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Author(s): W. Errol Bowen

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DEVELOPMENT, IMMIGRATION AND POLITICS IN A PRE-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY: A STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS IN THE 1960s

*W. Errol Bowen**

In any future history of the British Virgin Islands, the decade of the 1960s will merit special attention for three reasons. First, it was the decade that saw the start of the development of the islands and the beginning of their transformation from a pre-industrial state. Secondly, it was a period marked by a large scale influx of immigrants from other Caribbean islands and the United Kingdom. Finally, the decade saw the beginnings of a transition from an old-style colonialism under the forceful hand of an Administrator, to a more representative type of politics, in which the Administrator was bound, except in a number of special circumstances, to act on the advice of the Chief Minister or Executive Council.

This article will take a brief look at the social repercussions caused by the interplay of these three sets of changes.

PRE-INDUSTRIAL TORTOLA

At the beginning of the decade, the colony was predominantly a group of communities of small scale farmers and fishermen, the chief occupations were agriculture, principally livestock raising; and fishing and trading by sloops and schooners. Those engaged in these pursuits were largely, if not entirely, self-employed.

As far as the two basic industries, fishing and agriculture were concerned, both were in a state of decline. Indeed, some 12 years previously, a local writer had said: "The former can be dismissed in a few words, for as long as there are no regulations governing the preservation of fish there is no hope of a permanent recovery." While agriculture was

* Lecturer in Sociology, Caribbean Institute of Mass Communication, University of the West Indies, Mona.

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plagued by unremitting exhaustion of the soil, by bad cultivation, and by "soil erosion," which he said, "in time will convert us into an arid desert."[1]

Mountainous terrain and poor rainfall – approximately 40 inches a year – led to the raising of cattle rather than the growing of food or plantation crops like sugar cane. The cattle, owned by peasants, was exported mainly to St. Thomas, to the West; and the French and Dutch West Indies to the South-East. But the increasing low return to farmers led to unfavourable attitudes towards farm work.

Thus, by 1960, the shift of the labour force away from agriculture was very marked. In 1946, Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Hunting had accounted for 72 percent of the male working population and 7 percent of the female. By 1960 these proportions had declined to 45 percent for the males and 4 percent for the females.[2]

Where did those who left the land find employment? Apart from the Civil and Education services, and commerce, employment in the British Virgin Islands at this time tended to be casual in character, in the building and construction industries. But there was no large-scale building going on in the colony at this time.

Fortunately for the British Virgins, the period of declining agricultural activity was paralleled in the neighbouring American Virgins by the growth of the tourist industry and the demand for all types of labour there at high wages. The result was that migration from the BVI for work in the USVI came to play an increasingly important part in the economy of the islands.

Actually, in the cluster of islands which makes up the British and American Virgins, the American island of St. Thomas has always been the axis around which the others orbited.

Indeed, the Government of the British Virgin Islands, in its 1951 Development Plan, recognised the British and American Virgins as constituting a close, well-defined geographical, linguistic and economic unit.[3]

The population of the islands became extremely mobile, with between 200 and 300 persons per week moving between the British and US islands.

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1 C. Brudenell Bruce, "Rehabilitation", *The Torch*, Vol. 1, no. 4, (August 1948): 4. (*The Torch* was a BVI newspaper.)

2 Joscelyne Massiah, "Employment in the British Virgin Islands, 1960," (Unpublished Mss., 1968).

3 Norwell Harrigan, "A Study of the Inter-relationships Between the British and United States Virgin Islands, (Unpublished mss. 1969), p. 142.

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Most of these engaged in casual or regular employment for short periods in St. Thomas. In 1960, with a labour force of 4,128 and a population of 7,340, the number of British Virgin Islanders in the US Virgins was 734, or 10 percent of the BVI population.[4]

Of course, not every Virgin Islander needing work found a job and there was a gradual rise in the long term unemployed from 1 percent of the population in 1946 to 4 percent in 1960. During the same period, there was an increase in total unemployment from 4 percent to 10 percent, while under-employment increased from 6 percent to 16 percent.[5]

Not only did British Virgin Islanders go to St. Thomas for jobs, they went there for "groceries such as rice, flour, cornmeal, fats, and canned goods; clothes, shoes and hats; lumber, cement, and other building materials, and an equally long list of other articles."[6] The reason for buying in St. Thomas was that cheaper prices existed there.

