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REPORT OF WORKSHOP ON SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CHANGES  
 IN DOMINICA  
 (Roseau, Dominica, 10-12 December 1984)



UNITED NATIONS

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### Introduction

1. The Workshop on "Social Structural Changes in Dominica," was held in Roseau, Dominica, 10-12 December 1984. The study was one in a series pursuant to the request of Caribbean Governments at the Second Session of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in March 1977. At this meeting, the Committee agreed that "studies will continue on social structural changes on a country to country basis. The diversity of situations existing both between Member States of the Committee and within the countries themselves will be classified and analyzed. These studies will assist in the formulation of a policy of social development" (E/CEPAL/1039 p.22).

2. The Government of Dominica hosted the Workshop which was attended by 16 professionals, comprising historians, anthropologists, sociologists and economists, from Dominica as well as other Caribbean islands. The CARICOM Secretariat and ECLAC Headquarters, Santiago, were also represented (see list of participants, Annex I).

### Opening Ceremony

3. The official opening address was delivered by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education in Dominica, Mr. Hubert Charles. The Permanent Secretary welcomed the participants to Dominica and commended ECLAC and its Social Affairs Unit for producing the monograph on Dominica. He welcomed the monograph and indicated that lack of appropriate texts presented a difficulty for secondary school students and for professionals doing research in the Caribbean. He pointed out that even though the monograph would require revision, it certainly presented a basis for future research on Dominica.

4. The ECLAC/CDCC/OECS Co-ordinator, speaking on behalf of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, thanked the Government of Dominica for hosting the workshop and expressed appreciation to the participants for their willingness to assist in the review of the monograph during the workshop. He pointed out that in such exercises ECLAC was able to act as a bridge between government officials, intergovernmental and international institutions, as well as the academic community.

#### Closing Session

5. The closing address was delivered by the Honourable Mr. B. Alleyne, Minister of Home Affairs, Housing, Industrial Relations and Women's Affairs of Dominica. The Minister commented on the valuable input of the monograph into Caribbean history and sociology. The region suffered from a lack of data needed both for planning purposes and for the development of a vision of the region, present, past and future. The document would obviously contain weaknesses, but as an additional source of material it would be useful in Dominica, which had begun to develop an information base on Dominica's past and present social structures, since information base was at present deficient in terms of quantity and quality.

6. The monograph was unquestionably a valuable addition to that resource since it would help Dominicans to appreciate where they came from and where they were going. The document recognized the role of the Caribs in European times, a factor that is always invisible in terms of learning history. It further stressed the importance of the Caribs in Dominica's modern history and for this, it was useful.

7. The Minister hoped that the revised monograph would be available to a wider audience, including the Caribs, in a popularized form and at an affordable cost. If this should prove difficult an abridged version should be prepared to meet popular reading habits. Finally, the Minister welcomed the in-depth deliberations of the participants at the workshop and noted that this would surely add to the final form of the document. He thanked all who worked on the study.

8. In reply to the closing remarks of the Honourable Minister, Mr. S. Clarke, on behalf of ECLAC and all the participants, thanked the Government of Dominica for its generosity in hosting the workshop. He also expressed his deep appreciation to all the participants for adjusting their work schedules in order to attend the workshop, as well as for all the work done at the workshop. He added that the seriousness with which participants addressed the issues was very encouraging and it endorsed the faith ECLAC had in the project when it was first initiated in 1976.

9. He stated that the inputs made were substantial and would improve the document. The contributions would also serve to enhance the techniques for addressing other studies ECLAC had proposed. He stressed the importance of such studies for the decision making process.

#### Proceedings

10. The study is based on the current historiography of Dominica and it will assist historians and researchers in general in identifying existing gaps which must be filled for an adequate appraisal of the country's evolution. This circumstance nonetheless gives to the monograph an inherent incompleteness and demands successive approximation. The workshop stressed that any monograph written in this framework could really be concluded satisfactorily only after a series of similar research studies had been carried out on other Caribbean countries.

11. The overall proposal is that the series of monographs should result in the gradual formulation of a sociological theory of the Caribbean which would assist in outlining the commonalities of the region, while facilitating the identification of its specific components. It is expected, as one progresses in this direction, that the elaboration of social policies will assist in gradually achieving a genuine frame for structuring Caribbean development.

12. The participants expressed their appreciation for the work and congratulated ECLAC for embarking on such a highly beneficial project.

The need for ensuring the largest possible readership of the study was underlined.

13. The participants engaged in lively debates on the theoretical and methodological framework and the study itself, examining in detail consistency in the analysis as well as the relations between the various components. The study was divided into three parts to facilitate discussions.

