

*LABOUR IN THE WEST INDIES — The Birth of a Workers' Movement* was first published as a Fabian Society pamphlet in 1939, immediately after the general strikes and workers insurrections which blazed across the English-speaking Caribbean between 1935 and 1938. Beginning with St Kitts in 1935, the insurrections passed from island to island — St Vincent (1935), St Lucia (1935, 1937), Barbados (1937), Trinidad (1937) — and Guyana (1935, 1937), ending with Jamaica in 1938. The effects of these social upheavals were felt in all the islands during the general capitalist crisis of the 1930s, and affected the subsequent social and political history of the Caribbean. Arthur Lewis's pamphlet, now reprinted here, remains the only Caribbean-wide account of these events.

This reprint includes an afterword by Susan Craig *GERMS OF AN IDEA*. It is an important assessment of the period since the 1930s and of W. Arthur Lewis as an influential member of the social group, who have taken over the reins of political power from the colonial regimes.

W. Arthur Lewis (now Sir Arthur Lewis) was born on the Caribbean island of St Lucia. He is a well-known economist, academic and international consultant. He was one of the early international experts in the field of development economics. His numerous published works include *Politics in West Africa*, *The Principles of Economic Planning*, and *The Theory of Economic Growth*.

Susan Craig was born in the Caribbean island of Tobago. She is a lecturer in sociology at the University of the West Indies. She is also the author of *Community Development in Trinidad and Tobago 1943-1973*.

Cover design by Julian Stapleton



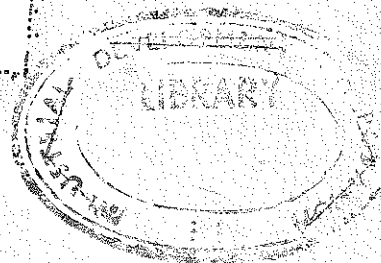
a New Beacon publication

# LABOUR IN THE WEST INDIES

The Birth of a Workers  
Movement

ARTHUR  
LEWIS

Afterword by Susan Craig



331.105.44(729)  
LEW

331.105.44(729)

LABOUR IN THE WEST INDIES

ARTHUR LEWIS

One other important political issue is that of Federation. The demand for it is based on two sets of reasons; first West Indian national aspirations, which are a powerful force in its favour; and secondly economy. The latter argument has been accepted by most official reports since 1897, and has long been obvious to the people themselves. Everyone knows the benefits which have been derived from establishing one expert agricultural service for all the islands—such as no single one could by itself afford—and it has long been accepted that education, health, police, the judiciary, and in fact most of the services could be administered much better and at a smaller aggregate cost if expert central departments were established in place of the present independent services. Indeed tentative beginnings have been made with education in the Windward and Leeward Islands, and plans for many other services have long been drawn up.

What has stood in the way of federation is not the sea; that is no obstacle in these days of aeroplanes and wireless telephony. The real stumbling block has been the opposition of small local potentates, fearful that their voices, all-powerful in a small island, will be unheard in a large federation. Nevertheless it is essential in the general interest to ignore these small magnates and to proceed with the federation of Trinidad, Barbados, the Windward and Leeward Islands and British Guiana in the immediate future, leaving Jamaica perhaps until a later date when better communications have been established.

The Labour Movement is on the march. It has already behind it a history of great achievement in a short space of time. It will make of the West Indies of the future a country where the common man may lead a cultured life in freedom and prosperity.

APPENDIX  
SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS PASSED BY THE  
BRITISH GUIANA AND WEST INDIES LABOUR  
CONGRESS, NOVEMBER, 1938

1. FEDERATION. (A draft bill embodying a constitution for the creation and governance of a Federated West Indies was agreed.)
2. CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM. This Conference calls upon the Royal Commission to recommend the granting of self-government with adult suffrage to the several West Indian colonies providing for
  - (a) Purely elected legislatures.
  - (b) Qualifications of elected members to be solely on an educational basis.
  - (c) Executive Council to be elected by members of the Legislature and to be responsible to the Legislature.
  - (d) The Legislative Council to elect its own president.
  - (e) The constitutional position and relation of the Governor to the Legislature to be similar to that of the King to Parliament, i.e., the Governor as representative of the King to exercise the King's prerogatives on the advice of the Executive Council.
3. LAND AND FACTORIES. This conference agrees with the principle of nationalisation of the sugar industry, and suggests to the Royal Commission a recommendation that legislation be enacted in the several West Indian colonies providing for
  - (a) The purchase by Government of large sugar estates for redistribution among peasants on easy terms of sale.
  - (b) The prohibition of the ownership by a single individual, firm or company, directly or indirectly, of a sugar estate of more than 50 acres in extent.
  - (c) The ownership by the Government alone of all sugar factories.
  - (d) The establishment of a single Government purchasing agency in each colony for sugar, such agency to be the sole exporters of sugar.
4. PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT. This conference further suggests to the Royal Commission to recommend that any increased preference on sugar granted to the sugar industry in the West Indies shall be granted by the Imperial Government on the condition that such preference be given as to 10% to the employers and 90% to the cane farmers and field and factory workers by way of increased wages and pay.
5. COOPERATIVE MARKETING. This conference asks the Royal Commission to recommend the establishment of cooperative marketing of cocoa, rice and other agricultural products.
6. LOCAL PRICES. This conference suggests to the Royal