The vague sense of unease with life in the colony was reflected in the columns of the islands' newspaper *The Torch* which complained that:

> Every year more and more of our young people are being sent away to be trained, but on returning so few of them have that love for Tortola that makes them want to remain and try to better the place. They go on scholarships, return and remain a year or two and then leave for more lucrative positions elsewhere. This constant turn-over of trained personnel seems to be the main thing that is keeping us back. Those in authority should see to it that when persons are accepting scholarships that they will return to stay at least five years.[7]

At this time, the racial composition of the British Virgin Islands was predominantly black with a population consisting of a mere 47 Europeans, 3 Asiatics, 373 Mixed and 7,398 Africans.[8]

Sociologically speaking, British Virgin Island's society at the beginning of the decade of the 1960s was as close to being a one-class society, or a society without classes, as it was possible to be. This does not mean that it was a society without inequality for there were distinctions of status between persons, with some being superior and most inferior.

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[4] Ibid, p. 158.

[5] Massiah, "Employment in the British Virgin Islands," pp.8, 11.

[6] An editorial in *The Torch*, 1, no. 3, (June 1946): 2.

[7] *The Torch*, 1V, no. 1, (Jan/Feb 1957): 6.

[8] *W.I. Census 1960*, Bulletin 11, Table 2. But note that this bulletin gives the total BVI population as 7,912 in 1960 while Harrigan (above note 4, gives this as 7,340.

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But class is not simply a matter of social status. As Laslett argues, the use of the words class and class-conflict imply a class of groups of persons defending and enchancing not simply a common status, but also common interests and power. The emphasis is on the solidarity of classes as groups of persons which act in championship of their conflicting aims. Such classes have a further characteristic: they are nationwide. Lasslett argues:

> It is in this sense that we shall claim that there was, in England at least, only one class in pre-industrial society. A distinction will be drawn between a status group, which is the number of people enjoying or enduring the same social status, and a class, which is a number of people banded together in the exercise of collective power, political and economic. The argument will be that there were a large number of status groups but only one body of persons capable of concerted action over the whole area of society, only one class in fact.[9]

In the British Virgin Islands, this class would consist of the representatives of the Colonial power, members of the Islands' government and top Civil Servants.

Again, as in pre-industrial England, Tortola in the early 1960s was a society in which there were few members of what today is usually understood as the "middle class." To quote Lasslett again:

> We now think of professional people such as doctors and lawyers, technicians of every description, teachers, architects, civil servants as the important people of this type. It is men like these which the nations of Africa and Asia are so sadly lacking in our century, and not so much the businessmen, which correspond (not very exactly) to the merchants of say, Elizabethan England.[10]

It was people of this type too that were sadly lacking in the British Virgin Islands in 1960. At that time there were no local doctors, no lawyers, local or otherwise, no architects, and most of the top teachers and top civil servants were non-Tortolans, a large number from the Leeward Islands.

Again, like pre-industrial England, Virgin Island society at this period had what Laslett has called a segmented character, and in reality consisted of groups of isolated communities scattered on the various islands, with little or no communication between the various groups. Travel between islands was by sea, as was most travel between communities on the same

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[9] Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London: Metheun & Co., 1965), p.22.
[10] Ibid, pp. 49-50.

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island, for land connections were very difficult going, and indeed were more like bridle-paths than roads, "satisfactory for jeeps but not for cars."[11] That is, where land connections existed.[12]

Why was there such a slow rate of road development in the British Virgin Islands? It certainly was not because the Tortolans were not aware of the importance of roads, for some 12 years before, an editorial in *The Torch* had observed:

> ..When eventually we settle down to road building and it becomes easier to travel from Carrot Bay to Road Town [about 25 miles] then and only then will our "metropolis" assume its proper place as the center of trade and commerce, education and culture of the British Virgin Islands group.[13]

And if there were few roads, there was little by way of other development either. Thus, as the decade of the sixties began there was electricity only in Road Town and that was limited to Government House, the Hospital and the Administration Building. Water supply was a problem and came mainly from rain water collected in cisterns attached to each individual house. There was a telephone service in Tortola, consisting of one switchboard with 20 lines, and a radio-telephone system linking the islands of Anegada, Virgin Gorda and Jost van Dyke with Road Town. There was no bank in the British Virgin Islands in 1960. People sent their money to St. Thomas and put their trust in God.

