



Opposition to indentured immigration in Trinidad (1845-1917)

K. O. Laurence

Numéro 138-139, mai-août-septembre-décembre 2004

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1040711ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040711ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe

ISSN

0583-8266 (imprimé)

2276-1993 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Laurence, K. O. (2004). Opposition to indentured immigration in Trinidad (1845-1917). *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe*, (138-139), 59-78. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040711ar>

Opposition to indentured immigration in Trinidad (1845-1917)*

K. O. Laurence

In the early formative years of the immigration system the Anti-Slavery Society opposed the whole project on the grounds that abuses reminiscent of the slave trade would inevitably arise, and that it was in any case unfair to the former slaves to import labourers to compete with them. A few Trinidadian voices echoed these views and when arrangements to import Indians were first being made in 1844 some dissenting missionaries engineered a memorial against it, and in particular against any contribution to its cost from general taxation. They described the first Immigration Loan Ordinance as “hasty and vicious legislation enacted by planters against labourers”². Subsequently the arrival of the first Indians in 1845 was followed within two months by a petition to the governor against the new immigration policy with 41 signatures. This protest was led by Thomas Hinde, a coloured schoolteacher and landowner, and the leading coloured politician of the day. His followers were likewise from the coloured middle classes. They argued that the cost of immigration would involve increased taxation, while at a time of falling sugar prices the Immigration and Agricultural Society was recommending cuts in salaries and wages for estate employees. The combination of higher taxes and lower incomes would mean that fewer “respectable” free immigrants would come to Trinidad from the nearby Caribbean islands or Africa. The Indians would flood the labour market, and it was noted that they were “immoral heathens”³.

By 1848 the weekly newspaper *Trinidad Spectator*, edited by a coloured Creole, declared that “an active spirit of opposition to the coolie” was

*. This Paper is based largely on the author's *A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana, 1875-1917*, (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1994), chs. 10 and 13.

2. C.O. 295/143, Macleod to Stanley, 3 August 1844, No. 65.

3. G. Carmichael, *History of the West Indian Islands of Trinidad and Tobago*. (London, Alvin Redman, 1961) pp. 215-16. C.Campbell, “Thomas Hinde of Trinidad, 1838-1848,” *Journal of Caribbean History* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1987), pp. 95-116.

springing up in the island. But this was an attack on the Indians and their importation, not on the policy of importing labour. The society as a whole had not yet developed any generalized response either to the policy of importing labour or to the presence of the Indians⁴. Even the Creole workers and peasantry, despite particular antagonisms on specific estates stemming from competition, were able to treat the newcomers with general calm. As yet they were too few to have much impact on wages and Trinidad had abundant land on which the discontented could squat.

Thus by the early 1850s indentured immigrants in Trinidad attracted very little opposition. The newspaper *San Fernando Gazette*, an organ of the black and coloured middle class, and some other small publications, kept up their attacks, but were paid scant attention by either planters or Colonial Office⁵. After all, the abuses involved in the early immigration schemes seemed to have been brought under control and the use of immigrant labour was widely credited with having saved the sugar economy of Trinidad from ruin, and also that of British Guiana. By the end of the 1850s immigration seemed to have set both colonies on the road to expanding production. Opposition to immigration dwindled, though it remained visible.

By the 1870s, however a slowly increasing voice could be detected in Trinidad suggesting that the continued importation of indentured labourers was undesirable. The *San Fernando Gazette*, for instance, devoted much ink to this cause in 1870-71. Echoes of the Anti-Slavery view that indenture was "a condition little removed from slavery" could still be heard, but essentially the rising opposition was based on two different lines of thought, which had greater freedom of manoeuvre now that the sugar industry no longer seemed to be faced with imminent ruin. First, there were those who disliked the social habits of the Indians in a manner which was essentially a dislike of foreigners who were also non-Christians, and so sought to exclude them⁶. The *Port of Spain Gazette*, organ of the establishment, wrote of the "heathenish rites and barbarous processions" of the Hindus⁷ while the *New Era* saw them as a potentially dangerous element in the society, a possible source of rebellion and disorder the danger of which increased as their numbers rose⁸. At another level the host population frequently took a highly critical, indeed prejudiced and intolerant view of the Indians' patterns of dress and behaviour. Their clothing was frequently assailed as "indecent". "The coolies", wrote a correspondent to the *San Fernando Gazette* in 1870, "are a worthless and filthy set", and their continued importation was "one of the greatest causes of our misery"⁹. There was, now and hereafter, a small number

4. W. Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies*. (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins U.P., 1993) pp. 158, 163. See also G.I. Tikasingh, "The Trinidad Press and the Issue of Immigration." Paper Presented at the Ninth Annual Conference of the Association of Caribbean Historians, U.W.I., Cave Hill, 1977, pp. 5-6.

5. Look Lai, p. 167.

6. *San Fernando Gazette*, 5 February, 11 June 1870, also 4 February 1871.

7. *Port of Spain Gazette*, 18 February 1871.

8. *New Era*, 27 March, 3 April 1871.

9. *San Fernando Gazette*, 5 February 1870.

of vocal persons in Trinidad who regarded the Indians as an undesirable element in the population; "underfed, dirty, drunken, sickly, discontented people" said the *San Fernando Gazette* in what was probably a minority view. If immigrants were still needed they should be sought in the neighbouring islands – where of course the population had familiar habits¹⁰. Cultural affiliation apart, an element of racial feeling was evident here. A number of smaller newspapers expressed similar views¹¹.

The second strain in the dawning opposition arose from the fact that Trinidad was developing economic interests other than sugar, notably cocoa. By 1864 public criticism of the size of the public subsidy to immigration had begun to be heard, and planters and merchants with no direct interest in immigration began to suggest that the actual employers should bear its whole cost¹². It was in the early 1870s that cocoa planters began to advance seriously the view that the existing tax on exports in order to raise funds to import indentured labour for sugar estates was a heavy and unjustified burden on all who, like themselves, did not employ indentured labour. They saw it as a tax on employers of free for the support of unfree labour¹³. As the 1870s progressed and cocoa planting became more widespread while still relying exclusively on free labour, this argument came to be used with increased force. It was reinforced sometimes with the assertion that as long as the sugar planters could get subsidized indentured labour they were unlikely to make much effort to improve their efficiency by buying improved machinery¹⁴. Immigration had come to be seen by some as a symbol of the unfair power and privilege of the sugar planters, not only by the cocoa interests but also by the rising coloured and black middle class¹⁵. Here was the core of the growing opposition, though we have no clear idea of the extent of the readership of the newspapers which supported and indeed led it.

