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Exceptional Victories: Multiracialism in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana

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ABSTRACT This paper seeks to discuss the conditions under which unique multiracial electoral victories occurred in the two neighbouring racially divided countries of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. I argue that there was an opening in the political party system in each country which permitted the rise of a new electoral force, and that it was driven by a new political class. This class projected a national developmental model which was attractive to voters. The two models in both countries were quite dissimilar, and reflected the type of development and a confluence of economic factors that were unique to each country.

The consolidation of the two-party electoral system in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana in the Caribbean has seen a simultaneous rise in interracial conflict and competition between people of Indian descent and those of African descent.[1] The major political parties have developed strong ties to these racialized communities. Election cycles (as well as the withholding of elections by the government) have become linked to the rise of racial insecurity, tension and violent conflict, as the two communities have come to regularly compete with each other for political power. As one commentator has put it, "the freer the election the fiercer the conflict" (Interview 1).

In the present time of increasing racial tension and even violence, it is often forgotten that parties that are 'multiracial' and able to overcome the racial legacy have been envisioned as necessary and desirable at multiple points in the histories of these countries. The Socialist Party and Butler's party in the 1940s–50s, the Workers and Farmers Party in the 1960s, the United Labour Front in the 1970s, and the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) in the 1980s are the best-known such attempts in Trinidad. In Guyana the early People's Progressive Party (PPP) in the 1950s and the Working People's Alliance in the 1970s–90s were parts of vigorous broad-based movements for social and political change. Each of these parties has a fascinating history, colourful popular leaders, and has had an important impact on subsequent political developments. Moreover, the PPP in Guyana and the NAR in Trinidad and Tobago actually saw electoral victory. In this paper I seek to explain the conditions of their

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success with a view to examining whether it is possible to transcend the legacy of racialized division.

The victory of multiracial political parties is important, first, for the reason that it represents a breakthrough in a zero-sum political game. The majority of studies on politics in these societies have maintained an analytic silence about the constant alternative: multiracial practices and possibilities. The studies on formal party politics accept the premise of 'racial competition' (Bahadoorsingh, 1968; Ryan, 1972; Premdas, 1974; 1973; 1983; 1986) based in part on its regular appearance and on the beliefs of cultural pluralist analyses which suggest that conflict is inevitable and normal in 'plural societies'.

While scholars have drawn attention to social structural dimensions of these societies, which suggests the 'constructed' opposition of the ethnic groups, instances of solidarity, and also the experience of shared oppression between groups (Cross, 1968; Mars, 1980–81; Rodney, 1981; Bolland, 1997a; 1997b; Reddock, 1993; Peake & Trotz, 1999), this has not displaced the reality of racialized political competition in these two countries, and even women's at times active involvement in it (Trotz, 2004). The focus on competition, therefore, continues to dominate more recent studies with an ethnographic methodology and a culturalist approach to the question of racial difference (see Williams, 1991; Munasinghe, 2001). A major difficulty with the conceptualization is that it does not serve to 'bridge difference' (see Reddock, 2001) and thus it leaves no theoretical grounds on which to discuss multiracialism.

The NAR in Trinidad and Tobago and the early PPP in Guyana not only won the elections, but won in a landslide. The NAR in Trinidad/Tobago won 33 out of 36 seats in 1986; the PPP in Guyana won 16 out of 24 elected seats in 1953 (while the country was still under colonial rule). These victories have been the singular exceptions to what has become the rule of race-based party competition. How was political space for these multiracial parties built?

The central argument of this paper is that the victorious multiracial parties formed in periods of party flux, were based in new electorates and offered benefits for all the major oppressed populations through the promise of a major economic shift. These were not small or limited promises; the parties appeared to actually have the understanding and the capacity to expand the range of limited local economic opportunities, hitherto produced by the dependent and racialized economy. The broad popularity of the ambition to break with structures of dependency at least briefly overcame the appeal of partisan ethnoracial identities.

Thus, I suggest that, while deep stereotypes, the two-party game, campaign strategies of division, the numbers game, cultural politics and sub-nationalisms, and clientilistic politics, go a long way in explaining the 'system of conflict' (see Brereton, 1974; Moore, 1995; Munasinghe, 2001; Premdas, 1972; Hintzen, 1989; Ryan, 1989), the system also unravels, and this is important to understand. This requires understanding the political and economic logics, or rationalities, of what makes formal party politics happen and unravel the ways that it does. I argue that economic pressures are central to this process of unravelling.[2]

Caribbean countries fall into the 'heavily dependent' region of the world system. Single or at most two sectors of the economy provide the majority of revenue. Booms and busts, and really only busts when in the agricultural sectors, heavily determine the (mis)fortunes of workers in the two economies. This has made local struggles, for instance over land for subsistence farming, only more competitive. More generally speaking, greater economic

insecurities, and not just political campaigning, make racial insecurities more intense. At the same time they also demand remedy and political accountability. Thus we see that all the bitterly opposed major parties in Guyana have been socialist. Nationalization was forced onto the governments by popular unrest and even revolt. Voters in both countries defected from the failing governments of the 1970s, even when they had no alternative political home, leading to the unravelling of the political logic. They raised a new demands for decolonization. 'Multiracialism' as a call has in fact integrally tied to the trope of decolonization, and comes in opposition to the imagined divide and rule strategies of the colonial era.