It was a society in which religion and the churches played an important role. For the country districts and the out-islands, the church was the main link with the wider world. And schools went on in church buildings under the supervision of Anglicans and Methodists, with reading, writing and arithmetic being taught largely by unqualified persons.[14]

Only three of the colony's schools were housed in buildings designed as schools. The remainder met in churches or parish rooms. Many of these were severely overcrowded as they consisted of a single room. So in dry weather, many classes were taught under trees.[15]

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11 *The Torch*, III, no. 6 (Nov-Dec. 1955): 3.

12 In 1969 there was still only a very difficult drivable land connection between Virgin Gorda's main settlement at Spanish Town and the community on the other end of the island at North Sound. The easy connection was by boat.

13 *The Torch*, 1, no. 7 (Oct. 1948): 2

14 Harrigan, "Inter-relationships Between the British and U.S. Virgin Islands," p.122.

15 *Triennial Report 1964-66.* (A BVI Govt. report on education), pp.12-13.

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In 1960, the single Government-run co-educational secondary school in the colony, with accommodation for 125 pupils – that is the top 5 percent of the school population – had in enrollment of 124.[16]

The curious thing about education in the Virgin Islands however, is that boys are generally expected to start earning at an earlier age than girls, and so there is a tendency for the number of boys remaining at school after the age of 12 to diminish. The result is that more girls than boys are to be found at the top of the primary school, and so more girls than boys enter the secondary school and complete the course there. In fact for every boy in secondary school, there are two girls. The girls also appear to do better at the academic and more verbal type of instruction.[17]

In short, there is a tendency for Virgin Island girls to be better educated than Virgin Island boys at both primary and secondary level, a fact which "could very well result in the boys playing second string to the girls in matters of leadership, achievement and force of character."[18]

Of course, Tortolans had long had a sense of unease about education in their islands, and in 1956 had set up a committee to investigate the educational set up of the colony and make recommendations to the Administrator "so that the perplexing question can be tackled and, we hope, solved."[19] Even before that, in 1948, a public debate had been held in Road Town to discuss "Education in the Virgin Islands," and one speaker was loudly applauded when he declared that the education system had fostered in the young the attitude that anything from outside the Virgin Islands was necessarily better than anything within them. Speakers from the floor blamed the defects in the system over the previous twenty years on the refusal of the Authorities to consult and be guided by public opinion.[20]

Whatever the reason, the fact was that the small size of the Secondary School, its staffing problems, the disparity in the sex ration of the pupils and the low standards of knowledge of entrants all seemed to militate against the efficiency of the school and was reflected in the "O" level

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16 E.L. Scatliffe, "The Development of Post-Primary Education in the British Virgin Islands" (Unpublished Mss., 1962), p.10.

17 Vincent L. Nathan Brissett, M.A., "British Virgin Islands Secondary School," (a mimeographed pamphlet on an inspection visit to the BVI secondary school in 1963 by the then Principal Education Officer in the Ministry of Education, Jamaica), p.1.

18 Ibid, p. 1.

19 *The Torch*, IV, no. 1 (Jan-Feb. 1957):3.

20 The Torch, I, no. 2 (May 1948): 2.

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results, in which few pupils managed to achieve the desired "four passes including English language and Mathematics" which were needed for progress in the Civil Service or other white-collar jobs.

Only the very exceptional pupil could achieve examination results giving access to a University. As a result, there was little hope that the "feed-back" of competent young people into the Civil Service, Teaching Service and private commercial and technical enterprises, could meet the territory's needs.[21]

We should however realize, as Massiah points out, that if in the BVI:

> Only 6% received a secondary education and of these only 2% gained a School Certificate or its equivalent. This position compares favorably with the rest of the region in which 9% of the adult population has acquired a secondary education and of these just 3% have done so successfully.[22]

THE BEGINNINGS OF DEVELOPMENT

British Virgin Islanders have always had their own views about the development of the islands. Thus in 1955 *The Torch* said: "Probably everyone in the islands has heard that at last the Virgin Islands is able to boast that we are becoming modernized. In what way? By having firefighting equipment, of course."[23] And one interpreter of the history of the islands has said: "The economic life of the islands has been dominated by a continuous search for a formula for their development."[24]

Until the decade of the 1960s however, it was obvious that the formula for development had not yet been found, for as we have seen, the BVI entered the decade of the '60s as very much a pre-industrial society, lacking much of the basic infrastructure on which successful development could be based. Any development of the islands would have to start from rock-bottom, and the question was – who would do the developing?

It was generally agreed that the development of the islands would depend primarily upon tourism, with the entire territory being considered

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21 *Triennial Report 1964-66*, p.11.