14. Chapters I-VI: this section outlined the history of Dominica from the arrival of the Spaniards in the 15th century to the social structure of the 18th century Dominica. The roles of the Caribs, the black settlers, the maroons, the enslaved planters and merchants were discussed.

15. Chapters VII-IX: the interplay of economic and political forces of 19th century Dominica were analysed.

16. Chapters X-XIII: the presence and decline of the counter-plantation system, the difficulties of the city Roseau and the conclusion of the monograph were reviewed. Especially important to the economic and social life of Dominica in the 20th century was the growth of the banana industry. Emphasis was placed on this and on the extension of the money economy as well as the effect both factors had on multicropping.

17. The interventions have been classified into three broad categories: methodological issues, interpretation of the empirical data in the light of the model adopted, and additional information required for supporting aspects of the main thesis. The participants formulated various criticisms and signalled new areas for research.

#### Methodological issues

18. There is a need for a definition of factors which would identify the "plantation system" in order to ascertain whether sufficient changes had taken place, globally and internally to warrant the continuing reference to a "plantation system" in Dominica. The existence of a "plantation" should not lead us to argue a priori the existence of a "plantation system". The emphasis on the primacy of internal factors obscured, at certain points in the text, the interplay between internal and external factors

and the way this relationship defines the internal components of the society.

19. The reading of history from the periphery toward the centre does not transcend the issue of ethnocentrism. Attention must be paid to changes in the centre which affect and are related to the periphery.

20. The weight allocated to political variables might not be justified when one engages in comparative studies of the Caribbean. It was suggested that the use of the concept "refuge" might provide a clearer understanding of pre-plantation Dominica. The topography of the island attracted the Carib settlers there and also afforded safety to non-Caribs.

21. The concept of "refuge" would also allow the investigation at the micro level of the co-operation of groups within the "refuge". It might also explain the nature of economic growth, since the social and economic arrangements were mobile, unstable and responsive to factors outside the borders.

22. The methodology should be made more consistent throughout the work. The monograph began with a sociological approach and by the 19th century the approach had shifted towards political economy. This was perhaps due to the sources and the types of data used, which make it difficult to sustain a sociological analysis.

23. There is a tendency to make inferences without clearly showing how conclusions are drawn, e.g. the paper does not show how social conflicts emerge. There is a general need for more statistical data and analysis relating to both demographic and economic variables.

#### Interpretation

24. A clarification of counter-plantation system has to be made since it conveys an idea of inherent and conscious antagonism between peasantry and plantation.

25. A clear dichotomy could not be drawn between African born and Creole enslaved in the context of the evolution of the internal groups.

26. A fuller investigation of Dominica as a free port seems justified in the light of the original intent of the metropolitan powers especially after the Seven Years' War.

27. It was suggested that references to "lack of money" in the economy were associated with cyclical economic changes. This indicates different perceptions of development on the part of small scale farmers in general and the government. The latter intended through the levy of taxes to force the ex-slaves back into regular plantation work.

28. In the 19th century and again in the 1950s and 1960s, there were moments of rapid change which allowed differentiation of family forms. The constraints on differentiation were both from without and within the society.

#### Information required

29. Given the contribution of the Caribs in the continuing development not only of Dominica but of the subregion -for example, in fishing technology and in agriculture- fuller attention should be given to their role. Additional bibliography would be: Richard Price, "Caribbean Fishing and Fishermen: a Historical Sketch" American Anthropology 68, December 1966, and Douglas Taylor and Hodge, "Ethno-botany of Island Caribs", Smithsonian Institute, Washington, 1948.

30. Fuller information is needed on the watershed period, the 16th and the 17th centuries, to assess the role of the Dominican and Vincentian Caribs. Dominica's topography is important in appreciating the almost insurmountable fatalism observed in Dominica due to the effects of frequent natural disasters. The topography also limited the development of settlements throughout the island, so most emerged on the leeward coast. For instance, the Caribs traded mainly with Guadeloupe and Martinique; it was not until much later that intra-island trade developed. In addition the trading habits of the Caribs are still evident, and need fuller enquiry, taking into account the available archaeological evidence.

31. Recent research suggests that the traditionally held view on the possibility of having nuclear family units among the enslaved on plantations needs to be revised, e.g. in the light of Barry Higman's work.

32. In terms of wages in the latter half of the 19th century, events have occurred which showed clearly that cash was not available. The 1893 land tax issue illustrates this. Even earlier, in 1856, an attempted road tax or alternative labour (the "travaux") was levied to maintain highways; resistance ended in imprisonment. Generally the supply of money in the country was inadequate in this period, and this was seen as contributing to stagnation in the economy.