To summarize, I argue that the euphoria of transcendence that accompanied the multiracial party campaigns and victories was linked, centrally, to the promise of a substantive breakthrough in the country's developmental impasse, resurrecting long-standing dreams of emancipation and freedom. To substantiate this argument I have relied on secondary sources such as dissertations, newspapers, books and articles. I have conducted key interviews with trade unionists and party activists of all the major parties, although for this paper I have restricted my use of interviews. I have also used archival sources, political party publications and government reports and surveys.

Explanatory Framework

Why would competing groups come together to put forward a platform of unity in a multiracial party? The only satisfying rationalist response is that, first, they need each other numerically and, second, perceive that they have a shared interest or need that can be met. That they need each other numerically cannot be emphasized enough, although it is not the major subject of this paper. It can be shown through a study of demographics and constituencies. In both these countries Indians and Africans have amounted to at least 30% of the population respectively, going as high as 50% Indians in Trinidad/Tobago and in Guyana. If an incumbent party had 80% of the vote of one ethno-racial group, a multiracial party might well be necessary to defeat it (this might not be necessary when the incumbent is the smaller ethno-racial group, although this situation is arguably more unstable). Obviously these calculations would also have to factor in the nature of the electoral system (first past the post or proportional representation). The actual processes in these two countries of coalition building also included the decline of the incumbents, the rise of new voters and the popularity of the multiracial leadership (Abraham, 1999).

When would they come to need each other numerically? I suggest that *party flux* provides the political opening for multiracial coalition formation. In Guyana it was the period before the first general elections and before the onset of the two-party system, in the 1950s, which offered such a political opportunity. In Trinidad it was in the decline of the hegemonic nationalist party, in the 1980s that allowed a new coalition of opposition parties to be put together. Within these openings political entrepreneurs of all racial backgrounds offered a platform that spoke to *shared interests* of the population in structural change of the economy of the society.

The successful multiracial platforms addressed this concern centrally. The platforms focused on restructuring the effects of the key industrial sectors of the economy, with restructuring defined by Shafer as "deliberate state-led efforts to reallocate resources and reorient economic activity by altering the sectoral composition of the economy to reduce a country's vulnerability to the risks associated with its current leading export

sector, or to seize greater or safer opportunities presented in other sectors, or both" (1994, p. 11). This became the focus around which domestic politics was re-organized and new alliances were forged.

The comparison between the two countries is instructive. In Guyana in 1953 the political targets were the colonial politicians and state, both of which were closely tied to sugar plantation interests. The newly enfranchised electorate was largely drawn from the multiracial rural and urban workers, including Indians and Africans. An anti-colonial politics was the centrepiece of the platform of the only mass organized party, the PPP. Its leadership emphasized the class basis of the narrow national economy, the need for land reform and economic diversification. Its plan for restructuring relied heavily on labour organizing, especially in the sugar industry.

Thirty years later the 'developmental state' was the political target in Trinidad and Tobago for its inefficiency and corruption, partially linked to windfalls from oil. The new electorate was the multiracial middle class, recently created by educational opportunities and benefits of the oil windfall of the 1970s, and which now desired greater economic and political opportunity. The middle classes were not tied to the hegemonic party; further, they did not have an experience yet of liberalization, which promised to liberate the country from its dependency on oil. The financial sector and a liberalized export-oriented economy was the promise of the future.

This argument generally supports Lewis's (2001) belief that in the Caribbean periodically, "new forces from the middle strata arise to implement and direct alternative policies in the process of institutionalizing change" (p. 140). I would suggest that it is the politics of the key sectors in relation to the prevailing balance of class forces that created the multiracial party platforms, and bought them crucial electoral support during a period of party flux. As a corollary to this argument, the multiracial victories embodied not the end result of an organizing thrust towards building a sustainable racial unity, but were the consequence of top-down developmentalist strategies in periods when the populations were vulnerable and open. No surprise then that, with the developing play of partisan politics, the parties split or expelled key ethno-racial leadership (depending on the perspective) within a couple of years, and racial lines of opposition only hardened in subsequent elections.

The PPP Platform and Organizing in Guyana: Radical Developmentalism

In 1950, with the promise of universal suffrage in colonial Guyana, the People's Progressive Party was launched. Its programme read: "The PPP will strive for unity of workers, farmers, cooperatives, friendly societies, progressive businessmen, professional civil servants, and cooperation of all racial groups". Ideologically it cast its vote with socialism. The multiracial leadership of the party, while emerging from the professional class-information at the time (they were lawyers, doctors, trade unionists, journalists) were generally the first-generation members of that class. In a stagnating economy and a small urban sphere their class interests were those of political entrepreneur in the service of working people. They were sharply against the domination of the polity by plantation interests as well as middle class-oriented ethnically based leadership.