It is noteworthy however that this rising local opposition to the immigration system in Trinidad was in no way directed against the principle of the importation of labour, nor yet that of indenture, but only against the sort of labourers imported or the manner in which the system was financed. This was to remain the case for several years to come. No one yet suggested with any confidence that the colony do without imported labour.

In the 1880s there occurred an increased polarization of interests for and against the continuance of Indian immigration. Sugar planters and those commercial interests which were largely concerned with sugar continued to think it indispensable to their survival, and they were gradually joined by the larger cocoa planters who began themselves to employ small numbers of indentured labourers. But agriculturalists who did not employ indentured labour, professional men, and others with no direct interest in immigration, came increasingly to oppose the public subsidy

10. *Ibid.*, 11 June, 5 February, 1870.

11. Look Lai, p. 167.

12. C.O. 295/227, Keate to Cardwell, 4 June 1864, no. 84

13. *Port of Spain Gazette*, 7 January 1871.

14. *San Fernando Gazette*, 4 February 1871.

15. B. Brereton, "The Foundations of Prejudice: Indians and Africans in 19th Century Trinidad". *Caribbean Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1974, p. 15.

which it received. Before a Royal Commission on the Franchise in 1888 Robert Guppy went so far as to argue that organized immigration had never been and was not necessary, but had indeed proved harmful, since it had enabled the sugar industry to be sustained when it should have been abandoned in favour of cocoa, which required far less labour¹⁶. But despite the obvious strength of the opposition among persons not concerned with the sugar industry to further expenditure from public revenues on importing labour for sugar estates, such views were obviously not shared by the sugar planters, who continued to dominate the nominated Legislative Council and to ensure that the status quo was maintained. Assistant Under-Secretary of State Edward Wingfield believed that an elected legislature, had it existed, would probably have stopped the importation of labour¹⁷.

In the mid-1880s the attack on the immigration system in Trinidad was mounted in the context of a campaign for constitutional reform. The system was increasingly seen as conducted for the exclusive benefit of the planters even though they had already gained control of the labour market through the importation of labour over the past 30-40 years, and it was the planters whose all-pervading influence the middle class reformers wished to break. Immigration therefore was to them a natural target. Moreover, since the reform campaign aimed to secure an elective legislature, the demographic question implicit in continuing Indian immigration became imbued with political importance. The black and coloured Creoles thus objected to continuing immigration for fear that the political system they hoped to capture might soon be filled by a population of Indian immigrants which might outnumber them. It has been argued that the middle class reformers sought to conceal this political objective for fear of antagonizing the Spanish and French Creoles, whose support was crucial to their reform campaign but who would not support a middle class effort to win political power for itself. And so the reformers attacked immigration on economic grounds laced with occasional social and cultural arguments¹⁸. Certainly the political factor was a significant one, but the argument that it was fundamental seems overdone. It is true that ever since 1867 the participation of Indians in the elections for the San Fernando Borough Council had roused critical comment in some circles, and that in 1888 Stephen Gatty, as chairman of the Royal Franchise Commission, raised the issue that Indian votes might one day control a majority of seats; but the political objection remained muted and was soon returned to the background. It did not re-emerge until shortly before the First World War.

The opponents of immigration however were about to gain a significant access of influence. The Colonial Secretary, Henry Fowler, was one of those who feared that the East Indians might become a considerable

16. *Report of the Royal Commission to consider and report as to the proposed Franchise and Division of the Colony into Electoral Districts*, Trinidad, 1889. Proceedings of the Sixteenth Meeting on 14 July 1888, pp. 28-31.

17. C.O.384/169: Robinson to Knutsford, 25 May 1888, no. 136, minute by Wingfield.

18. K. Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917-1945*, (Kingston, U.W.I. Press, 1994), pp. 5-8.

problem if they came to make up too large a proportion of the population¹⁹. Then in the early 1890s the normally pro-planter *Port of Spain Gazette* resurrected the supposed dangers of an uprising among discontented Indians, really a variation of the old distaste for “uncivilized and pagan” Indians²⁰. Such fears were reinforced when the census returns for 1891 revealed that in the previous decade the Indian population had risen from 48,820 to 70,218, or nearly one third of the whole²¹. Then in 1890 Governor Sir William Robinson nominated Robert Guppy to be a member of the Legislative Council²². In 1890 another member, Dr. De Boissière, came out in favour of the substitution of Creoles from the islands for Indian immigrants²³. Within the Council the disputes which now arose came to be centred on the size of the annual indent for immigrants, and matters came to a head in 1893 when, with Fowler acting as Governor, the colonial government wanted to reduce immigration²⁴.

The Council took the opportunity to review the arguments for and against the immigration system, which had been increasingly aired since 1888, and Guppy sent a long protest to the Secretary of State against any further subsidy to the importation of labour. Guppy’s principal argument was that indentured immigration was not only costly but created conditions which discouraged the voluntary migration of labourers from the neighbouring islands. He pointed out that a feature of the indenture system was the barrack accommodation which had been introduced for the Indians, and which degraded those who lived in it:

“...the housing of labourers in barracks, where is no privacy and decency is impossible, is one of the chief causes of driving away the better class of Negro immigrants and also the coolies who have completed their five years of forced labour. No decent married labourers could endure a barrack life.”²⁵

He maintained further that the Immigration Ordinance, by providing a minimum wage which quickly became the normal level, effectively prevented competitive wage offers by potential employers; and this also helped to discourage voluntary immigrants.

To these arguments Guppy added the now usual attack on the use of general revenues, to which the whole population contributed, to subsidize a particular industry, and create lower wage levels than the natural conditions of supply and demand would provide. Again, he saw the future of the sugar industry as one involving the increasing separation of cultivation from manufacture, the former being undertaken largely by cane farmers who would employ little if any labour. This development was obviously hindered by the continued existence of a large force of indentured Indians for whom the factory-owning planters were obliged to find

19. C.O. 384/173: Fowler to Knutsford, 16 August 1889, No. 314.

20. *Port of Spain Gazette*, 5th December 1890. H.A. Will, *Constitutional Change in the British West Indies, 1880-1903* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 203.