22 Massiah, "Employment in the British Virgin Islands'" p.6.

23 *The Torch*, III, no. 1 (April 1955).

24 I. Dookhan, *A History of the British Virgin Islands, Some notes on its Writing and Bibliography*, (University of the West Indies, Department of History, Postgraduate Seminar, pamphlet, June 1967) p.12.

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as a tourist area.[25] It was also quite evident that the Colonial Administration had little intention of initiating development. As Harrigan put it: " . . . it is inconceivable that these beautiful and unspoilt islands, protected waters and superb beaches can remain forever unexploited. In the interim there is not a great deal that can be done by Government."[26]

If little could be done by the Government, and this opinion was arguable, the question remained – if not the government, then who would be enterprising enough to see the potential of these virgin islands? Who would be the entrepreneurs?

It is very seldom that one can pinpoint the historical moment when the development of a country begins, but one almost surely can in the case of the BVI. It began when Laurence Rockefeller's negotiations for the construction of a resort on Virgin Gorda resulted in the completion and opening of a 50-room hotel in 1964. As Harrigan said: "The Rockefeller entrance into the British Virgin Islands was the most significant factor in its economic advancement."[27]

Basically, Virgin Gorda was not equipped to face development on a comprehensive scale. Physically, the island's 8.3 square mile area was in two entities. The smaller, low southern portion contained about 600 of the island's population, living in the Valley area, while about 400 lived in the North Sound settlement in the mountainous northern part of the island.

The settlement in the Valley was exceptionally scattered and unorganised, with no definite centre of community activities. Shops and other commercial activities, as well as Administrative and Cultural institutions were scattered haphazardly over a wide area and the standard of infrastructures and other public services was poor and inadequate. The North Sound Settlement had the same lack of basic infrastructures, public services and amenities.[28]

The possibilities of employment in the island were limited to agriculture, fishing and a few services like carpentry. As in Tortola, agriculture had seriously declined in recent years, and the young were reluctant to stay on the land. Consequently, the tendency to migrate had

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25 Ivar Ditlef-Nielsen, *Town and Country Planning in the British Virgin Islands*, (Pamphlet, Interim Report December 1967-November 1968) p.14.

26 Harrigan, "Inter-relationships", p.137.

27 Ibid, p.140.

28 Ditlef-Nielsen, *Town and Country Planning in the British Virgin Islands*, pp.16,17.

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increased in recent years and many a breadwinner found employment off the island, especially in St. Thomas and Tortola.[29]

So, when Rockefeller's luxury resort hotel, Little Dix Bay, got under construction in 1962, it was – because Virgin Gorda was not equipped or capable of supplying the domestic, public and commercial services which normally are required of such a community – developed as a self-contained unit, with its own infrastructures, services and supplies.[30]

Right from the start, Little Dix Bay exerted an appreciable impact on the development of the island. Because of a lack of skilled labour, large numbers of Barbadians and other West Indians were brought in to work on the construction of the hotel. And after the hotel was opened in 1964, many of these West Indians stayed on in the colony.

The hotel became the largest employer on the island, with about 160 people on the payroll, of whom about 40 were down-islanders from Anguilla, St. Kitts, Antigua and the rest of the West Indies, 100 were Virgin Gordans, and the rest were from North America, Europe and Southern Africa. Altogether Mr. Rockefeller's estate covers some 515 acres on a 99 year lease.

The next big spurt in the development of the islands followed the signing by the Administrator on 20 January 1967 of the Wickham's Cay and Anegada Development agreements. The signing was the outcome of several months negotiations between the Government and Batehill Ltd., represented chiefly by English entrepreneur Ken Bates.

Batehill's was not the first British investment in the territory, but in the view of the Administrator, the Batehill agreements offered: "the first real prospect to this territory, that is, the whole British Virgin Islands of the establishment of a measure of suitable industrial development in addition to tourist development."[31]

The Wickham's Cay development was a straight land reclamation job, involving 70 acres in the bay at Road Town in Tortola. The first part of this project, involving the reclamation of the land and the cutting of access roads through it from one part of the town to another, was completed in 1969. The second stage was to involve the selling of this reclaimed land for the construction of houses, shops and so on.

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29 Ibid, p.17.

30 The hotel generates its own power, brings in water from Puerto Rico and food supplies from the United States, and in 1969 was thinking of getting fruit supplies from Dominica.