#### Criticisms

33. The following were the main criticisms:

a) The stratification system within the different groups of settlers established before 1763 is not sufficiently highlighted in the monograph. Similarly there is need to unearth data on the number of settlers and the patterns of settlement;

b) More attention must be paid to the elements of family life among the enslaved, and to the different management techniques of enslavement and control of the enslaved;

c) There is need to examine more explicitly the nature of the colonial and post colonial state. This would provide inter alia a better explanation of the policies of the Colonial Office in making Dominica a Crown colony;

d) In general the treatment makes it difficult to appreciate the differences of degrees as opposed to differences in kind, for instance between the stunted development of plantation in islands such as Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Tobago and Grenada;

e) The use of published data alone creates serious methodological difficulties; it has to be supplemented by other information;

f) Chapter XI on the "Predicament of Roseau" should be reformulated using the additional information now available. Chapter VI on the "Incompleteness of the Class Structure" seems incomplete and should be revised; and

g) The study does not emphasize sufficiently the variety of strategies used by small farmers in addition to emigration.



Areas for Further Research

34. The following areas were identified for further research:

a) The role of the Caribs and the part they played in the history of Dominica;

b) The role of the maroon wars in depleting the finances of the country at the turn of the century;

c) The role of the non-traditional factors which stimulated upward mobility such as the participation in military or police activities by the enslaved. Membership of particular religious faiths as it relates to social mobility;

d) The role of religion in the social fabric of Dominica;

e) The fate of the Mulatto Ascendancy;

f) The effects that an improved road system in 1956 and 1972 had on the growth of Roseau and other main towns in Dominica;

g) The role of the youth in 20th century Dominica;

h) The contribution of peasant production to the economy of Dominica; and

i) The effects of migration on the economy of 19th-20th century Dominica.

New Projects

35. The workshop recommended new projects related to the elaboration of country monographs similar to the one under consideration:

a) The creation and/or upgrading of national research facilities and more specifically the conservation of archives and museum development were seen as a most urgent task;

b) Projects should also be formulated for the production of relevant national and regional research material and for its distribution within the secondary system;

c) National studies projects should be set up under the Extra-Mural Department of U.W.I. and within the 'A' level institutions. The workshop pointed out, nonetheless, that in the absence of careful super-

vision, the net result of such activities, as regards the advancement of the social sciences, would be particularly meagre; and

d) The establishment of a Caribbean Social Science Research Council to promote and stimulate the development of related disciplines, through co-operation, exchange, dissemination of information. It was noted that similar initiatives during the last five to eight years, some by ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, have not got off the ground. The multiplication of ad hoc working groups similar to the present one, gathering scholars and specialists from the various governments, the academic communities and the regional and intergovernmental organizations was proposed as an interim measure.

Annex I

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Annex II

STATEMENT BY S.ST.A. CLARKE

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister, Distinguished Participants

I have the pleasure to address you in the dual capacity as the UN/ECLAC/CDCC/OECS Co-ordinator, and also on behalf of the Directorate of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean. It is in both these capacities that I have the honour to speak at this ceremony on the closing of the Workshop convened expressly for reviewing the research paper on social structural changes in Dominica.

At this time when there is serious concern about the economic bases of our Caribbean societies, and economic restructuring is seen as being of highest priority, it is highly appropriate that attention should be given to the Social framework and its evolution; for it is the social frame that facilitates or hinders the implementation of policies which are primarily economic in nature.

Within the UN it has long since been realised that many economic policies which are desirable and fundamentally sound, often prove difficult or impossible to implement because some or several social conditions act as inhibiting factors. It is the recognition that social bottlenecks effectively impede economic development, that stimulated the work to research and establish more precisely, the nature of the social framework in Caribbean countries as closely as the available information would allow.

The workshop we are now concluding should therefore be viewed as one of the steps in the process of concretising our understanding of the social structure of Dominica; how it has evolved; and what it is. Without an understanding of these fundamentals, there is not a firm basis for addressing the sociological aspects of development - nor for giving the best orientation to policy formulation. While, therefore, this workshop may have been primarily of an academic nature, it is an essential part of the foundation on which policies directed to structural adjustment have to be built.

Such considerations highlight two aspects - the importance of information inputs to the decision-making process, and the institutional inter-relations that are necessary for generating and communicating such specialised information. Having commented on the importance of the research element as a necessary base for policy-making, I take this opportunity to make some brief observations on the institutional aspects.