21. Look Lai, p. 168.

22. C.O. 384/179: Crown Agents to C.O., 19 September 1890, minute by Wingfield.

23. C.O. 384/178: De Boissière to Col. Sec., 25 February 1890, enc. in Robinson to Knutsford, 25 October 1890, No. 352.

24. C.O. 384/187: Fowler to Ripon, 23 August 1893, No. 300.

25. C.O. 384/187: Protest of Robert Guppy, 29 August 1893, enc. in Fowler to Ripon, 4 September 1893, No. 314.

employment. Hence the indenture system militated against a highly desirable reorganization of the sugar industry, and was therefore against the public interest. Rather, Guppy maintained, should the public revenues be spent on improving the roads²⁶.

Here, in 1893, were most of the arguments which were to be advanced against immigration in Trinidad over the following twenty years. Labour could be provided from the neighbouring islands if state aided immigration under indenture were abolished; complete freedom of labour was both desirable and practicable; a subsidy to one industry at the expense of the taxpayers was unfair, and hindered the necessary reorganization of that industry; and the existing system fostered social evils. Thus the suggestion that indentured immigration based on public subsidy was not only financially inequitable, as its opponents had long insisted, but also unnecessary and wrong in principle, was now put forward. Thus did Guppy lay down the essential outline of the ensuing debate.

In the middle 1890s, with world sugar prices falling, the planters were slowly increasing the size of the daily estate task, thus effectively reducing wages, and the wages of skilled free labour were also being reduced. One result of this was a drift of free labour, both Creole and Indian, away from the estates. Meanwhile continued immigration produced a small surplus of indentured labour on some estates, which meant that fewer tasks were worked, and earnings fell further. In this context opposition to immigration tended to grow. In 1895 even the *Port of Spain Gazette* took the position that indentured labour had become more expensive than free. The press had become unanimous in its opposition to the system and most newspapers made small distinction between an arguably objectionable system and what they saw as the objectionable qualities of the actual immigrants²⁷.

Although the general opposition to immigration was clearly growing, the strength of the sugar interest in the Legislative Council still precluded its success unless the Secretary of State should intervene. This he showed no signs of doing, and many critics were in any case still concerned with the financial aspects of the system rather than with its existence. They therefore concentrated their efforts on minimizing the size of the annual indent. For 1895/96 the planters wanted 3000 immigrants, the Protector of Immigrants thought 1200 should suffice, and the Council ultimately agreed to 2000²⁸. Guppy had now died, but Henry Alcazar, a coloured barrister who took his place as a spokesman for the opposition, was a much more formidable speaker. Alcazar was also able to deploy new evidence that the immigrants' actual earnings were much lower than had been thought, when in 1895 new information revealed that large numbers earned less than 84 cents a week on the average at task work although the legal minimum offer was \$1.25. This seemed to argue both that wages had fallen and that there was no significant shortage of labour, whatever the planters might say. This sudden revelation of surprisingly low earnings, which persisted for some years, certainly served to strengthen the

26. *Ibid.*

27. Look Lai, p. 171.

28. Broome to Ripon, 9 May 1895, No.170 and minute by Ebdon.

opposition to immigration and especially to large indents. It also awakened the suspicions of the Colonial Office²⁹. When in 1896 Alcazar again protested against the size of the indent for the ensuing season (1500), he was supported by the Coloured Solicitor General Vincent Brown. There were now two able members in the legislature arguing that the colony's labour market was adequately stocked, though both the planting interest and the Governor continued flatly to deny it³⁰. By this time visible unemployment at least in some areas, among both native and free Indian labourers, led even the *Port of Spain Gazette* to allege that the planters were using the immigration system to create a surplus of labour and that it was damaging the non-sugar interests³¹.

While keeping alive the accustomed arguments, Alcazar now began to concentrate his attack on the level of wages, which he claimed with some exaggeration had fallen by 30% since the 1860s as a direct result of the policy of indentured immigration. In a memorandum to the West India Royal Commission of 1897 on the depression in the sugar industry he wrote :

"The depression is due, to my mind, not to the present condition of the sugar industry, for it is admitted that there has been no important reduction in the amount of money circulated by that industry, but to the pauperising of the masses by the artificial state of things created by Indian immigration. The labour market of the Colony, especially in the sugar districts, is so overstocked that the earnings of the working classes are miserably low. They are unable to find more employment than is absolutely necessary to keep starvation from their doors."³²

Alcazar saw the abolition of Indian immigration as the first step towards an end of the depression, coupled with the encouragement of free immigration by easing the conditions for the acquisition of Crown Lands³³. He maintained that during the past 15 years at least labour had been available in adequate measure and immigration "has been but a weapon in the hands of the planter to enable him to obtain at starvation rates the more efficient labour of local origin"³⁴, and argued that while there might be remote estates where labour was genuinely difficult to get the employers should then pay the whole cost of its importation themselves. He pointed out that the area under sugar cane had decreased in recent years while labour saving devices and new methods of manufacture had been introduced, so that the estates should now need less labour. Alcazar noted that wages in Port of Spain or on the railways where indentureds did not work were 35 to 40 cents a day as against 25 cents on the estates. In his view the planters could well afford to raise their wages,

29. C.O. 384/192 Broome to Ripon, 9 May 1895, No.170 and minute by Wingfield ; Ripon to Broome, 18 June 1895 (with 9395).

30. C.O. 295/970 : Broome to Chamberlain, 18 March 1896, No. 74 and enc. Protest by H.A. Alcazar.

31. *Port of Spain Gazette*, 8 April, 20 July, 8, 10 August, 15 October 1895.

32. *Report of the West India Royal Commission, 1898*, Appendix C, Part IV, p. 312, No. 294 : Memo by H.A. Alcazar, 28 February 1897.

33. *Ibid.*, Q. 1224.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 319, No. 295 : Memo by H.A. Alcazar, 28 February 1897.

despite the depression, and of course the termination of indentured immigration would help to finance much higher wages³⁵.