31 Radio broadcast by Administrator Martin Staveley, 7 February, 1967.

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Now Road Town had originally developed along the coast at Road Bay on a very narrow strip of flat land with the sea before and the mountains behind. This meant that the development of the town had spread out along three and a half miles of coastline, giving the town a protracted narrow shape with one main road through it which soon proved itself unable to cope with the increase of vehicular traffic.

Thus the Wickham's Cay development would have a considerable impact on Road Town and its people. As the first comprehensive urban development to take place in the islands, it would completely change the face of Road Town.

And just as the Wickham's Cay agreement involved the physical transformation of Road Town, so too, the Anegada agreement involved the physical transformation of the island of Anegada.

The most inviolate of the Virgins, Anegada lies 18 miles to the north-east of Tortola, and constitutes about a quarter of the total land area of the BVI; some 6,450 acres of flat scrubland, surrounded by excellent sand beaches.

All of the island is Crown Land, but the Anegada Ordinance of 1961 reserves an area with stated limits and measuring 357 acres for the 200 or so people living on the island. This area is know as the Village or Settlement.

There was a complete lack of any facilities on the island, and the Government had no intention of providing any, for, said the Administrator: "It could never be justified for a government – any government– to provide the full range of facilities for a small, isolated community of 200 people."[32]

And since the government, said the Administrator, had no possible hope in the foreseeable future of being able to afford to put in the basic services, "the only course was to grant a sufficient concession to make it worthwhile for someone capable of doing so, to do it."[33]

The "sufficient concession" – the Anegada agreement – provided for a 199 year lease of approximately 5,700 acres of the island, during which time there would be complete exemption from all taxes on income and profits to firms and corporations resident or conducting business on the island.[34]

Some 1,500 acres were reserved by the Government, and this included

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32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 *The Financial Times*, (12 August, 1969): 23.

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the Settlement, for local development. And for their concession, the Company was required to construct a public road network, an airstrip, an 80 room hotel, an electricity plant, water and sewerage works, a deep water harbour and jetty, and in addition, to meet the first cost of a police station, customs office, hospital and post office.[35]

The company would also pay back to the Government a percentage of the gross receipts.[36]

It was envisaged that the development underway in Anegada would lead eventually to a "final situation in which thousands of people will live on the island, both tourists and permanent residents."[37] A prospect that filled many Virgin Islanders with gloom.

As Staveley had thought they might, the Wickman's Cay and Anegada agreements, together with incentive legislation, attracted other developers to the island, and as the decade of the Sixties came to an end, the British Virgin Islands presented a far different picture from that at the start of the decade.

From having no banks in 1960, there were four major international banks in 1969. Electricity service was being extended throughout Tortola, and there was an efficient telephone service with direct dialing, not only internally, but to the US Virgins as well.

Whereas at the start of the decade all goods for Tortola had to be off-loaded in St. Thomas or Puerto Rico, there was now a direct shipping service to Road Town from Miami, New York, and London.

At the end of the decade too, the islands were being serviced by three airstrips, and even if the airports were still fairly primitive, at least, those serving Tortola and Anegada were long enough to permit turbo-props.

By the end of the decade, land speculators were hard at work, trying to get from Virgin islanders land that had been in some families as long as 150 years.

Nevertheless, as the decade ended, the tourist industry in the territory was still remarkably undeveloped. There were no more than 250 hotel beds in all the islands, and many of the hotels were small, sometimes with as few as six or seven rooms, and with few exceptions, run by amateurs.[38]

However, two or three big hotels were being built, and there were no less than 22 construction and engineering companies in the islands,

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[35] Staveley, "Radio Broadcast"

[36] *Financial Times*, (12 August 1969): 23.

[37] Ibid

[38] Ibid

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accompanied by their wave of experts and advisers. Tortola suddenly found itself with four firms of architects, all overworked, and there was a new professional class of accountants, and lawyers, and technicians of every description.

As we have seen, this was a class of professional people that was notably absent from pre-industrial Tortolan society, and given the character of Tortolan development, it was no surprise to find that this was a class made up almost entirely of immigrants.

THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION

The growth of Tortola's immigrant population is most easily indicated by a consideration of the Government's work permit statistics. Work permits were introduced on August 1st, 1964, in an effort to make sure that Virgin Islanders got first choice of any available jobs. But according to the Government's Advisory Committee Report, there was a chronic shortage of all types of skilled labour in the colony, apparently caused largely by the outflow of a large percentage of the local labour force to the US Virgins, attracted by the higher wages there. So the many new companies found it necessary to use immigrant labour from the down-islands and technical staff from Europe.

