Jerome Teelucksingh

Labour and the Decolonization Struggle in Trinidad and Tobago. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xiii + 235 pp. (Cloth US\$ 95.00)

Jerome Teelucksingh contends that labor has been “the most potent force” in the struggle for “liberation from imperial forces and capitalist domination” (p. viii) in Trinidad and Tobago. Accordingly, he focuses on the working class, positing that it laid the foundation for the development of subsequent local nationalist movements and the evolution of working-class struggles from the 1920s to the immediate post-World War II period.

Delineating and scouring this particular phase provided Teelucksingh an opportunity to discuss the crucial role played by the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) and its successor organization, the Trinidad Labor Party (TLP). But the text goes further, discussing in depth the emergence of more radical labor organizations which embroiled themselves in the politics of the post-war period that undergirded nationalist movements globally. This approach, which examines the *modus operandi* of the incipient and older organizations, establishes the critical nexus between labor and politics that emerged from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth. This is not a link that was easily forged. Working-class strugglers and early political reformist groups were neither one and the same nor the chummiest of bedfellows. Though both offered resistance to colonialism, the approach of the latter was often peaceful agitation for political reforms, while the former advocated forceful action through strikes, demonstrations, and picketing. It was the failure of the political reformer groups that spurred the development of more radical workers' organizations. These ultimately outpaced the sheer reformists to become the game-changers.

Throughout the volume there is an underlying recognition of the inherent radicalism of labor throughout the region's colonial history. However, rather than highlight this through theoretical and macrocosmic angles regarding the contestation between capitalism and labor, Teelucksingh narrates a wealth of developments and scenarios exhibiting the welter of intricacies and intrigue inherent in the interaction between labor and politics. His introduction sets well, however, the tone for an incisive homily, exploring the history of labor relations up to the close of the long nineteenth century. Labor, colonialism, and race are presented as inextricably connected, fashioning the social, economic, and political structure. Teelucksingh points to the explicit intention of Europeans to exploit labor to their advantage, and deals with the exploitation of Amerindians, enslaved African-descended laborers, and European and Asian indentured immigrants, though the exploited always resisted courageously.

Chapter 1 provides unprecedented historiographical details on the early organizations—their aims and objectives, operations, challenges, and evolution. The TWA stands out for its championship of labor issues, inevitably extending its interest beyond this into economic and social affairs, although there was obviously increasing concern for the poor, as reflected in its membership and the issues raised. Chapters 2–3 highlight the strengthening and consolidation of the organization, its incorporation of women, its link with international labor organizations, and, most importantly, its involvement in post-1918 politics. Chapter 4 focuses on the engagement of the organization's leaders into electoral and legislative politics. When the TWA was formed, it could have registered only as a friendly society. Moreover, it was not conceptualized as a political party. Chapter 5 discusses its transformation into the TLP. The upsurge of nationalist thinking and activism that preceded independence in Trinidad and Tobago and the synergies with the trade unions and the TLP form the subject matter of Chapters 6 and 7.

While Teelucksingh lacks a grasp of the Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean or the wider Anglophone Caribbean, his eye for details of the Trinidad and Tobago experience offers rich information about the labor movement and its various leaders: their portfolios, socioeconomic backgrounds, and personal styles, the issues they raised, the frustrations visited upon them by the imperial and colonial administrations, the connections between metropolitan and local organizations and their methods of operation, and the links between metropolitan and colonial administrative responses.

In his opening salvo Teelucksingh warns that while he uses Marxian terminology, his focus is not restricted to class. Implicit here is a paradoxical, methodological hybridity which suggests that in a sense less might be delivered than reasonably expected. It is not simply that Teelucksingh's "working class"-centric study scarcely applies Marxian frames of reference: it is that, in consequence, the dialectics between capital and labor are hardly explicated. His deliberate limitation of the class factor could have opened a window for the exploration of race, but the opportunity was not seized. So while this work can be lauded as a treasure trove of data on radical labor and its impact on the local decolonialism, this comes mostly in relation to Indian leaders hitherto unfairly neglected by scholarly enquiry. Meanwhile, there is no justification for the markedly scant treatment of Tubal Uriah Butler, arguably one of the most radical and politically influential leaders of the period.

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