At the time of the Royal Commission that view may have been too sanguine, but Alcazar made a forceful and convincing point when he turned to the moral evils of indenture. Though he echoed Guppy's strictures on the housing provided and its attendant lack of privacy, he was not inclined to make too much of the view that the conditions of life degraded the immigrant, who was after all free after five years. But he felt strongly that the system was degrading to the employers:

"It is recognized that by making him brutally callous to the rights of others and blunting his moral sense generally, slavery does at least as much harm to the slave-owner as to the slave himself. . . . [The effect of the indenture upon the employer is] similar to that of slavery, for. . . he has thus permanently about him a large number of his fellow men bound to do his bidding under penalty of imprisonment. In fact, with regard to its effect on the employer, the system is not very different from slavery, with the gaol substituted for the whip. And one of the worst consequences of Indian immigration in Trinidad has been to keep its educated classes at the moral level of slave owners."³⁶

The decline in the relative importance of sugar in Trinidad's economy is reflected in Vincent Brown's claim to the Royal Commission that Indian immigration ought to be stopped whatever might be the consequences for the sugar industry. Even the Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce thought that it might well be phased out and estate cultivation turned over to cane farming. The broadening of the basis of the opposition was further indicated by the appearance of two organizations claiming to be "working class", which attacked indentured immigration on the ground that it was responsible for the falling wages and rising unemployment of the Creole population. These were the short-lived Working Men's Reform Club, composed essentially of watermen and dockers, and the Trinidad Working Men's Association with 50 members in 1897, mostly Port of Spain artisans³⁷. The fact that Indian immigrants offered very little direct competition to these groups of workmen is for the moment beside the point: they mark the dawn of organized opposition to Indian immigration among skilled and even unskilled Creole working men. Such men were well aware that, quite apart from the existing state of the labour market, continuing Indian immigration posed an increasing economic threat as the Indians penetrated into new activities and yet remained willing to work for wages which Creoles would not accept.

Before the West India Royal Commission in 1897 planter after planter repeated his conviction that immigration was "absolutely" necessary to continue sugar production. Neither native nor immigrant Creoles could be substituted for the Indians, they said, because there were some kinds of work which Creoles simply would not do - like loading canes or weeding - and they could not be relied on to work the full week. G.T. Fenwick,

35. *Ibid.*, QQ. 1283-8, 1294, 1318-20.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 319, No. 295: Memo by H.A. Alcazar, 28 February 1897.

37. *Ibid.*, QQ. 3296, 1800-1832; Appendix C, Part IV, No. 313.

leader of the planting interest, animadverted on the "natural disinclination" of the Creoles to work, though not all planters went so far³⁸.

Far from being a public subsidy to a single industry, assisted immigration was seen by its supporters as public expenditure on the general development of the colony which benefited all sections of its community and the withdrawal of which would likewise deprive all sections of many economic opportunities. Furthermore, since everything which immigrants ate or wore was subject to customs duty, it was asserted that they largely paid for their own importation.

The Royal Commission, concluding that sugar might well fail, creating serious unemployment and a fall in wages, proceeded to weigh the arguments for and against continued immigration. They picked their way down a middle path between the antagonists. Clearly they thought that there was some substance in the view that the colonies already had enough Indian labour for the maintenance of cultivation but they had been faced with "evidence, which we cannot disregard, that at the present time and under present conditions, indentured labourers are absolutely necessary to the carrying on of the sugar estates"³⁹. And they were not prepared to advise any step which might intensify the depression. Indentured immigration therefore should continue, though it should be kept to the minimum necessary for the working of existing estates. For the same reason they advised that aid from public funds should continue, though they rejected in principle the planters' argument that a subsidy to their industry was justified on the ground that immigration was of benefit to the whole colony, and they recommended that state aid should cease when the industry had recovered some strength.

The opponents of immigration had thus gained some ground in that the Royal Commissioners advised a close scrutiny both of the extent and of the financing of indentured immigration. But the last years of the century, with sugar believed by many to be in some danger of collapse and the Imperial Government persuaded that some assistance was due to it, were not a propitious period for the advocates of a change which in the short run could only make the task of producing sugar more difficult. Yet the campaign was kept alive by the local press, and Attorney General Nathan joined the small number of influential persons who sought to abolish immigration⁴⁰. After the Brussels Convention abolished the beet sugar bounties the outlook became more promising, while the Legislative Council acquired another unofficial member who was consistently critical of the policy of immigration in C. Prudhomme David, the first Black to be nominated to the Legislative Council and a barrister of much ability. From 1904 the annual vote for immigration was always opposed by a small minority of the Council, and the core of the argument became the simple question: was there or was there not enough labour already in the island? Alcazar's opposition had now become less vocal, but in November 1904 David demanded, ultimately with success, that the Government

38. *Ibid.*, Appendix C, Part IV, QQ. 85-100; 248-57, 302-204, 1686.

39. *Report of the West India Royal Commission, 1898*. (C. 8655), para. 302.

40. C.O.259/403,409: Moloney to Chamberlain, 12 August 1901, No. 351; Atty. Genl. Nathan to Col. Sec., 23 December 1901, enc. in Moloney to Chamberlain, 29 January 1902, No. 36.

institute an enquiry on this point, pointing out that there were some large cocoa planters who opposed immigration. In 1904 and 1905 he cast solitary dissenting votes against the annual indent⁴¹. In 1906 the opposition was much strengthened when the failure of the cocoa crop created much temporary unemployment in that industry to add to an admitted distress among unemployed Creole artisans⁴².

Thus spurred, the opposition burst forth again in a sustained campaign. Apart from the usual minority vote in the legislature against the public subsidy to immigration, the Trinidad Working Men's Association sent a formal protest, the first of many, to the Secretary of State, against the importation of labour. The Association however was never accorded much respect in official circles, and discredited itself by a series of inaccurate assertions about the expenditure of public funds, the level of wages and the incidence of discontent, and by attacking the East Indian community, unfairly, as a source of crime. And the fact that it called itself a Working Men's Association while being composed not of labourers but of artisans, small farmers, store clerks, petty tradesmen and a few lawyers, was viewed by the Colonial Office as another misrepresentation further reducing its credibility⁴³. Again, as a body of less than 300 persons before 1909, it was regarded as unrepresentative⁴⁴.

In 1906 too the Special Committee on the Labour Question in Trinidad, which the governor had appointed in the previous year, produced its report. It found that there was no doubt that agricultural labour was scarce at least in some areas and at some times of the year, and especially in the sugar industry. This Committee achieved the partial conversion of Alcazar, who was himself one of its members. He was now convinced that there really was a shortage of agricultural labour⁴⁵, and was no longer wholly opposed in principle to the further importation of Indians, having come to believe that sugar still needed some help. But he still opposed the financial arrangements⁴⁶. Yet overall the opposition to immigration was becoming slowly stronger and it was longer articulated largely by the urban professional class. It included also a considerable number of agricultural employers who were able to do without indentured labour as well as a number of commercial elements, both white and coloured. And outbursts against immigration were becoming more frequent, and increasingly embraced principle as well as cost and dislike of

41. B. Samaroo, "Cyrus Prudhomme David - A Case Study in the Emergence of the Black Man in Trinidad Politics." *Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 3, November 1971, pp. 80-82. See also Trinidad and Tobago *Legislative Council Debates*, 7 November 1904.