In the first year of operation, 1964, a total of 192 work permits were issued. The next year, this rose to 249, but fell in 1966 to 149, and in 1967 to 96. But once the Wickham's Cay reclamation project got underway, and the construction companies came in, there was a dramatic jump in the number of immigrants, and so a total of 456 work permits were issued in 1968, and by the 18th of September 1969, this had almost doubled to a total at that time of 863 permits.

A break-down of the 1969 work permit holders by country of origin showed that they came from a total of 31 countries, with the largest number, 173, coming from St. Kitts, and the second largest number, 97, from the United Kingdom.[39]

At that time, it was estimated that out of a total population of 11,000 in the colony, some 700 were Europeans, mainly from the UK, and some 1,400 were West Indian down-islanders. And by far the greater majority of both these groups had come in since 1968.

Now normally, when immigrants *en-masse* move into a new society,

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39 Figures obtained from BVI Labour Office records.

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they move in at the bottom levels of that society. But after 1968, Tortola found itself in the unusual position of having migrants moving in not only at the bottom, but also apparently at the top of the society as well, with the Tortolans being sandwiched in the middle. And even here too, some down-island immigrants were moving in.

The result was Tortolan antipathy to both groups, coupled with profound distrust of those who seemed to be moving in at the top – the English.

The English in Tortola can be divided into two broad categories. Those who were there before the Sixties burst of development activity may be called the *settlers,* as they were in more or less permanent residence in the colony. The other group, made up of those who were on two year contracts with the various construction projects, may be called the *transients*. The two groups have basically different outlooks on life in Tortola.

Tortolans say that before the influx of transients, there was no racial friction in the island. The few whites in the population integrated with the local black population because that was the only Tortolan society there was.

Now, they say, the large influx of transients has changed all that. The transients have arrived in such large numbers that they are creating a society of their own, separate and apart from local society. They need not try to please nor to integrate with the local society because, in any case, they were going to be gone in two years. The settlers say they deplore the attitude of the transients.

By 1969, Tortolans felt that the white immigrants were trying to create a society of their own above the local coloured society, and they supported their claim by saying that parties held by the Administrator, the top British official in the island, were predominantly white affairs with just a sprinkling of official blacks. A complete reversal of the situation of just a few years previously.

Tortolans further claimed that by and large, the English immigrant had an insulting attitude towards the locals and seemed to feel superior to them. He smiled and joked with them when he wanted something done, after which he ignored the locals.

Some Tortolans also felt that the islands were now being "re-colonized" after having been left to languish for so many years, because the English now saw some economic advantage to themselves, rather than being interested in developing the islands in the interest of the islanders themselves.

Although there was more social contact between Tortolans and

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down-islanders, nevertheless, Tortolans also inveighed against the West Indian migrants in their midst. The down-islanders were accused of creating slums where none existed before by sharing homes and living six to eight in a room. They were also accused of keeping their houses in a filthy condition and of building plywood houses with inadequate sanitary arrangements. They were accused of increasing the island's crime rate, and police records did show that most recent crimes of violence involved Kittitians. Unattached male West Indian migrants were accused of breaking up Tortolan marriages. Finally, the down-islanders were accused of having introduced hookworm and other parasitic diseases into the island.

In short, the presence of large numbers of immigrants, both black and white, filled Tortolans with a brooding sense of unease. An unease that had some expression in the political sphere.

THE NEW POLITICS

Politics in pre-industrial Tortola was a politics without ideology. A politics of personalities rather than issues. A politics of short-range pragmatic approaches rather than of long-range principles. A politics constrained by the social structure of the society.

Lacking classes, conflict in pre-industrial societies is characteristically between individual people, on a personal scale, rather than between groups in the society.[40] Or else, it is between geographically separate communities – Long Look people against Road Town people or Sea Cow's Bay people and vice versa. In short, a conflict of town against country.

Ideologies develop when there is a felt social need for ideas and beliefs to guide political action.[41] But in the early 1960s, while there were social needs, these were felt more in terms of a vague unease and were not articulated into social issues. This might in part have been due to the absence of that professional class of lawyers, doctors, architects, teachers and technicians who usually form the articulate issue-defining segment of society; and due in part also to the geographically segmented nature of the society.

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40 Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, p.52.

41 William E. Connolly, *Political Science and Ideology*, (New York: Atherton Press, 1967), p.54.

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Above all, it might have been due to the colonial constitution of the period which left all effective power in the hands of the British-appointed Administrator.

