

**THE EXPANSION OF HOUSING POLICY IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES,  
1935-1960**

**By**

**AMANDA J. BULLEN, B.A. (Hons.)**

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**AUTHOR:**       **Amanda J. Bullen, Honours B.A. (University of Victoria)**

**SUPERVISOR:** **Dr. Richard Harris**

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## ABSTRACT

In the 1930s, governments in the British West Indies began to develop concerns about housing issues. In Britain, unrest throughout the colonies in the 1930s created awareness of inadequate social and economic conditions and eventually caused Parliament to reformulate colonial policy. The new policy was expressed through the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, which provided funding for social welfare projects, including housing schemes, in the colonies.

This research examines the expansion of colonial housing policy in the West Indies between the 1930s and the early 1960s, when the colonies began to gain their independence. There is very little literature on the development of housing policy in the British colonies and most writers have assumed that governments were not active in the housing sphere until independence. The present research demonstrates that, in fact, West Indian governments and the Colonial Office began to take an active interest in housing as early as the 1930s. This interest grew as a reflection of the changes in colonial policy in general that began in 1940.

After examining Colonial Office records at the British Public Record Office, the *Trinidad Guardian* for selected years, and contemporary official publications, I conclude that a fairly comprehensive and consistent housing policy developed in the West Indies in the colonial era. Due to funding limitations, however, housing programs were not always sustained, and they did not succeed in resolving the region's housing problems. As housing policy developed, its initial emphasis on slum clearance and housing policy shifted to an increasing concentration on initiatives designed to strengthen the private

sector and to aid self-help initiatives. This was primarily because governments found that public housing was generally too expensive to accommodate the large numbers of people who required improved housing. The approaches to housing that developed in the Caribbean in the 1930s and beyond were significant because they influenced the evolution of housing policy in other British colonies. Furthermore, they enhance our understanding of policies used in the developing world in the post-colonial era.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

Low-income groups in the developing world have often experienced poor housing conditions, in particular overcrowding and lack of sanitation. This was true in British territories during the colonial period. As Robert Home, one of the few writers to have discussed colonial housing policy has noted, the poor quality of housing was in part the result of an attitude that viewed 'indigenous' subjects simply as workers:

The colonial economic system, from the early days of plantation slavery in the Caribbean and the American South, treated black people primarily as units of labour. Housing made little or no accommodation for family or communal life. Indeed it often sought deliberately to extinguish their cultural traditions and social practices, for slavery was a form of 'social death.'"<sup>1</sup>

Even with the end of slavery and later, indentured labour, housing conditions remained poor and many people continued to occupy the old workers' barracks.

Colonialism rarely improved housing, and although it did not always make conditions worse, this was often the case. Housing policies adopted in developing countries today often reflect those introduced in the colonial era, and problems have resulted. As some theorists have suggested, attempts to deal with housing issues in the developing world have frequently been unsuccessful because they are not suited to local conditions: "because building regulations were usually inherited from former colonial administrations or copied from the industrial countries, they embody Western housing preferences which may be alien to other cultures."<sup>2</sup>



Despite the lengthy history of housing problems in developing countries, little has been said about the evolution of housing policy in the colonial period. Writers have generally assumed that there were no comprehensive housing programs in the British colonies until after they gained independence, mostly in the 1960s, but in fact colonial administrations became interested in housing issues as early as the 1930s. In the West Indies, colonial governments began to develop legislation and comprehensive housing programs that influenced other colonies.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, I will argue that knowledge of early housing initiatives in the West Indies is essential to an understanding of British colonial housing policy. While I have examined housing policy across the West Indies in general, I have concentrated on Trinidad because it was the first to pass housing and planning legislation. In addition, the colony employed all of the major types of housing programs (slum clearance and public housing, aided self-help, rent control and enabling strategies) that were represented in the region between the 1930s and 1960.

The definition of policy used in this paper is derived from Leslie Pal's description of 'public policy' as "a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or set of problems."<sup>4</sup> Government housing policy, then, refers to "a course of action or inaction" selected to deal with housing problems. It is important to note that according to this definition, inaction may be a policy choice; if, for example, a government is aware of poor housing conditions in rural areas but chooses not to address them, focusing instead on urban housing problems, this may reflect that its priority is urban areas.



The purpose of this thesis is to document and explain the development of housing policy in the British West Indies prior to independence. I seek to address two pairs of questions: firstly, how and why did housing policy begin to expand in the 1930s? Secondly, what forms did this policy take, and why? Housing is important because it reflects general shifts in British colonial policy that took place in the twentieth century, as the colonies prepared for independence. The West Indies is particularly important to a study of colonial development as it was an important source of policy ideas. By the 1930s, some colonial administrators had come to refer to the West Indies as “an Imperial slum” because poor social conditions, including housing, prevailed in the area.<sup>5</sup> They saw the region as a “testing ground” for the new colonial policy that emerged in the 1940s.<sup>6</sup> According to the preface of a 1946 book by T.S. Simey, Welfare Adviser in the West Indies in the 1940s, “what is done in the West Indies will determine to a great extent the future social and economic development of the Negro peoples not only in Africa, but in other parts of the world where they have settled in large numbers.”<sup>7</sup>

The West Indian colonies consisted of a number of small territories including Antigua, Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago (see Figure 1). Their economies were highly dependent on agricultural exports, especially sugar. Unlike other colonies in the Empire, few ‘indigenous’ residents inhabited the territories. By the 1930s, the population consisted largely of the descendants of African slaves brought in to work the plantations, and of East Indian and Chinese immigrants. These last had come to the territories as indentured workers when, after the abolition of



Figure 1. The Caribbean region. (Source: Great Britain. Central Office of Information. 1957. *The West Indies: A Nation in the Making*, pp. 26-27).

slavery in 1834, a labour shortage ensued. After the end of slavery, many ex-slaves established their own small farms and created a tradition of self-help in which they built their own housing. When the system of indentured labour that tied the remaining workers to the barracks was abolished in 1917, many continued to occupy the old barrack housing. Barracks normally contained a row of ten to twelve rooms, and were originally designed to accommodate single workers.<sup>8</sup> Many had come to house entire families, however, and living conditions were generally very poor.