42. C.O. 295/438: Jackson to Elgin, 4 December 1906, No. 356.

43. C.O. 295/438: Jackson to Elgin, 23 November 1906, No. 343, and enc., and minute by Lucas. Also C.O. 295/451: Enc. in Knaggs to Crewe, 4 May 1909, Conf.

44. C.O. 295/438: Elgin to Jackson, 31 December 1906, No.320 (with 45581). C.O. 295/444: Elgin to Administrator, Trinidad, 6 May 1908, No.123 (with 12862). In 1909, while the Sanderson Committee was sitting, the Association showed a new burst of activity and achieved perhaps 1000 members, all Negro or coloured. C.O. 295/451: Le Hunte to Crewe, 21 May 1909, Conf.

45. *Report of the Special Committee appointed to consider matters relating to the Labour Question*. Trinidad and Tobago Council Paper No. 13, 2 February 1906, paras. 9-11, 47-8, and Minority Report by H.A. Alcazar.

46. *Legislative Council Debates*, 1907, p. 254, 23 December 1907.

aliens, though the opposition in the Legislative Council was less consistent than might have been expected. As Prudhomme David stated in 1910, he saw little use in perpetually raising an issue in which it was abundantly clear that he could not succeed⁴⁷.

Throughout these repeated disputes the Colonial Office upheld the sugar planters with a confidence which betokens little respect for the comments of the Royal Commission of 1897, and they had usually the support of the governors. Before the Commission undertook its investigations it is difficult to blame the Office for accepting the repeated assertions of governors that those who claimed that the supply of available labour was already adequate were quite wrong. Sir Napier Broome, for instance, believed that "if Mr. Alcazar's ideas were transformed into action, the sugar planters and the Colony would be speedily ruined."⁴⁸ The facts of political power were that while the system of nominated members usually produced some representation of other interests, the planters had a firm grip on the Council; and only in extreme circumstances would the Imperial Government override the advice of its governor to maintain the *status quo*.

With the Royal Commission's report before it, however, the Colonial Office should have become less trustful of the views of governors, as some members of its staff in fact did. W.D. Ellis, clerk in the West India Department, recognized in 1897 that the low level of earnings suggested that the supply of labour was not genuinely short in Trinidad. Until the sugar crisis passed however, it was obviously dangerous, and some thought it unfair, to add to the industry's problems⁴⁹. But when the opponents of immigration returned to the attack after 1903 they deserved a more careful hearing. Yet all those to whom the Colonial Office naturally turned for advice supported the planters' position at least in part and it did not feel able to follow through on the doubts expressed by Ellis and Secretary of State Chamberlain at the end of 1902⁵⁰. Chamberlain had decided in 1898 as a general policy to trust the views of the "men on the spot" in the colonies, while Ellis soon accepted the inevitability of indenture once more.

Governors, and many other observers of colonial affairs, often failed to distinguish clearly between the labour force required to maintain the sugar industry and that needed to expand and diversify the colony's economy. Here lay a confusion which often confounded the debate on the necessity for immigration. Both exercises were probably seen as parts of the essential process of enhancing the value and profitability of the British capital and natural resources, though in terms of the supply of labour they were really quite different processes. The question posed by the opposition had to do with the existing production, and an answer in terms of future prospects was beside the point. The planters who demanded more immigrants did not wish to see the economy further

47. *Legislative Council Debates*, 1910, pp. 21, 267-70, 14 February, 19 December 1910.

48. C.O.295/370 : Broome to Chamberlain, 18 March 1896, No.74.

49. C.O.295/379 : Jerningham to Chamberlain, 10 June 1897, No.223, minute by Ellis. C.O.111/501 : Boyle to Chamberlain, Telegram, 12 February 1898, minutes.

50. C.O.295/413 : Trinidad Estates Co. to Lucas, 16 December 1902, minute by Ellis. C.O. 318/303 : House of Commons Question, 17 November 1902, minutes.

diversified. Conclusions which favoured the planters however were completely swallowed by a Colonial Office which, in spite of the doubts raised in 1897-8, was too long accustomed to regard indentured immigration as part and parcel of the sugar industry.

And so the picture hardened. In 1906 Sir Henry Jackson, a governor of unusual perspicacity, could comment on the protest of the Trinidad Working Men's Association, "I do not conceive it to be necessary for me to enter here into any defence of the system of immigration, without which the Colony could never have attained to its present prosperity..." Jackson believed that since the distress and unemployment which undoubtedly existed appeared to be confined to artisans and non-agricultural labourers, it could not be due to immigration⁵¹. Sceptics having been dismissed or converted, the Colonial Office acquiesced in a view expressed by the Colonial Secretary of British Guiana:

"The only opponents of immigration are those who reason that if the coolie were not here the same task would be theirs at double the rate of pay, overlooking the fact that in such an event there would be no task for anyone, as the sugar industry would cease to exist."⁵²

No one disputes the claim that the Creole labourers were disinclined under the existing conditions to work a full week without fail whenever the planters wished it. The claim of the opposition was that if the money spent on immigration were used to increase wages the Creoles would then work more regularly. While this claim cannot be proven, there is good evidence that by 1903, indeed earlier, there was enough labour in Trinidad for the sugar industry to be sustained without the continued use of indentured immigration. During the slack season the presence of so many indentured immigrants on the estates meant that those free labourers, both Indian and Creole, who depended wholly or in part on estate employment often could not get work. The state of the labour market was thus becoming somewhat more helpful to the opponents of immigration by 1906, and they could point to at least one sugar estate in Trinidad which had once used indentured but now employed only free labour⁵³. At this time too their attack began to gain unexpected support in the Imperial Parliament where there had always been members who watched the working of the immigration system closely and jealously.