Until 1966, seven of the eleven members of the Government were from Road Town, which meant that even if the country members voted as a group, they could not prevail. That year, a Constitution Committee was appointed, headed by the Oxford lecturer, Mrs. Proudfoot. The new Constitution she proposed was adopted with a few variations, and elections were held in 1967.

Whereas previous elections had been contested largely by independents, for this one, political parties were hastily organised, but just as hastily fell apart after the elections were over. And when the dust had settled, for the first time, voting strength in the Legislative Council now lay in the hands of representatives not from Road Town, but from the country districts.

Since the new Constitution had introduced a semi-ministerial system giving the elected representatives increased responsibility, while reducing somewhat the power of the Administrator, it meant that political power had passed to the hands of what some Road Town residents called under their breath, the "barefoot boys."

Under the new Government, important Civil Servant posts which were formerly held by expatriates were now filled by Tortolans, many from the country districts, and this further irritated the people of Road Town, who had come to look on the Civil Service as their own preserve.

For the first time, Road Town found it did not have the big voice in Virgin Island affairs. And then, before they had had time to properly accommodate themselves to this state of affairs, they found themselves being swamped by the rapid influx of down-islanders and Englishmen.

Hitherto, there had been no antagonism towards outsiders coming in. There had always been a few white people coming in, and down-islanders, but the whites had never found in those days any racialist feeling at all. But now, a definitie antagonism against all outsiders began to manifest itself, some of it taking a racialist form against white outsiders.

It may be that racial incidents were first provoked by the whites. There are stories of a white man having been beaten up because he told a Tortolan: "Get out of my way, nigger."

And of another white man, a settler, who is said to have kicked a child at Sea Cow's Bay, after which Tortolans would steal his cars and turn them over.

But the act of racism which really incensed the whole of Road Town

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occurred not in Tortola at all, but in the United States. It was the assassination of Martin Luther King.

A few days before the assassination, there had been some public meetings at the Recreation Ground in Road Town in which various speakers had talked about the oppression of the people both by the Government and the whites. Some speakers criticised the police department, which was headed by an Antiguan and largely staffed by down-islanders. A few whites, including Ken Bates, spoke in defence of white investment in the islands, but by and large, the audience supported the anti-Government, anti-white, anti-police speeches.

Then King was shot, and the man who had been the moving spirit behind the earlier public meetings, Noel Lloyd, a Tortolan who had lived in England, called another meeting, at which it was decided that there should be a march through Road Town the following day as a mark of reverence and respect to the slain civil-rights leader.

The march took place and gained a fair measure of public support, but it turned out to be more of an anti-government rally than a march in respect for King, for there were more placards denouncing the Government and demanding Positive Action than any other sort of slogan. The marchers also barricaded white businesses and forced them to close their doors out of respect, they said for King.

This first demonstration of Positive Action was followed up by an attack on the police station in which Lloyd and a handful of supporters caught the police napping and succeeded in setting off the klaxon which was rung only as a hurricane warning. Since it was dead of night, and there had been no hint of bad weather, the whole of Road Town awoke with a start, wondering what the noise was all about.

Positive Action supporters – for this was the name now given to the movement – said that the capture of the police station was only intended to demonstrate, most graphically, that the police were an incompetent lot who could not even protect their own headquarters, far less the citizens of Tortola. But the Government viewed the episode as part of a plot to bring down the Government, and a warrant was issued for Lloyd's arrest.

He was subsequently arrested, effected an escape, and was subsequently recaptured after a mad motor chase along the island's lone highway from Road Town to East End.

In the interim between his escape and recapture. Road Towners had become convinced that Lloyd was no longer acting rationally but was a mentally ill man. So when the police chief tried to return him to his prison cell, a vast throng rescued him yet again from the hands of the police and took him to the hospital. There Lloyd was given a sedative by

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doctors, while the crowd, in festive mood, stood guard outside the hospital, forcing cars with white occupants to turn back, and so on.

A public collection raised enough money to fly Lloyd to Puerto Rico and Jamaica for medical attention, and in his absence the Positive Action movement was taken over and run by a triumvirate of two men and a woman. This triumvirate called a series of mass meetings to explain conditions and though only a few hundred turned up, a state of general unrest prevailed. A state of unrest in which some acts of vandalism were committed, including the burning down of the market, and in which some whites began to fear for their persons. However, there were no physical assaults on whites. They were, however, subjected to abuse, and white women were called ugly names by young men along the street.