Often it is commented that the output of research does not relate to or does not reach the policy-makers when they need it and in a form that they can use. It is the function and fortune of this aspect of UN work that it can act as a link to bridge the interests of the academicians and the policy-makers. This workshop was meant also to serve that purpose; so that while the deliberations here would serve to improve the basic sociological information, it also should serve to shape the material into a form that is relevant and useful, and make it more suitable as a basis for policy formulation for development of the society.

The social sector as an integral area of development planning, has not been emphasised in most of the plans and programmes prepared in the Caribbean countries. In fact, the plans and programmes tend, in the main, to be lists of projects for which external financing is sought and usually they are presented as the Public Sector Investment Programme. One important consequence is that there are no social profiles to accompany the investment programmes.

I should make the further observation that there are no social statistics systems for planning - for example, as far as employment is concerned, (and while taking into account work already in progress), there still is need for research into such aspects as the demand for labour in different economic organisations (e.g. peasant economy, plantations, manufacturing, and the respective interest groups involved and their bargaining power).

The need to obtain quantitative measurements for social and economic planning adapted to the region has been recognised by the Governments. In fact, the whole matter of socio-economic indicators has been a major issue in fora such as the CGCED. Dissatisfaction has been

expressed with the use of indicators such as GNP and per capita income alone as guidelines for the categorisation of countries. They have stressed that categories such as "middle income developing countries" were misleading when applied to the small island economies and have an adverse effect on the availability of international assistance.

There also is the need, therefore, that an attempt should be made (at the regional and national levels) to develop more meaningful indicators to be used for decisions on development aid.

The participation in this meeting, embraced members of the academic community, officials from the inter-regional organisation CARICOM and UN functionaries. It is very necessary for these institutional elements to continue to interact, in the work towards a clearer articulation and understanding of the Caribbean Societies.

Accept my deep appreciation for the support that has been given to this effort both by the participants, and by the Government of Dominica. The initial result of improving on the results of the study, and on identifying the areas for further work will be of much benefit to the Secretariat, and the final product should be of much value to the Government and people whom we have the pleasure to serve.

Thank you.

Annex III

COMMENTS ON THE DOCUMENT 'SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN DOMINICA'  
BY THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT, UN-ECLAC,  
PORT-OF-SPAIN, Mimeo., 1984

I: General Remarks

The monograph and the series of studies of which it forms part are welcome contributions to the self-knowledge and the Sociology of the Caribbean people. This is especially so since the purpose is to interpret the least studied of the regional societies. The present work is twice welcome, for its authors, while offering a rich, insightful blend of analysis and empirical data, bring a fresh and innovative eye to the study of Dominica.

Theirs is a perceptive and thought-provoking text, in which several of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the historical and sociological literature are persuasively challenged. Among these are: the use of the term 'slaves' to mean 'the enslaved'; the view of Europeans as 'settlers' and of independent Blacks as 'runaways' (p. 13); and the understanding of creolization as implying acquiescence in enslavement (p. 51; cf. Braithwaite, 1974). We are also reminded of the submerged nature of many significant local institutions which, without the support of formal political power, became '...relegated to the sphere of private and community life' (p. 64).

That the Caribs and their implacable struggles against European settlement and colonization have been made integral to the analysis is commendable, in spite of the paucity of data on their social organization and practices. Several of the participants at the seminar in December 1984, (this author included), offered suggestions for further reading, which should permit a better understanding of the influence of the Caribs, via their technology, skills and 'ethnobotany', on other ethnic groups in Dominica.

The first premise of the monograph is that, in the making of Caribbean nations, there has been a long history of popular inventive-



ness and local institutions, developed parallel to the dominant ones, which are the crucible wherein a national identity will be shaped (Dr. Casimir's presentation on methodology, 10 December 1984). It follows that, as a major methodological postulate, internal social processes are given primacy over the explanations commonly offered in the historiography of the region: external factors or 'heroes' and exceptional figures as the 'makers' of Caribbean history. At the same time, the study asserts the logical (p. 35) and historical primacy of political structures '...as the basic or infrastructural layer upon which economic relations (p. 40) and, by extension, social class and ethnic relations (p. 60) would be inserted. These two methodological postulates need not be contradictory. Therefore, given the imperial context of the political structures, the researchers have to offer a sophisticated analysis of the delicate balance between the 'internal', the 'external' and interpenetration of the two spheres. They do not always succeed in this task.

However, their emphasis on the local affirmation of identities and practices, which are opposed to those which the dominant classes sought to impose, is a crucial one. For we need to unearth and understand the ways in which the dominated, without control over state power, mobilize, negotiate or win concessions in their struggles against oppression and for human dignity. The early chapters of the monograph offer useful insights on these processes.