In the early twentieth century the growing awareness of social problems and the new importance of the working class movement in Britain produced an access of interest in labour conditions generally. In 1904 this centred on the conditions under which Chinese labour was employed in South African mines, a question which served to focus attention on the employment of Asian labour in British colonies. Some people began to criticize an indenture for a term of years as an undue restraint on personal liberty⁵⁴. Questions in Parliament appeared frequently, as regards the West Indies especially from the Labour Member for Sunderland,

51. C.O.295/438: Jackson to Elgin, 23 November 1906, No. 343.

52. Cd. 3026/1906, p. 31: Actg. Govr. Cox to Secretary of State, 23 April 1906.

53. Cd. 3026/1906, pp. 9-15: Actg Immign. Agt. Genl. to Govt. Sec., 5 April 1906, and encs; pp. 20-21: Encs. in Report of District Commissary, J. Solomon, March 1906.

54. C.O.323/717: I.O. to C.O., 10 February 1916, J. & P. 4522/15, minute by Macnaghten.

Thomas Summerbell⁵⁵, after 1906 in regular correspondence with Alfred Richards, the Port of Spain chemist who now became President of the Trinidad Working Men's Association⁵⁶. Parliamentary and public attention focussed far less on the West Indies than on the treatment of Asian immigrants in South Africa and to a lesser extent Australia and Canada⁵⁷; but a general feeling of disquiet was created which called for some sort of action without knowing precisely what was required. At the end of 1908 the Secretary of State, Lord Crewe, decided to set up an inter-departmental enquiry into indentured immigration in the British colonies, under Lord Sanderson's chairmanship⁵⁸.

The Sanderson Committee was at once faced with a barrage from the opponents of immigration in the several colonies concerned. Alcazar offered a further protest, directed mainly at the still existing subsidy; the Trinidad Working Man's Association offered a memorial arguing that indentured immigration had depressed the labouring classes and "revived all the traditions of slavery" among the employers⁵⁹. Thomas Summerbell argued first that it was unnecessary and secondly that it bordered on slavery⁶⁰; the People's Association of British Guiana presented a lengthy memorandum contending that the system of indenture was "vicious and degrading" and should be replaced by free immigration⁶¹.

In an effort to get to the bottom of the argument about the supply of labour the Sanderson Committee invited both Prudhomme David and Alfred Richards to testify before it. Richards was neither logical nor explicit, and given to overstatement. His evidence was described in the Committee's Report as "altogether untrustworthy"⁶². Prudhomme David however made a quite different impression. A confident, clear, and generally convincing witness who answered questions, sometimes rather hostile questions, clearly and deliberately, he argued that in fact the system depressed the labour market and thus state aid was unfair to the taxpayer. And its abolition would certainly not ruin the sugar industry in Trinidad. Perhaps the sugar cultivation would be reduced 20 percent for a period of five or six years, but cane farming would probably expand at the expense of cultivation by estates thus separating the growing and manufacturing processes; wages would certainly rise, though probably not above what employers could afford to pay, and this would attract Creole labourers back to agriculture; but there would be no disaster. David went straight to the heart of the planters' real position:

55. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, Fourth Series, Vol. 167, cols. 1267-8; Vol. 171, cols. 1797-9; Vol. 187, col. 309; Vol. 198, col. 733. *Ibid.*, Session 1909, House of Commons, Vol. 2, col. 500.

56. B. Samaroo, "The Constitutional and Political Development of Trinidad, 1898-1925", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1989, p. 115.

57. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, Fourth series, Vol. 199: General Index for Session 1908, pp. 162-3: "British Indians in the Colonies".

58. C.O. 323/554: Colonial Office to Treasury, 6 March 1909 (with 7818).

59. *Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates*, 1910. P.P. 1910. XXVII. 1. (Cd. 5192-4) (Sanderson Report), Papers Presented, pp. 113-114, 116.

60. Sanderson Report, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 136, 141.

61. *Ibid.*, Papers Presented, pp. 18-22.

62. Sanderson Report, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 225-36, passim. Sanderson Report, p. 68.

“...the value to the planter of the Indian labour consists rather in the state of indenture than anything else. What he wants is ... not so much a labourer as an indentured labourer; ...because he has the indentured labourer entirely under his control and can do what he likes with him, pay him as he likes, and send him to jail when he does not do what he wants.”

Hence the fact that the enormous increase in the free population did not reduce the planters' demand for indentured immigrants⁶³. The opposition also received welcome support from Norman Lamont, who had progressively abandoned the use of indentured labour on his own estate between 1896 and 1901, and agreed with David that the planters wanted “not labour but indentured labour” because it was easier to control. Scarcity of labour, he thought, was a problem only during the planting season of June/July, if at all. He proposed to phase out indentured immigration over a period of ten years⁶⁴.

Unfortunately, David's assertions were sometimes speculative and incapable of proof; and Lamont, after relying on free labour for a few years had had to curtail his sugar estate and abandon his factory, so that he had become in effect a large cane farmer. Lamont insisted that not using indentured labour was in no way the cause of his trouble; and that a large factor in his failure had been the payment of £1,000 annually in export taxes so that his competitors might employ indentured labour. But sugar production required factories as well as cane farmers and the owners of factories all asserted that they could not possibly survive without indentured labours⁶⁵. Lamont's experience could easily be seen as the ultimate proof of that case.

Naturally, the planters were not slow to seize on these weaknesses in their opponents' case. Peter Abel, ex-manager of the Usine Ste. Madeleine, stated flatly: “when you stop emigration to the West Indies you may as well hand them over to the United States.”⁶⁶ Abel here exemplified those who thought of the sugar industry as so much British capital which must on no account be endangered, an argument which was always very influential in imperial circles, and especially so now that capital was being widely cited as one of the mainsprings of empire. Sir Neville Lubbock claimed that far from depressing wages immigration in fact created more jobs of kinds which Creoles liked.

“I cannot understand why there should be any question about allowing the estates to have as many coolies as ever they would take. The advantage to the Colony of having the estates to train those people is enormous... It is all helping to develop their industries, and must be for the benefit of the Colony eventually.”⁶⁷

It is however possible to detect a somewhat modified tone in the pronouncements of the planter organizations. The West India Committee, while convinced that “the continuation and extension of the system... is

63. Sanderson Report, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 203-206

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 300, 304-305, 349.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 300, 303, 307.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 419.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-92, 108, 116.

in the highest degree desirable”, refrained from suggesting that its termination would ruin the sugar industry. The Trinidad Agricultural Society’s view was that the death of sugar would be gradual⁶⁸. No doubt the failure of the estates to collapse during the heyday of bounty competition less than a decade previously had made them just a little more cautious, and the increasing importance of cane farming in Trinidad told its own tale. The acting governor also would say only that there was a scarcity of labour in some districts, which a reduction of immigration would aggravate⁶⁹.