Commission to recommend that no sugar and oil manufactured and refined in the colonies should be sold to local consumers at more than the export value plus 5% for distributors' profits.

7. PUBLIC UTILITIES. This conference recommends that all essential utility services, viz., railways, water, electricity, tramways and telephones should be owned by the state or municipality.

8. SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION. This conference suggests to the Royal Commission to recommend that legislation be enacted in the several colonies providing for

- (a) Old age pensions.
- (b) National health insurance.
- (c) Unemployment insurance.
- (d) An ordinance to penalise unfair labour practices, similar to the National Labour Relations Act of the USA.
- (e) A 44-hour week without reduction in pay.
- (f) Minimum wages for all workers.
- (g) Workmen's Compensation on the lines of Great Britain, including agricultural workers and domestic servants.
- (h) Trade Union law, including the immunities and privileges enjoyed in Great Britain.

9. CONCILIATION MACHINERY. This conference is of the opinion that there should be uniform legislation throughout these colonies for the establishment of Wages Advisory Boards and of a Labour Officer (where there is none at present) to whom all disputes as to wages and other conditions of employment shall be referred, and that provision be made for representation on these Boards of Labour and Trade Unions in each particular trade and industry.

10. FACTORY LEGISLATION. This conference urges the enactment of legislation throughout these colonies to provide for factory inspection and other provisions of the Factory Law in Great Britain.

11. MINIMUM WAGES. While this conference accepts the principle that there should be a minimum wage for all workers (including shop assistants), it is of the opinion that in view of the differences of supply and demand and otherwise in the separate colonies, each colony should accordingly prepare for submission what may be considered the minimum wages for workers in the different categories of trade and industry.

12. COURTS. This conference is of the opinion that the West Indian Court of Appeal should have its adjudication enlarged so as to permit of its hearing appeals in criminal cases.

The Conference deprecates the existing practice in certain colonies of the appointment of persons holding the dual position of Police Magistrate and Judge of the Supreme Court, and is of the opinion that all such posts should be held by separate individuals.

13. POLITICAL OFFENCES. This conference demands that the law relating to sedition in these colonies be given the same interpretation and be employed only as in the United Kingdom, and that the existing law whereby the Executive is empowered to declare what is a seditious publication be repealed.

This conference is of opinion that the practice of trial by special jury in the criminal courts be abolished.

This conference urges the early introduction of prison legislation similar to that which obtains in the United Kingdom for dealing with political offenders.

14. POLICE. This conference is appreciative of the fact that there is no statutory bar to men of the ranks attaining commissions in the police forces, but is aware that no facilities are in fact afforded for the promotion of men from the ranks beyond the grade of Sergeant Major or First Class Warrant Officer; and is of opinion that Sub-Inspectors and Assistant Superintendents of the police forces should be recruited as far as possible from the ranks; and further, the conference demands the cessation of the practice of racial discrimination in appointments to Commission rank.

15. EDUCATION. This conference regrets the neglect in the past by governments to provide technical schools for vocational training, and is of opinion that throughout these colonies institutions similar to the Tuskegee Institute of the USA be established, that liberal bursary systems be introduced, and that special regard be paid to the establishment of agricultural farms.

In the case of secondary schools this conference stresses the necessity for a more liberal grant than now exists of free exhibitions from the primary schools.

The Conference is emphatic in its demand for the introduction of free compulsory elementary education throughout the colonies up to the age of 15 years, with provision of free books, and a daily milk ration for those in need.

16. HEALTH. This conference is of opinion that the Imperial Government should send to the colonies a commission of water, sanitary and sewerage engineers to make a survey of conditions in each colony with a view to improvements; that the cost of all such improvements be met in the first instance by advances made by the Imperial Government, and repaid in due course from local revenues, free of interest. Further, that throughout these colonies the whole question of hospital administration be reviewed by a Medical Commission to be appointed by the Colonial Office.

The Conference is of opinion that there should be clinics to deal with ante-natal cases, child welfare, tuberculosis, cancer and venereal diseases.

17. MINOR INDUSTRIES. This conference is of opinion that