The method of study has been to offer a sociological 'reading' of already-published socio-historical research, official reports and other commentaries on Dominican society. This is the basic limitation of the work, since the available studies are too few and too limited in their scope to sustain the desired analysis of the evolution of the contending social groups. Archival and oral sources now need to be closely examined.

In spite of its strengths, the text reveals certain problems of fact and interpretation. What appears to be the most significant of these will be briefly discussed.

## II: Specific Remarks

The authors need to distinguish clearly between the features that were peculiar to Dominica and those which were shared with other West Indian colonies. For example, in the early chapters (pp. 39, 63), the failure of Dominica to develop as an externally-oriented sugar plantation economy is attributed to neglect by the British Government, as if the island were unique in this respect. In fact, Dominica's treatment was not unlike that given to the other Windward Islands. Marshall (1972, Ch. II), after documenting the permanent crisis that arose after 1776, argues that the British Windwards as a whole never experienced prolonged prosperity as plantation economies. He concludes that by 1823, '...bankruptcy was general throughout the British Windward Islands' (Ibid., p. 109). The difference between Dominica and the other ceded islands - as far as the plantation economy is concerned - is therefore one of degree and not of kind.

Such prosperity as was enjoyed by the planters in the Windward Islands cannot be attributed to the efforts of the British Government. Imperial interests did not always coincide with the interests of the planters, as the enforcement of the Navigation Acts at the time of the American Revolution and afterwards amply demonstrated.

In general, the imperial state, apart from its concern with the monopoly of military and naval power and trade, with the securing of imperial customs and duties, and with the power of patronage, had little concerted policy for the development of the plantation colonies, once the institutions for settlement were put in place. The Colonial Office did not exist before 1801; and West Indian Governors had at their disposal few institutionalized ways of persuading the local assemblies to legislate; there was also no supply of money under the sole control of the executive. The power of the Governors and the Colonial Office was often a veto power which, by definition, was appropriate only to extreme situations. Murray (1962) analyses West Indian governments in the period 1801-34 and concludes that the local oligarchies '...largely ruled themselves' (Ibid., p. 43).

It is incorrect to state (p. 17) that marronage and guerrilla warfare were 'the only avenue open to family life in other Caribbean islands'. Higman (1975) and primary sources such as Young (1819) suggest that the image of the slave family as non-existent or predominantly 'matrifocal' is a distortion.

The analysis of the 19th century economy (Ch. VII), in spite of the methodological postulates on the counter-plantation system, is devoid of any study of the contribution which peasants and fishermen made to Dominica's economy. Neither the number of freeholders nor the non-plantation products or exports of the colony are discussed. Such data would probably be available in Blue Books reports and, for freeholders, in assessment rolls or registers of voters. It is important not to become prisoners of the published sources which have not been concerned with these issues.

The need of the peasantry for cash is well analysed. However, it should be made clear that cash was needed, whether from organized and regular markets for their produce, from remittances, or from wages. If the argument is put in this way, it becomes more difficult to see wage labour within the plantation economy simply as a '...functional requisite of a peasant society and one of its pillars' (p. 112).

Secondly, the lack of cash in circulation in the late 19th century probably led - as oral histories indicate for Tobago, whose sugar economy was as bankrupt as Dominica's - to barter or quasi barter as important and regular means of distribution and exchange for the peasantry. This should be explored for Dominica. By extension, the exchange of labour (coup de main), the sexual division of labour and other practices should be examined as part of the 'parallel institutions' established by the peasantry.

Thirdly, as posed throughout much of the text, the argument runs the risk of suggesting a too-simple dichotomy between the 'plantation' and the 'peasantry'. Although as a schematic model it is extremely fruitful, we should note that in reality, there was considerable overlap between renting, metayage, wage labour and

independent small holding. In general, the study has not sought to analyse the relative significance of metayage, wage labour and small holding agriculture in the 19th century, and this is a serious omission.

If Dr. Nicholls (p. 111) is correct about the share of the sugar going to the estate in the metayage system, then it indicates that the metayers in Dominica were able to develop relatively more power vis-a-vis the planters than those in other BWI territories where the share was generally one-half of the sugar to each party, with the planters keeping most, if not all, of the molasses. The point deserves further exploration.

The emphasis on the political structures with which the study began is not sustained throughout the work. In Chapter VIII, the impression conveyed (pp. 85 et seq.) is that it was internal ethnic rivalries which carried the day in the debate on the constitutional status of Dominica. It is vital, however, to appreciate the interplay of forces between the mulatto ascendancy, the Dominican whites, the Colonial Office and the London merchants, in the context of the condition of the West Indian colonies as a whole in the late 19th century.