Eventually, elected political leaders opposed to the Government, who had given support to the movement in its early stages, now spoke out against Positive Action, or rather, not against the Movement as such, but against anarchy. So there was an end to overt activity.

However, the issues that had been raised were not lost on the Government. These issues included, first of all, the whole question of the concessions granted to Ken Bates in the Wickham's Cay and Anegada agreements. It raised the whole question of immigration and whether there should not be some government control of the number and type of immigrants coming in both from the down-islands and from England. It also set the Government to thinking about questions it had never thought of before, such as that of communication between the Government and the governed, and whether speeches should be vetted before being broadcast, and whether the police chief should be a local man or a foreigner, and so on.

The Government also immediately took steps to introduce legislation that met the issues raised by the Positive Action movement. These included an Alien-land holding ordinance which required that all non-Tortolans first get a licence before they could buy land. They passed a Land development control ordinance which required that an indication be given of how and for what purpose land was going to be used. They passed a Non-belongers law which prohibited non-Tortolans from working without permission. They tightened up work-permit requirements to make it mandatory that applicants had certain medical tests before they were granted.

Finally, as the decade of the Sixties neared its end, the Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry to examine the Wickham's Cay and Anegada agreements. Among the terms of reference was the request that the Commissioners report on:

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1. the probable effects of the terms and conditions of the Agreement;
2. the likely social, economic and political consequences in the British Virgin Islands of the implementation of the Agreement;

and in the light of that report to make recommendations as to –

a. the future development of Anegada in general; and
b. whether a new development concept for Anegada should be adopted.[42]

A not dissimilar request was made with respect to Wickham's Cay, and implicit in the whole inquiry was the hope that the Commission would indicate if it could, some new approach to the development of the British Virgin Islands as they went forward into the Seventies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The changes set in train in the British Virgin Islands during the decade of the Sixties had many implications for the social life of the islands in the Seventies and Eighties. Apart from the obvious physical signs of change, the most striking change was that in the social structure of society.

Tortola had begun the decade of the Sixties as a classless society. A homogenous black society with only a handful of whites. It ended the decade with an emerging class society.

For the first time in recent Tortolan history, there was a whole group of landless people, the down-islanders, solely dependent on wage labour to sustain life. Tortolans regarded the working class down-islanders as the lowest group in the society.

The large mass of Tortolans still had some land on which they could subsist if they were out of work, and so they still maintained an air of rugged individualism and economic independence. But this self-confidence was being gradually eroded by the presence of a third large group in the society, the white "up-islander," to coin a term, whom many feared were setting up a parallel society above the local society. If the Tortolans sold out their land to this group, they would be in a similar position to the down-islanders.

Thus, the class society that was emerging was shaping up in terms of three groups of various national origins. What some would call a plural

42 Government Information Service, News release, "Commission of Inquiry," 90/69, 9 September, 1969.

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society. At the same time there was emerging a class of professionals made up of down-islanders, up-islanders and a few locals. A class that was likely to take an ever more active political role. The implications of this changed social structure on the future functioning of Virgin Island society were likely to be many and varied. Let us speculate on these.

First, politics. The pre-ideological politics of pre-industrial Tortola was likely to disappear. The various groups in the society would in time develop different needs and interests, and politics would necessarily become a politics of issues and principles. Should the vote be given to Non-belongers or with-held from them? Should development continue along lines that would necessitate the continued influx of Non-belongers, or should it be shaped more and more by Tortolans? Such questions would sooner or later present themselves, and the answers would be shaped by the group that had political power.

Industrial relations. Sooner rather than later, some form of trade union activity was likely to emerge, doubtless with a predominantly down-island membership. Should it be allowed to develop or should it be crushed by taking away the members' work-permits? What if an economic slump produced a large number of unemployed down-islanders? Should they be repatriated? And what would be the repercussions?

Social services. There would be an increasingly urgent need to increase the availability of housing, medical services and hospital space, and educational facilities – both in terms of quantity and quality; recreational facilities, and so on and on.

Racism. Tensions between up-islanders, locals and down-islanders would probably be exacerbated rather than mollified as it became apparent that there were no easy solutions to any of the problems raised by the changed social structure of Tortolan society. These tensions could provoke incidents which will be regarded as an increase in racism, but which could probably be analysed and solved in terms of social issues.

Thus, it seems evident that the decade of the Seventies could be as full of discomfiting social change for British Virgin Islanders as was the decade of the Sixties.

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