Having reached a general conclusion in favour of the use of indentured labour to develop tropical colonies, the Committee sought to evaluate the arguments against it put forward with specific reference to Trinidad and to British Guiana. Assured by the colonial authorities and other responsible witnesses that the agitation against immigration was the work of a small minority consisting mostly of urban people of African origin who knew nothing of the subject but considered that the increasing settlement of Indians was depriving the Creole population of its own heritage⁷⁰, and conscious that a large population would facilitate the development of Trinidad and British Guiana to the greater glory of the British Empire and hopefully to the greater profit of British capital, Lord Sanderson and his colleagues found it difficult to accept the arguments of opponents of a system which appeared to have more than half a century of success to its credit. The committee was obviously impressed by the unanimity with which witnesses insisted that the Creoles refused to work with regularity. It would not accept the view that immigration had produced unemployment and destitution in Trinidad, and in face of some conflict of evidence it rejected the view that importing labour had led to a general reduction of wages in Trinidad. It concluded as regards Trinidad:

“The evidence seems to us to prove that labour imported primarily for the benefit of the planter subserves other purposes which are of direct benefit to the community at large. On the other hand... we apprehend that any attempt to put at end to immigration either suddenly or within a short term of years would inevitably have a most serious effect on the sugar industry and on the colony generally.”⁷¹

The Sanderson Committee therefore concluded in April 1910 that immigration should continue, but that the size of the labour force should in future be carefully watched, and that the system should not go beyond “what is strictly necessary to keep the labour market adequately supplied.” This view, much the same as that of the Royal Commission in 1897, was accepted by a Colonial Office long conditioned to the notion that, in the words of senior clerk George Grindle:

68. Sanderson Report, Papers Presented, p. 14: Resolution of Annual General Meeting of the West India Committee, 29 April 1909; British Guiana Planters Assn. to Govt. Sec., 20 May 1909. *Ibid.*, p. 131: Trinidad Agricultural Society to Trinidad Working men’s Association, 27 May 1909.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 131: Acting Govr. Knaggs to Secretary of State, 8 February 1909.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 275, QQ. 8572-9: Evidence of Col. Sec. S.W. Knaggs.

71. Sanderson Report, pp. 59-60, 67-8, 72-3.

“The root of the whole problem is that Creole labour is not reliable ; ... the Indian will work when he is wanted to. Obviously in such a business as sugar the planters must have labourers who can be depended upon to work steadily during the crop season.”⁷²

Grindle and his colleagues were much influenced by the fact that what was at stake was an old and proven arrangement, and he was not really disposed to question established doctrine. It is also important to note that like many before him Grindle presented the issue as one involving the right of a class of employers to obtain what they regarded as “reliable” labour. It is true that the British Liberal Government was making unprecedented efforts towards according greater recognition to the rights of labour in Britain, and simultaneously curtailing the freedom of action of employers. But if such developments were still at a very early stage in Britain it is not surprising that the philosophy behind them was hardly as yet applied to the colonies. Opponents of immigration therefore had to contend not only with the arguments of the planters and their strength in colonial legislatures, not only with the general disinclination in the Colonial Office to disturb the status quo, and the uncertainty surrounding the consequences of a change of policy, but also with the fact that they were attacking the interests of an employer class at a time when the entrenched power of that class within the imperial political system was only beginning to weaken.

After 1910 the Trinidad Working Men’s Association continued its local campaign against immigration, presenting three further protest memorials to the Secretary of State in 1911 and 1912. But after the discredit attracted by its President’s conduct before the Sanderson Committee the Secretary of State afforded it scant attention. And the Association now did no more than repeat familiar claims, supported by questionable statistics, which were in opposition to the recent advice of an elaborate enquiry⁷³.

Before the First World War therefore the articulate opponents of Indian immigration in Trinidad were growing in numbers but still few and nearly powerless, and very few people of political influence were really concerned about the principle of importing more labourers as opposed to the important detail of who paid for them. Nor was there any sign that the critics of the system might gain their ends in the foreseeable future.

In Great Britain the Sanderson Report, claiming that the immigrants were generally well treated, quietened the parliamentary anxiety considerably, though Labour members of Parliament maintained the practice of asking periodic questions in the Commons based on their contact with Trinidad Working Men’s Association⁷⁴. Henceforth the British opposition to the continuance of indentured immigration, either in the West Indies

72. C.O. 323/581 : I.O. to C.O. 28 October 1911, J. & P. 2062, minutes by Grindle 28 November.

73. C.O. 295/465 : Le Hunte to Harcourt, 25 April 1911, No. 170, and minutes. C.O. 295/474 : Le Hunte to Harcourt, 12 March 1913, No. 105, and minutes. C.O. 295/477 : Le Hunte to Harcourt, 31 December 1912, No. 510, and minutes.

74. C.O. 295/465 : Le Hunte to Harcourt, 25 April 1911, No. 170, minutes by Cowell and Darnly.

or in other colonies, had only nuisance value, though certain leading figures in the Imperial Government were known to be opposed to it. In Trinidad, while waiting for Sanderson to report, Alcazar had continued to demand that general revenues should pay only for the government establishments required to service and control the immigration system while taxes paid only by planters should provide for the entire cost of importation and repatriation, a system adopted in British Guiana in 1900. More broadly Prudhomme David argued that Trinidad badly needed public works, roads, police stations and schools, "more public accommodations of all sorts", and in such a situation money should not be spent on immigration⁷⁵. David's rhetoric could sometimes achieve great polemic heights. He told the Legislative Council in 1910 that in fact

"immigration was not merely for the purpose of extending cultivation but of excluding local labour from participation in the prosperity which might be supposed to flow from the cultivation of the land."