Two important points deserve mention in considering the colonial state. Firstly, the Emancipation brought starkly to the fore the scope and function of the public domain. Whereas, in the era of slavery, plantations provided care for the aged, hospitals, enslaved labour for repairs to the roads etc., after 1838, the functions of the state had to expand to absorb these and other social services (supervision of the school system etc.). Throughout the BWI, the burden of taxation was punitively imposed upon the labouring classes, with a view to discouraging alternatives to estate labour. Prime necessities as well as boats, horses, asses, mules, carts, guns and even dogs (except those belonging to the estates) were heavily taxed. (For Jamaica, see Robotham (1981)). The selfishness of the mulattoes (pp. 91-2), as of all West Indian plantocracies, has to be seen in this context.

Secondly, because of the enhanced power of the local assemblies vis-a-vis the Governors, the Colonial Office, from the 1850s onwards, sought to secure greater executive powers and to simplify West Indian

constitutions for its own administrative convenience, given the declining importance of the West Indian colonies and the financial difficulties of the planter class. Economic bankruptcy led to increased dependence on the imperial exchequer for loans and various forms of support, and this was used as a lever by the Colonial Office to impose constitutional change in the direction of greater imperial control. One by one, the BWI colonies which had enjoyed the old representative system succumbed, whether from financial necessity or from the fear of continued insurrection (as in Jamaica (1865), Saint Vincent (1862) and Tobago (1876)), and relinquished their representative institutions in favour of Crown Colony status. Barbados remained a notable exception, in that its planters and merchants as a class remained solvent - although individual planters went bankrupt - and managed to keep the estates under local control and out of the jurisdiction of the Encumbered Estates Court (Karch, 1979; 1981).

The politics of the mulattoes in their ambivalent confrontation with the Colonial Office must be explained in this context. Rogers (1970) and Green (1976) are helpful references. There is also a long memorandum on the subject from the Colonial Office, which clearly expresses the British preference for imperial control as the quid pro quo for further assistance to the colonies. (See Chandos to Governor in Chief, 17 August 1868). This and other despatches on the subject may be in the Dominican Archives.

The point also illustrates the changing mode of exercise of imperial power over time.

As the study moves from the 19th to the 20th century, there is a movement away from a sociological analysis to a focus more on the political economy of Dominica. Even the mulatto ascendancy, to which such prominence was given until the end of the 19th century, disappears from our view. The composition of, and changes within, the various classes and strata need to be sustained into the 20th century, as the basis for the analysis of the social crisis of the 1970s (Ch. XII). The use of census data to examine population growth, emigration and internal migration is also a necessary underpinning of the analysis of this chapter.

Several of the above remarks oblige us to return to the methodological postulates with which these comments began. Alternative primary and oral sources need to be explored if the fundamental disjunction between the premises and the text is to be resolved. Secondly, whether to give 'primacy' to internal processes or external structures (or both) will emerge from the analysis of specific historical conjunctures, notwithstanding a priori assertions.

Prepared by Susan Craig, Department of Sociology, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. March 1985.

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II: Archival Records

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Annex IV

COMMENTS ON THE DOCUMENT 'SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN DOMINICA'  
BY HUBERT J. CHARLES

Despite the fact that she has failed to attract many historians to her archives, Dominica remains (at least in my opinion) one of the more exciting fields for research both historical and anthropological.<sup>1/</sup> Perhaps it was this realization which prompted Anthony Layng to pen a veritable plea for attention by researchers entitled *Dominica - An Island in Need of a Historian*. Layng was interested primarily in the question of ethnicity, religion and the stability of the Carib Reservation. However, he must have been struck by the possibilities for piecing together the rich tapestry of the Dominican experience particularly those portions which involved the pre and early colonial periods.<sup>2/</sup>

Seen within this context, Social Structural Changes in Dominica is a welcome addition to Dominican historiography. It is however much more. For one thing, it adds to the discussion on several of the important themes in Caribbean historiography, including the nature and type of pre-plantation society and the establishment of the plantation society. In fact Social Structural Changes goes a long way in demonstrating the extent to which careful synthesis of contemporary and recent sources, can provide new insight into historical problems. In my comment, I wish to merely build on the foundation laid by the authors and identify some of the issues which could benefit from further research.

The first thing I would wish to do is to introduce the concept of the 'refuge' which is in harmony with the construct of Social Structural Changes, but which I feel more accurately describes pre-plantation in Dominica. Some years ago in a short article on the Jacco Flats, I toyed with the idea that Jacco and his men had used the Flats as a 'refuge', an area strategically located, well protected from surprise encroachments by enemy forces and one which allowed its



inhabitants to survive until the threat, whether real or perceived, had passed.<sup>3/</sup> I firmly believe that the practice of identifying a refuge to which one could resort to in time of war, was of Carib origin.