Cheddi Jagan, an Indian, a founding member of an influential Marxist study group and an elected MP from the 1947 elections, was the most prominent leader of the party. By all accounts he was hugely popular among different groups of people for his commitment to liberating Guyana from colonial oppression. He had already gained visibility through

being elected to the legislature from 1947. He was revered by poorer East Indians for his own upbringing had been on a sugar estate. His direct and simple style of communication, his rhetoric, as well as his roots in their community made him widely trusted by sugar workers. African leaders were generally more regionally based in their popularity. Forbes Burnham, an African lawyer, came to stand for Black leadership from the urban centre of Georgetown. In the large African village of Buxton many Indians and Africans turned out to support another African, Sidney King, rather than Burnham as the party leader (Interview 2). Ashton Chase was also popular among urban Black workers.

The party introduced into political debate a critique of the foreign capitalist stranglehold on the economy and the impoverishing legacy of large plantations, the human waste generated by a mono-crop economy, and the perils of a non-diversified economy—issues that went to the heart of the organization of economic life in the country. These were not original arguments, but drew from Fabian socialism, Marxist theory, and the growing popularity of the idea of 'mixed economy' in third world contexts. They drew as well as from the long tradition of working class struggle and demands in Guyana.

In the 1953 elections support for the PPP was widespread and included cross-racial support in a number of areas and for a number of candidates. The great upset was not just in the percentage of the voting electorate won by the PPP—50.6% out of a 74% turnout—but in its domination of the legislature. The PPP won 18 seats out of 24. This meant that the PPP could elect all six ministers of the Lower House. It would not control the Upper House, where the nominees of the Governor outnumbered the elected (the Upper House could only delay financial expenditure, not prevent it).

Its victory, with a clear majority of seats from urban and rural, African and Indian strongholds, was an astounding fact for colonial and US observers who had until then not understood the depth of organization and popularity that the party had attained. The agricultural base and the illiteracy of the voting base had not led them to expect the degree of solidarity and unity that the victory represented. Moreover, the leadership could not be controlled. As parliamentarians and ministers they began to foster strikes on sugar estates in order to force a recognition of a rival sugar union.

The counter-revolution began. The PPP was ejected from office by British troops 133 days after entering the legislature. An Interim administration was established. The PPP returned to office after elections in 1957, this time, however, no longer embodying a coalition of ethno-racial groups, but representing primarily an Indian voting base.

Explanation of the Electoral Success of the PPP

The majority of the elite and middle class dating from the 1920s was not interested in mass politics. In their perception the disenfranchised masses were as a collective only 'mobs' or 'strikers', or alternatively, 'destitute'. Middle class pressures groups such as the League of Coloured Peoples and British Guiana East Indian Association did not seek to challenge the colonial political economy. In a memo to the Governor the appointed leader of the major sugar trade union stated the need to 'make' workers of this very dissolute, drunken population (Indian) through cultural instruction (see Cooper, 1996 on the general problem of creating 'workers' in colonies).

More importantly, the middle class, political reformist, nationalist leadership had been demobilized over the previous two decades. In 1928 colonial intervention had clamped down on the steady rise of popular protest led by this group through restricting their

role in the legislature. With the truncation of their political careers, the reformers turned towards the nascent labour movement for it had a dynamic independent of colonial machinations. Whether or not the elite alliance with the working class encouraged the strikes that shook the industry, the political capital of *being an Indian or Black* aspiring leader was enhanced by numerous strikes in the 1930s. The bulk of the sugar proletariat came of these origins, and was strongly conscious of the treatment meted out to them as mere labourers in a colonial economy.

In a matter of two decades, between 1928 and 1948, the Portuguese, Coloured, and White independent politician could no longer claim to be a 'representative', a term which was coming to replace 'respectability' as the political standard. In 1953 Governor Savage noted: "The European Guianese have not yet recovered from the shock of the elections but they are not prepared to enter politics and indeed anti-white feeling is growing, fed by propaganda, and soon no white candidate will stand a chance of being elected".[3] Notwithstanding the racial panic in his words, the political space was indeed becoming defined by 'Indian' and 'African' political identity, but also by an anti-colonial analysis and movement.

The new party organized extensively, raising a new layer of leadership from the rural areas. The mood between Indians and Africans was fraternal by most accounts. It was both an election for the PPP and against Bookers, the major sugar conglomerate who had dominated the country politically and economically. The PPP campaign to its credit did not rely on racialization of the polity to win support, but rather attempted to build on the historic struggles of the town residents, the villagers and the sugar workers to win support. This labour force had been militantly opposing the conditions of work and pay as well as the conditions of village upkeep and support long before the arrival of the PPP. The party consciously drew upon working class organizations such as friendly societies, farmers' organizations, villages, social clubs and rate payer associations in its organizing. The PPP's calculations were also strategic. Indian representatives mostly ran in Indian-dominant areas, and similarly with Africans. The opposition were clearly identified as either supporters of the major British sugar conglomerate, Bookers (Interview 3), or of a Black and Indian elite that was not committed to social progress.