Indeed the local labourer would soon be "left to pick a livelihood as best as he could in the town." More solidly he highlighted a growing sense of economic rivalry, as immigration appeared to be forcing local labourers off the estates. Even if it were true, as some alleged, that Blacks resented the Indian presence because the latter were more successful, it was still objectionable that the general population had to pay taxes "to provide the cost of bringing rivals into the colony." At the same time he insisted that his objection to the system was based simply on economic grounds and not on any resentment at the rivalry of an "alien race."⁷⁶

The Sanderson Committee had condemned the use of imprisonment as a penalty for labour offences, the core of the indenture system, and this gave David the opportunity to emphasize his objection to the principle of indenture:

"the first necessity in any country's prosperity is a contented labouring population. That we have not got, and that we shall not get so long as you consecrate the principle of imprisonment for breach of a labour contract... ..you cannot on the one hand degrade labour, and on the other effectively preach the dignity of labour."⁷⁷

The public argument however still centred on finance and in 1911-12 the financial provisions were re-arranged as Alcazar had long wanted, so that the employers paid the whole cost of introducing new immigrants. This however probably served to weaken the chances of terminating the system since it tended to deflect attacks on the public subsidy and deprive the campaign of those supporters whose objective was essentially financial⁷⁸.

Thus the opposition's chances of achieving an end to indentured immigration seemed to be slipping. However in 1912 the nomination of

75. *Legislative Council Debates*, 1910, pp. 21, 26.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 28.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

78. C.O. 295/471 : C.O. Memo. on Cost of Indian Immigration into Trinidad (Reg. No. 20223), and minute by Harcourt.

the coloured Creole Dr. Stephen Laurence to the Legislative Council, effectively in succession to Prudhomme David, together with that of Dr. Enrique Prada, set the scene for a full rehearsal of the case against immigration. There were now four members in the Council critical of the system. Laurence seized the occasion of the annual motion to approve the indent for the coming year to set out his reasons for opposing the system. He accepted that immigration had in the past brought great advantages and indeed been "indispensable" both to the sugar industry and to the colony generally, but insisted that conditions in Trinidad had changed. As regards the future, he rehearsed all the familiar objections, starting with finance. He also noted that the system created incidental burdens for the colony related to an increasing population of misfits which put pressure on hospitals, prisons, asylums, courts, pauper lists⁷⁹.

Laurence then raised what he called the political objection, which had surfaced during the campaign for constitutional reform in the late 1880s but had since received small attention. He suggested that there was "a numerical objection" to continued immigration. East Indians now accounted for one third of the population and if immigration continued they would sooner rather than later come to form a majority. He continued, "As a West Indian I feel that I have a right to protest against converting this West Indian colony into an East Indian colony." If such a change resulted from spontaneous immigration he would think it acceptable, but not when it came from "the people's money being used year after year to ... eventually swamp the labouring class by ... a foreign labouring population."⁸⁰

Laurence noted that it had been suggested that an Indian should be nominated to the Legislative Council specifically to represent that community, and while he had no problem with the nomination of an Indian he thought that nominating a representative for a specific community was objectionable unless an elective constitution was intended. In the existing circumstances it would give the East Indians a special lever over the native population. In thus emphasizing the political factor he insisted that he bore no ill will or antagonism towards the existing Indian population, his "fellow-inhabitants."

Finally he raised the "agricultural objection". How was it that after importing so many Indians over so long a period the planters still found it impossible to get enough free labour? His answer echoed David's to the Sanderson Committee: the immigrants were "encouraged and controlled by government supervision," while nothing was being done to encourage local free labourers to work on the estates or to help the general development of free West Indian labour. As for the unprovable planter assertion that without immigration the colony would be ruined in a few years, he recalled that the planters had foreseen the same consequence when slavery was abolished. He urged that Indian immigration be phased out over a period of years while some of the money thus saved to the general revenue should be used to develop West Indian agricultural labour by establishing a labour bureau, promoting cane farming through a

79. *Legislative Council Debates*, 1912, pp. 94, 193.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

system of instruction and competition, and generally investigating possible means of encouraging the population to work steadily in agriculture. Here was not only a restatement of familiar points but a change in emphasis and a new and positive programme for the future, which enhanced the strength of the opposition case⁸¹.

It was however in India itself that a movement arose which would grow powerful enough to force the abolition of indentured immigration. A week after Laurence's speech in 1912 G.K. Gokhale produced a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council in India calling on the Indian Government to prohibit indentured emigration, which he claimed affected India's self respect, and India became the focus of the campaign against the system. In the West Indies the opposition was much encouraged by this development. Laurence repeated his position each year when the annual indent for immigrants was being considered, emphasizing increasingly the need for the government to take steps to "utilize and organize local agricultural labour in the interests of the agricultural industries of this colony," about which nothing was being done⁸². And he retained the support of two or three other members who remained concerned about finance.

For the season 1914-15 only 423 immigrants were received in response to an indent for 2000, essentially because wartime exigencies disrupted the supply of shipping though agitation in India had made recruiting more difficult. Yet the sugar industry lived on. The view that immigration was indispensable was taking a beating. The end was in sight.

Throughout the campaign finance had remained the issue which generated the greatest criticism, since details of that system affected many people who saw nothing amiss with the principle of continuing to import labour, or with that of indenture. The export duties did not reach a number of small but increasingly prosperous sugar producers, most of them locally resident, who sold all their produce locally. On the other hand small producers of cocoa or coconuts who employed hardly any labour got no benefits from immigration yet paid export duties. Indenture fees did not affect the growing numbers who employed free Indians but not indentured, including the great majority of cocoa and coconut planters. Yet the immigration system naturally brought all of these groups indirect benefits.

Most of the argument over the details of how immigration should be financed of course reflected the particular interests of different groups in the population, but the fact was that every conceivable financial structure was open to objection from some standpoint or other, and once the overriding need to rescue the colony's principal industry had disappeared in the late nineteenth century, any arrangements were open to dispute. Financial inequities generated feeling which commonly produced opposition to the annual ordinances for raising immigration funds and/or the indent for new immigrants. In the event the constant disputation over finance, growing more intense as the years passed, was a standing aid to those who sought the abandonment of the immigration system. They

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 100, 101-103.

82. *Legislative Council Debates*, 1913, pp. 45-8; 1914, pp. 41-3, 686; 1915, p. 637.

made great play with the argument that the import duties, which were an important part of general taxation, ultimately filtered down to the general population in the form of higher food prices. Nor did they overlook the fact that support services like the Immigration Department fell on the general taxes.

Attacks on the principle of importing labour, or of the system of working under indenture, though vitally important in the campaign in India, cannot be said to have roused great popular enthusiasm in Trinidad. But some prominent spokesmen, the odd newspaper, and a small element of the growing middle class took the principled stand; and when principle was added to the long standing and complex financial pressures and the rising economic jealousy of an awakening Creole working class, the long term result was a considerable and growing opposition to immigration, though after 1912 the initiative in moving against it lay in India.