Using Pierre Verin as source, Layng tells us that the Caribs preferred to locate their villages near a river on the coast of an island, having gardens far back in the forest, "but that such an arrangement would be difficult to achieve in the rugged coastal terrain of Dominica".<sup>4/</sup> However, once this information is seen in terms of the refuge concept, the practice becomes less one of 'preference' and more one of strategy. Moreover, Dominica, far from being unsuitable to the execution of such a strategy, becomes ideally suited, specifically because of its rugged terrain.<sup>5/</sup>

The task of projecting the refuge concept from several strategically located points within the island to a description of the island itself, is not a difficult one. It was in fact, the topographical nature of the island which attracted the Caribs to it in the first place. When once the Eastern Caribbean had been thrust in the words of the authors on the international scene, it was the relative safety represented by the presence of the feared Caribs; the almost limitless expanse of virgin forest and a plentiful supply of fertile land which attracted non-Carib ethnics to the island - one of the few 'calm' spots in a region plunged headlong on the road to colonialism and the socio-economic imperatives of the Plantation.

The task of further unravelling the dynamics of life within the refuge is as much the responsibility of the anthropologist as the historian. Social Structural Changes has given us a few pointers on the macro-level but much more research is needed into this early period.

That the diverse groups within the refuge had to co-operate is beyond question. The means (the council and treaties) which bound them together, thus prolonging the island's pre-colonial period, should be an interesting subject of investigation. Were they primarily Carib, African or European, or were they a melange of the three influences, i.e., truly creole? How did they work? Who were the blacks? How did they get to Dominica? What type of relationship developed between themselves and the whites?

Again, who and from whence came the early Europeans? Were they remnants of buccaneers who simply refused to come to terms with termination of their high adventure on the seas, or were they Europeans disenchanted that their search for a new life had ended in a social system hardly different from that left behind? Were they escaped indentured servants or engagés, fleeing the harsh conditions in Guadeloupe and Martinique, or simply impatient with "the long wait" needed to qualify as colons?<sup>6/</sup>

The concept of the refuge also lends itself to an explanation of the limited economic growth which took place in Dominica before 1763. In fact, refuge is by definition, unstable, mobile, always susceptible to factors outside its borders. For pre and early colonial Dominica, the main external factor which impinged on the island was Anglo-French rivalry. During this period trade and agriculture were limited. So too was capital formation and investment.

It would be interesting, however, to determine whether there were exceptions to this rule. How many large and medium sized states existed before the Land Sales Commission held its first sitting in 1764? We know, for example, that a free black from Martinique, Jeannot Rolle, had established an 'estate' in the Grandbay area and had by the late 1630s, expressed interest in having a priest establish a mission there. Was Rolle a pioneer in estate building, or had he been following the example of entrepreneurs in other parts of the island?<sup>7/</sup>

Again, we know that Rolle was previously engaged in collecting firewood and building material for export to Martinique. Did the capital for establishing his estate come from the proceeds of this trade, or did he have (free black) support?

The profound impact which the 1763 annexation had on Dominica is well chronicled by authors. In fact, one gets a vivid sense of the English struggle to shift the island from the periphery and closer to the center of the colonial stage. Again, one is able to internalize the true meaning of a colony of exploitation in contra-distinction to a colony of settlement. The authors present us with a bird's eye view

of the English as they bulldozed their way through the relatively human social relations established by the French, (even on the larger agricultural holding) and introduced measures to intensify the exploitation of the blacks, labour power on estates newly established with foreign capital and absentee landlords. One is able to picture the uncomfortable transformation of whites to agents and overseers and merchants, attempting to reap profits from the islands' Free Ports and sugar estates.

In one respect, however, the analysis of Social Structural Changes has concentrated too much on the traditional areas of social movement. These explain persistence of peasantness and resistance within the slave community essentially as responses to the process of English colonial consolidation. They do not, however, explain the slow and sometimes painstaking and imperceptible movement from one strata to another within the slave community. Nor do they record the movement of blacks from their status as mere slaves to elevated positions of trust and confidence.

The fact is that English policies (one may also add French propaganda) engendered what Fredrickson and Laseh call 'consciousness of collective interest'. The maroon era which dominated the Dominica scene for decades and threatened on many occasions, to bankrupt the state, could only be the result of effective political organization within the black community itself.<sup>8/</sup>

Research into the exploitation of the christian church (both Catholic and Protestant) by the slaves, could also provide us with evidence of successful attempts to escape the social structural confines imposed by the plantation system. The introduction of Christianity among the slaves, is often cited as having benefitted the planter class. Many planters were convinced that the introduction of christianity had a pacific effect on the slaves, and built churches and introduced priests and missionaries with this goal in mind. However, not much emphasis is placed on the extent to which the slaves became converted simply to enjoy the benefits which the cloak of christianity provided.<sup>9/</sup>

Social Structural Changes does in fact, make one mention of the superficiality which attended the conversion of slaves during the French era. However, much research is needed into the relationship between the slaves and the christian churches; the shift to christian names, marriages, families and the elevation in status which resulted.