Struggles of urban and rural workers were actively supported by the new emerging leadership from the late 1940s. Similarly to the organizing strategies of Anglophone Caribbean parties across the region, the strategy of the party was to win leadership in every trade union and federation in the country. By 1953 Cheddi Jagan was President of the Sawmill Workers Union (mostly African workers) and Forbes Burnham, who came to be the most prominent African PPP leader, was the President of the British Guiana Labour Union (the first union established in the country, in 1921, extending across urban workers). Jocelyn Hubbard, another of the early members, represented the Clerks' Union.

The base of the PPP extended beyond unions to all 'working people'. Clusters of radicals, middle class and lower middle class in origin, became attracted to the party and helped to shape some of its development. The party itself operated through local groups, which had their own elected officials. Party leadership visited the rural areas regularly, held public meetings, and the local group signed up new members. The party organized educational classes on world and local politics, and distributed its newspaper widely. Many joined as a result of what they read in the paper (Drakes, 1989, p.17). The youth organized their own regional conferences. The PPP leadership represented and spoke a language of change and militancy that resonated with people's experiences

and struggles in the first half of the century to form trade unions in the face of trenchant opposition by planter interests.

Moreover, the 1953 general elections were the very first with a universal suffrage held in Guyana. There was thus a scope of action permissible in the organizing and campaigning, for it occurred without precedent and without prior political commitments for the majority of the population. The sheer numbers of the hitherto disenfranchised working class population made popular a progressive, nationalist anti-colonial agenda that included organizing under militant and representative leadership the key sector of the economy. The commonality of the experiences suffered by former enslaved and indentured African and Indian workers on the plantations and in union struggles in the 1920s and 1930s made for political commonalities as well. There had also not been significant interracial conflict over the previous 100 years. All these factors were essential.

Possibly determining for the party's success, however, was the skewed industrial structure of the country, the huge size of the agricultural class, and the support of sugar workers who comprised the largest sector of the working population and therefore the largest voting bloc. The key industrial sector in Guyana in 1953 was sugar. The industry in Guyana was dominated by Booker Brothers, McConnel and Co. Ltd., a company based in the UK. The sugar industry in 1954 produced 54% of the colony's exports. In 1956 45% of the government's revenue from income taxes and excise duties was derived from the sugar industry (Reubens & Reubens, 1962, p. 10). The industry locally owned extensive tracts of land and controlled the labour, land and housing market to a great degree. It was estimated indirectly to support about 80% of the entire population of the country.

In 1946 49% of the workforce lived on the estates (Venn Report, 1949, p. 15). At least half the rural workforce was comprised of Indian formerly indentured workers, now free wage labour, but still resident on or near the estates. This dependency on the estates, with their monopoly over drainage facilities, housing and good land, continued to proletarianize a substantial proportion of the Indian workforce even while it allowed them to diversify their activities into rice growing and the production of other provisions. Within these structures of dependency strong bonds of solidarity grew between Indian workers and their families.

The rural location of the African population also persisted into the middle of the 20th century. According to the 1946 census, 39.3% of Africans were located in the urban areas of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, which meant a full 60.7% were in the rural areas, islands and forested hinterland of the country (*Census of the Colony of British Guiana 1946*, 1949). Overall, the vast majority of the urban and rural workforce in Guyana were desperately poor in these decades (David, 1969, p. 23). "55% of the self-employed males and 72% of the females either had zero earnings or sub-standard earnings" (Reubens & Reubens, 1962, p. 6). This drastic situation made imperative an argument for radical reform.

The poverty and powerlessness of the workers and their communities provided clarity of purpose in the struggle against inordinate influence of the foreign-owned sugar industry over the legislature, over land ownership, over residence, and over curbing alternative investment and productive opportunities, affecting every other aspect of the economy. Profits left the country; workers locally were impoverished; cultivable land was monopolized. In other words, all national factors of production were severely underdeveloped as a consequence of the structure of the sugar industry. The political field was open to a movement against this domination.

The Guyana story as told here is straightforward, although many omitted details came to stick. These included, what people really desired for themselves as opposed to what the party leadership claimed was the way to emancipation; how significant were rural–urban tensions; why, later, the leadership could not find ways to work together; how latent was Indian–Black competition as a dynamic in the society, and so on. Given the importance of these details, the Trinidad story becomes more intriguing. How could a multiracial electoral victory occur there in 1986 in the circumstances of a long history of racialized competition and betrayal, of a weak and fragmented trade union movement, and with a long history of Indian political exclusion?

Trinidad/Tobago (TT): An Introduction

In the 1980s TT was in the world economic system on terms somewhat of its own making. It was now nearly 40 years after the first election with universal suffrage and a full 25 years after formal political independence had been won. Having one of the highest GDPs and per capita incomes among developing countries, the nature of its economy also had a complexity far above what existed in Guyana 30 years previously, despite similar historical origins. Politics in TT, as in Guyana, was nonetheless heavily determined by the country's dependent status and, as in Guyana, economic nationalism was the orthodoxy.

In 1969 the third national development plan attempted to tackle head-on the main structures of ongoing weakness, identified as unemployment, non-diversified economy, and economic dependency (Robinson, 1986, p. 261). The Budget speech of 1969 addressed the 'localization' of the banking sector that was entirely foreign-owned at the time. Foreign banks were urged to sell local shares and to be locally incorporated. This was the beginning of regulation of the financial sector of the country.

The implementation of these plans was, however, overtaken by a rapidly changing international and local political context. Black Power struggles and street marches by unionists forced a political response to the hitherto 'technical' matter of development. On the heels of this came the oil windfall that threw all planning out of gear. By the early 1970s petroleum extracting and refining accounted for almost 75% of exports and 20% of GDP. By 1974, with higher prices, total petroleum income increased from 25% to more than 69% of total revenue to the government. By 1985 all the refineries in the country were state-owned. Yet the decline in world oil prices meant that revenues from the oil industry now had a purchasing power similar to the pre-boom period of 1971 (Boopsingh, 1990, p. 389).

The social conditions of TT by the mid-1980s were thus complex. The industrial base was centred on the oil industry, spin-off industries and petrochemical industries established with the oil windfall money of the early 1970s. The labour movement, which had centred on the struggles of oilworkers, had risen to its political peak in the mid-1970s and had subsequently declined. It had suffered cutbacks from the drop in oil prices in the early 1980s. A multiracial movement of Indian and African workers that had developed with the expansion of the labour movement had also declined, with infighting, and with a renewed rise of competitive party politics by the early 1980s. Wages and savings in TT had risen in the postwar years, to begin to decline again by the early 1980s. With these factors working together, it could be said that the postwar social contract of wages indexed to high oil wages, growing unionization and expanding industrialization was falling apart.

The NAR Platform in Guyana: Private Sector Developmentalism

It was against the background of this crisis that the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) party organized to win a multiracial breakthrough in the political game in 1986. The NAR comprised a 'party of parties': the opposition party of Indians, the business sector anxious to enter the export-led world, and the new professional middle class. They promised a new social contract, one not pegged to oil but to growth, by releasing the controls on the private sector. The platform broke from the old social contract in that it did not see the redistribution of oil revenues as fundamental to facilitating this process. Rather, the opening of the country to world financial markets was preferred. The expansion of the private sector with the removal of import licensing requirements was promised. At the same time labour was to have its place on tripartite boards, and local economic development plans were intended with community participation.

The international context of restructuring, liberalization was crucial to the NAR's orientation. By the 1980s, the internationalization of the world economy had begun, through dismantling state-owned sectors created in the previous two decades, and through financial, bank-induced encouragement towards building greater import and export capacity, and the hitching of economies to IMF-directed recovery plans. The World Bank report for the country (World Bank, 1988) noted that the slump in oil prices raised a number of critical turning points in the management of the economy. Noting that the new government of 1986 (NAR) had the right idea in promoting private sector development and curbing state expenditure, the report advocated a cut in income and company taxes. The report also noted that the traditional method of promoting industrial development was by granting protection and import duty exemptions (basic import substitution measures) but that these discouraged export initiatives. The report advocated granting free trade status right away to export industries. These suggestions, coming from the World Bank team, were typical of the kind of 'liberalization' reform package suggested to numerous developing countries in the 1980s. Yet these arguments are typically widely criticized as serving corporate and not popular interests, so what explains the popularity of the NAR in Trinidad and Tobago? Some background is necessary here.

Race–Class Structure and Politics

The class structure by the early 1980s was markedly different from that a decade earlier. Attempts to institutionalize and productively use oil monies from the 1970s boom created large projects of energy-based export industrialization which, however, did not prove to be profitable. Reports noted the waste of oil money, and the lack of anything to show from it. This was not entirely true. Many working class families made considerable amounts of money from the spin-off activities from the oil boom, especially in the sector of construction. Real wages more than doubled in non-tradeables in 1975–85 (Hilaire, 1992, p. 65). The revenues generated economy-wide effects thanks to a greatly increased governmental role. The 'cost of living allowance' was institutionalized in 1974 leading to steady rises in public sector real wages (25% between 1974 and 1976, 27% between 1977 and 1980, 46% between 1981 and 1983). The sugar industry was nationalized in 1975 and there was a 100% increase in sugar worker wages. Subsidies were given to petroleum products, cement and food items. Guaranteed price programmes for agricultural products were established. Purchase taxes on durable consumer goods were reduced in 1974–79. The

expanded university system created the largest number of postgraduates in the history of the country. Real estate speculation boomed. A middle class employed in the expanded public sector was consolidated as the government became the largest employer, with 24.6% of total employment by 1985.