The Dominica experience also affords the opportunity for investigating the rise in status of the many blacks who joined the Ranger battalions who fought both the French and the maroons. During the maroon wars, there was much conflict between the Legislative Council and the regional military command over the use of English regular troops against the maroons. On one occasion when permission was given to use detachments from the Black Corps against the maroons, Lord Liverpool wrote to Sir G.G. Commander of the West Indian Forces (based in Barbados) insisting that he "give Directions that every precaution be taken to secure the health of the men and to prevent the unnecessary exposure to danger".<sup>10/</sup>

Slaves who served faithfully as guides were either rewarded with manumission or mentioned in the dispatches.<sup>11/</sup> The value of a guide named Diego was increased to £250 after two successful parties against runaways. One should be careful not to attribute solely selfish motives to those slaves who enjoyed the confidence of whites. During the said maroon wars, a highly regarded guide was sent to the stockade (a serious loss of status) because he deliberately led the colonial troops hunting for maroons astray.<sup>12/</sup>

Though Social Structural Changes goes a long way in demonstrating the extent to which careful synthesis of contemporary and recent sources can provide insight into historical problems, one is nonetheless slightly disappointed at its overwhelming dependence on readily available sources. One is in fact, left to wonder whether the monograph would not have been even more valuable, if the rich archival resources in France, Guadeloupe/ Martinique and in Dominica had been exploited in order to bring fresh insight into the historical problems already mentioned. The authors, I am sure, will be able to enlighten us on this.<sup>13/</sup>

This brings me to the suggestion which I would like to end this comment. I would like to suggest that a logical development of this project should be an attempt by ECLAC to upgrade the archives in the Eastern Caribbean Countries to the level where researchers desiring to follow the path charted by Structural Changes, would not find new research so difficult.

A sub-project could involve an attempt to repatriate (in the form of photocopies and slides) documents deposited in European and Caribbean states to Dominica. Successful implementation of this proposal would provide a much needed fillip to local historical research, and would give added meaning to the valuable work represented by Social Structural Changes.

N O T E S

1/ For a recent review of scholarly research on Dominica, see Robert A. Myers, Research on Dominica: A Survey, prepared for the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Caribbean Studies Association, Fort-de-France, Martinique, 1979.

2/ Anthony Layng, "Dominica, An Island in Need of an Historian", Caribbean Quarterly, Vol. 3 (1973).

3/ Hubert Charles, "Jacco!", Dominica Grammar School Magazine, New Series, No. 12 (June 1973), p. 73 - 77.

4/ Anthony Layng.

5/ IBID., p. 36.

6/ The French used the term engagés to describe the indentured servants who were contracted to work three years in return for their passages to the New World. At the end of this period, the indentured servants were given three hundred pounds of tobacco which was then used to buy land. They then graduated to the ranks of colons or small planters. See Michael M. Horowitz, Morne - Paysan, peasant village in Martinique, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), p. 11.

7/ S.A.W. Boyd, Historical Sketch of the Grand Bay Area, prepared for the 11th West Indies Agricultural Economics Conference, Dominica, 1976.

8/ Frederickson and Laseh, "Resistance to Slavery", Civil War History, 13 (1967), p. 317.

9/ For one view as to the benefits of conversion to slaves (with respect to mobility within the slave community) see Michael Cranton's Christianity and Slavery in the British West Indies 1750 - 1865, (University of Waterloo: 1977), p. 14.

10/ Lord Liverpool's letter to Sir George Beckwith, July 12th 1811, Dominica Legislative Council Minutes, 1806 - 12, Government Archives, Roseau.

11/ On 14 February 1811, the Dominican Legislative voted £200, for the Manumission of a Slave Lego as a reward for his faithful service - as a guide.

12/ Andrew Cockrane Johnstone - Letter to His Honour, the President and Council, Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen of the Assembly, 9 December 1800, Dominica Legislative Council Minutes 1799 - 1806, Government Archives, Roseau.

13/ For a perspective which may be helpful to the authors, see Monica Schuler, Periods, Processes and Themes in Caribbean History, 19th Century, prepared for the Tenth Conference of Caribbean Historians, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1980.