By 1990 46% of the population was engaged in the 'service sector', of which about 40% were professionals. The identification of Trinidad/Tobago as a regional banking and finance centre (the *Wall Street Journal* noted that the TT Stock Exchange had the fifth highest growth in 1997) led to the growth in hotels, and restaurants expanded the number of service sector workers from the mid-1980s. The average income in 1982 was US$8000, making Trinidad and Tobago the third highest annual per capita income in the developing world. In 1980 the figures reveal the relative equivalent status of the African, mixed and Indian populations within the class structure, and the continued dominance of the Chinese, Syrian and White sectors (Ryan & Barclay, 1992, p. 144). Income distribution was at the same time not extremely skewed, suggesting that there was indeed a substantial portion of the population within a middle range, as measured by income, if not a comfortable 'middle class'.

The Politics of the Middle Class

The trade union movement had dominated critical analysis in the 1960s, and radical critiques of the economy were given prominence until the mid-1970s. These radical analyses became tied down in factional fighting within the trade union movement, engaged in ideological dispute. The credibility of the nationalization and anti-imperialist doctrines which had been widely shared was now diminished. By the turn of the 1980s there began to be greater visibility and airing of views of a new and more assertive voice on the upswing—the middle and professional class in Trinidad. This was a multi-racial grouping. The context of their rise included the decline of the incumbent political party and the social contract that it had implemented over the previous decade.

The Afro-Trinidadian professional–managerial class had been at the forefront of the country's 1970s development strategy (Friday, 1989). This class ran the state enterprises established with petro-dollars. These were the state functionaries and intellectuals who were beneficiaries of the major transition that had been brought about through the Energy Based Industrialization initiatives which had established with petro-dollars major new state-owned export industries in the country based on chemicals, gas, methanol, fertilizers and steel. These state entrepreneurs increasingly had conflicts about excessive political interference in appointments and in the running of the enterprises and the inability to convert themselves into 'capitalists' in their own right (Friday, 1989, p. 233) If the idea was to be like the private sector in terms of private capital accumulation that was not happening.

The indigenous capitalist class, mostly White, had been largely left out of these developments since they were seen to be interested only in commerce and banking and not enterprising enough to invest in new manufacturing enterprises. This class felt that the new state run projects would never be successful, although they looked forward to all the spin-off activities of increased services, distribution, construction and real estate development (Friday, 1989, p. 210). Their programme was put forward as early as 1972 by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in response to nationalization. The latter associated 'localization' (selling shares locally by banks and insurance companies) with

'expropriation', reflecting the justified paranoia of the small White elite who were threatened by the tide of Black Power protest. The formation of the United Labour Front (ULF) trade union-based party in the mid-1970s only accentuated the fears of a 'communist' takeover. However, this class also gained tremendously from the oil boom and only grew in economic strength. It began to build political alliances with the disillusioned professional class in a shared commitment to the private sector (albeit no longer necessarily white-dominated) in response to the ongoing governmental attempts to maintain control over the management of the economy.

Analysing the chairmanship of the state boards, Friday notes that there were a majority of Afro-Trinidadians and the rest were Euro- and Sino-Trinidadians. There was almost a complete absence of Indo-Trinidadians on the state boards. Therefore, it is no surprise that the other ally in the coalition forming in opposition to the government were Indian professionals. At a broader and more diffuse level the new political thrust overlapped with a forming Indian identity not associated with support for government or workers, but rather with a university-educated class who wished to acquire political power to buttress their economic and credential strength and new-found cultural confidence.

By the 1981 elections a new political party, the Organization for National Reconstruction (ONR), including many members of these groups was formed. It contested the elections on a platform of getting rid of the statist government. As a new player politically it had the benefit of fresh energy and it ran the most 'American' of campaigns, with a sophisticated public relations front "like the country had never seen before". It won over 84 000 votes but no seats. An opposition alliance, which did not before the elections include the ONR, now included the party for the local government elections in 1983, and together they swept the elections.

With the general elections approaching, the choice of leader from this alliance was most important. A.N.R. Robinson, who was finance minister in 1962–70 in the incumbent PNM government, was the most popular among African and mixed voters, and became the alliance leader. The polls showed that Panday of the ULF was the favourite among Indian voters. At the same time a greater proportion of Indians, long excluded from power, supported the idea of a coalition than did Africans (70% compared with 48%, according to Ryan (1989, pp. 46–47)). The ONR ran the organizing campaign. It was a classic coalition of differing interests, brought together in opposition to a declining incumbent.

The slogan of 'one love' struck a note of a sentimental and yet hopeful politics. One interviewee recounted, "I supported the NAR because it was the first party in my mind that had a vision for the society". The person went on to explain that he had been brought up in a middle-class multiracial neighbourhood of Port of Spain and his schooling was also integrated. After this stage in his life he did not experience harmony again. Election results reveal that new voters came out in every constituency as a primary factor in its success.

As these alliances in the opposition were being negotiated, the PNM, in the person of Prime Minister Williams, continued with its selective nationalizing thrust, with the localization of banks and insurance companies, and the spreading of shares across the population. The stalemate between the government and private sector interests was thrown wide open with the death of Williams in 1981 and the declining oil revenues from 1982. It was a debate of concern to all as to whether the state enterprises should continue to be subsidized. It was estimated that the major industrial projects were all running at a loss (Pantin, 1987). Loans taken out for them were coming to payment time. Through a

number of corruption scandals the PNM had lost all credibility as an honest manager of the nation's money. In a staple statement of class attack, the size and wages of the public sector workers were held responsible for the decline in the fiscal condition.[4]

From 1983 the governing PNM, following discussions with the IMF, was forced to cut back heavily on the kinds of expenditures it had invested in through massive state enterprises, loans it could not regain, and public sector wages it could not sustain. The internal and external debt started rising rapidly. By 1986 funds for long-term projects were gone. The PNM removed subsidies it had established in the 1970s. In 1983 rates of purchase tax were raised across the board by 30%. Between 1983 and 1985 excise and motor vehicle taxes were also hiked. Access to foreign exchange was limited. Quotas on imports were reduced and tightened considerably (although rents increased as a result of the greater premiums on holding an import license (Hilaire, 1992)).

While many small and a few large companies went out of business in the recession in 1983–86 the major conglomerates run by White Trinidadians continued to make a profit. Finance houses closed down, causing thousands of investors to lose their savings, but banks still turned a profit, though smaller than during the years of the oil boom (Friday, 1989). Foreign banks did better than local banks. In sheer monetary terms the large business class was more resilient than the state enterprises. Yet it looked like the state was going to continue to hold the business class under control, this time without popular support. In this context, the formation of the NAR emerged to advance a platform of private sector-based developmentalism.

Who benefited from the multiracial government of the NAR?[5] I ask this to identify some of its key supporters. The climate for investment in the country improved with the reduced emphasis on state-owned enterprise through reduced credit, the interest in joint ventures, and the decline in state-based granting of contracts as favours and patronage. Speaking more generally of the impact of structural adjustment policies in the Caribbean in the 1990s, Kari Levitt has noted that "this economic model has favored trading and financial services over productive activity. Banks and insurance companies have done very well, while the mass of the population has suffered a substantial decline in real income" (1990, p. 161). While there was consumer and business pressure to lower the interest rates, banks convinced the minister of finance that this would lead on a run on the banks if the rates were lower than that of inflation, and that reduced bank profitability would mean closure of some banks altogether (Ryan, 1989, pp. 102–103). There has been a concentration of assets in the insurance industry with 10 firms accounting for 78% of total assets (Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, 1994, p. 11). In addition, the beneficiaries have been disproportionately foreign companies who have moved in as joint partners in most of the key industries.

In 1989 the NAR government cut income and corporation taxes from 59%–45%, while instituting the regressive value-added indirect tax. It privatized a number of enterprises and revised the Aliens Landholding Act to permit foreign purchase of Trinidad and Tobago land. This had been a long-standing demand of the local business class who deplored any attempt to criticize foreign ownership (Friday, 1989, p. 340). EC Zero, which had been an attempt in 1983 under the previous PNM government to restrict imports through ceilings or quotas, was dismantled by 1988 by the NAR, with an annual allocation of local currency to importers. Subsequently the foreign exchange controls began to be completely eliminated (Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, 1994, p. 7).

The losers were disproportionately the 'average' person. The public sector deficit was reduced through wage freezes and revenues were raised through VAT. Compensation of employees as a percentage of GDP declined from a high in 1986, at 63%, to 51% in 1991 (*National Income of TT 1981–1991*, p. 360). There has been a net out-migration of the labour force from Trinidad and increased importance of remittances from 1988 (*Balance of Payments of TT*, 1990–1991). The jump in the unemployment rate between 1986 and 1987 from 16.6% to 21.6% (*Review of the Economy*, Central Statistics Office, 1988, Appendix 22) nationally and 10.6% to 23.7% in the capital, Port of Spain, was tremendous. To generate employment, the NAR's policy that made the most headway until women's groups opposed it, was to set up an Export Processing Zone in south Trinidad. Subsequently the Free Zones Act (1988) was passed. Freed from relying on patronage obligations of a racially based government, the NAR was able to implement these fundamental changes in the organization of investment and distribution of assets in the country.

Explanation of the Electoral Success of NAR

Given the general knowledge that the business class supported the NAR for their own gain, why did people put their hopes in it? There are a number of answers, and they all have relevance. There was, first, the political opening. The old regime had lost political, moral and economic legitimacy, and there was a chance to displace it. Second, the old social contract of wages linked to oil revenue distribution had come to a close with the decline of labour's strength. Third, the NAR included the main representatives of the Indian population, who were now almost 50% of the population, and who had not yet been in the ruling government. Four, the coalition represented truly a multiracial array of interests, including White and Coloured business interests, African management interests, and Indian professional interests, and this was extremely attractive to the non-ethnic voter. Fifth, technocrats who were leading members of the coalition were considered 'beyond race' in their knowledge of economics and their promise of restoring financial strength and productive growth to the economy (see Hintzen, 2001 for a general discussion of this point). Finally, for the few radicals in the coalition, it offered the promise of "a true political democracy", with its emphasis on widespread participation (Interview 4).

All these points might, then, offer a conclusion quite opposite to the one I have forwarded, for the 'developmentalist' solutions offered were ultimately quite opposed to working people's interests. I would here make the distinction between the reasons the coalition was built (the restructuring agenda) and the reasons for its electoral success (to do with race as enumerated above, with electoral organizing, a political opening, new cooperative ideas, and the rest). What was visible to the public was a strong sense of the transformative possibilities for better development with a'national coalition bringing together familiar voices that had long struggled against the incumbent government. While the trade union movement was hostile to the proposed direction, it was racially segmented, and hence not a strong threat to the new multiracial political leadership.

Without any bargaining strength behind them some labour members opted out of the 'participatory' processes within a year, and discussions were left at the elite level between technocrats, professionals and businessmen. These discussions themselves were overtaken by the crisis in the economy. The size of the inherited deficit and the external public sector debt was underestimated by the NAR, who were forced by the IMF to continue the harsh austerity measures started by the PNM in order to negotiate a new

payment schedule of a stand-by loan agreement. This was undertaken in the 1987–90 budgets and within months brought people out on the streets in protest at the party's economic programme. The dream turned sour in a matter of months. Multiracial civil society groups began organizing a popular opposition. A coup was launched in 1990 by the Jamaat-i-Musilmeen, a radical Black Muslim group with urban and rural support, hoping to cash in on the unpopularity of the government.

In Conclusion

With the onset of racial politicking overlapping with the onset of party politics from the 1950s, ideology has mattered increasingly less to these particular Caribbean societies than has their perceived racial quality. All the major Guyanese parties have been socialist, with explicit cold war alliances. The two major Trinidadian parties have been nationalist. Both party systems have been locked down by partisan racial campaigning and voting.

In this context, I have shown that the electoral success of multiracial parties has been significant for reasons beyond merely breaking through the electoral impasse. After all, there was no impasse yet in Guyana. Both victorious parties had strong agendas for restructuring the national economy in an international context of change, i.e. the era of decolonization and the era of liberalization. Support for these parties came from a variety of class-based interests which trumped racial competition. Both parties were also moments of empowerment for Indians and minorities, in particular. Thus, both parties represented some interest beyond pragmatic coalitional politics. It was not a matter of putting together racial groups at the point of elections. This has been tried multiple times in both countries, to no avail. Multiracialism in these contexts carried a meaning which resonated with national interest, linked in turn with decolonization from inherited structures of dependency and exclusion. Yet we also learn from the experience in Trinidad and Tobago that the notion itself cannot replace democratic forms of popular development.

This analysis does not suggest much in terms of future options so I would like hazard a thought about this. We have seen that the two multiracial parties organized successfully only when the party system was in flux; in Guyana when it was in formation, and in Trinidad when the hegemonic national party was in decline. Given this, the two-party system cannot avoid a closer scrutiny and a call for reformation. We do see an increased discussion of power-sharing and governments of national unity in both countries. This study concurs that political reform would need to be a thrust of a multiracial politics of the future. But does this solution not keep alive the problematic of who is in power? Might not power sharing by existing racialized parties only further disempower the working majority as well as third parties? Meanwhile, people have been voting with their feet and have been moving their families, skills and futures, in large numbers, into neighbouring metropolitan countries. Ironically, this has been a very multiracial movement.

Notes

A longer version, from which this article is excerpted, appears as 'The electoral success of multi-racial parties in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 30(60), 2005.

1. The majority of the populations of these two countries comprised men and women of African and Indian descent who worked in the colonial export plantation economy. The remainder of the populations hailed

from China, Portugal, Spain, England, France and other Caribbean countries, including Amerindian peoples corralled into the forming nation-states.

2. See Hintzen (1989) for the only systematic theoretical attempt to link economic, political and racial dynamics in these countries. He too does not focus on the multiracial victories.
3. Enclosure in CO 1031/121.
4. From the Governor of the Central Bank's speech, quoted in *Free Enterprise*, published by the Chamber of Commerce, n.d.
5. For details on various proposals and policies of the NAR, leading to specific racial discussions and consequences, see the book length study by Selwyn Ryan (1989).

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Interviews

Interview 1 with Rupert Roopnaraine, Co-Leader, Working People's Alliance, Guyana.
Interview 2 with Rampersaud Tiwari, Cabinet Secretary, 1960–62, Guyana.
Interview 3 with Eusi Kwayana, founding member WPA, former minister in the PPP and PNC governments. Many interviews and conversations from 1993 to the present, Guyana.
Interview 4 with Asad Mohammed, NAR, ULF member, Trinidad and Tobago.