Barracks were not confined to rural areas; landlords also used them to house people in the towns, where housing was often overcrowded and lacking in sanitation. Until World War Two, Caribbean colonies had relatively low levels of urbanization because of their heavy dependence on agriculture, but this began to change in the postwar years.<sup>9</sup> Rates of rural-to-urban migration were already high enough to cause colonial administrators concern by 1945.<sup>10</sup> According to Kempe Hope, between 1950 and 1970 urban growth rates were more than double those of rural areas, creating greater urban population pressure.<sup>11</sup>

In the second chapter, I review what has been written about the development of colonial policy in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. I then examine the literature on the importance of housing in colonial policy, focusing on the housing of the indigenous populations of the colonies. Consideration is also given to what authors have said about the influence of the West Indies on the development of colonial housing policy. The literature review reveals that there is a shortage of research on housing in the colonial period.

The third chapter looks at the growth of West Indian housing policy in an attempt to explain why it began to expand in the late 1930s. It provides a three-stage model for the development of policy and suggests that the initial phase of growth was marked by the passage of the first housing and planning legislation in the region in Trinidad in 1935. During this phase, awareness of the housing problem increased as a result of colonial unrest and the findings of two Royal Commissions that visited the region between 1937 and 1939. The chapter examines the impact of the new colonial policy embodied by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 on housing programs. In addition, it shows that the development of housing policy was a contested process, with the Colonial Office, colonial governments, municipal governments within the colonies and large employers offering resistance to certain initiatives.

In the fourth chapter, I chart the changes that took place in the form of housing policy between the mid-1930s and 1960. I suggest that the most fundamental of these was a shift in emphasis from public housing towards the private sector, although not necessarily a 'housing industry.' The chapter looks at the social and economic circumstances, the growing light of experience, and the results of housing research programs that shaped policy. It also discusses the organizations and individuals who contributed formative ideas.

The thesis concludes by comparing West Indian housing conditions and policies in the mid-1930s with those of the early 1960s and summarizes the steps in the evolution of housing policy. In addition, it suggests that, given the misconception that there was no



housing policy in the British West Indian colonies prior to the 1960s, there is a need for further research into other colonies in the years before independence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> R. Home, *Of Planting and Planning*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> M. Hardiman and J. Midgley, *The Social Dimensions of Development*, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> R. Home, *Of Planting*, p. 181; Potter and O'Flaherty, "Notes and Comments," p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> Pal, *Public Policy Analysis*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> K. Blackburne, *Lasting Legacy*, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> R. Home, "Transferring British Planning Law to the Colonies," p. 398.

<sup>7</sup> T.S. Simey, *Development and Welfare*, p. vi.

<sup>8</sup> Great Britain. *Trinidad and Tobago, 1931*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> T.D. Boswell, "Characteristics and Processes of Urbanization," p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing in the West Indies*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> K.R. Hope, *Urbanization in the Commonwealth Caribbean*, p. 39.

# **Chapter Two: Colonial Development Policy and Housing, 1930s-1960s**

## **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature on British colonial policy, particularly with respect to housing, from the 1930s to the early 1960s. It highlights what has been written about the evolution of housing policy in the West Indies in the same period.

In the first section, I outline the development of colonial policy in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, beginning with the period immediately preceding World War II and ending with decolonization. During this time, a major shift in colonial policy took place, embodied in the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act. The Act provided funds for social welfare schemes, including housing projects. Events in the West Indies in the 1930s provided a major impetus for the emergence of this general policy. In the second part of the chapter, I look at the more limited literature on the specific role of housing in colonial policy, focusing on policy targeted at the indigenous populations of the colonies. Official publications indicate the emergence of a housing policy, but very few writers have considered how British and colonial government attitudes towards the housing of indigenous people in both urban and rural areas changed in the interwar and postwar years. The third section looks at what authors have said about the growth of housing policy in the West Indies between the 1930s and 1960s, and about its influence

on other colonies. Housing and planning legislation passed in the West Indies in the late 1930s and the 1940s was soon copied in British colonies overseas. The literature on town planning and urban development generally, not just that relating specifically to housing, is included in this review because housing and planning policies are interrelated, and developed in parallel.

### **Colonial Policy: The New Concern for Development and Welfare**

Writers have indicated that unrest in the West Indies in the 1930s played a significant role in shaping the British colonial policy that emerged in the 1940s. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act was passed following unrest in many British colonies throughout the 1930s. Ryan has claimed that “the disturbances in the Caribbean, and particularly those in Trinidad, shook the British Empire.”<sup>1</sup> In 1934, strikes took place in Trinidad’s sugar belt. In 1937, demonstrations which began in the country’s oil-producing region spread to Port of Spain and to rural areas. Uprisings also took place in Jamaica, Barbados, St. Kitts and St. Vincent as well as in some of the African colonies during the same period. Writers have acknowledged that these events led to a major shift in colonial policy; for example, Johnson has observed that “British reactions to the Caribbean labour rebellions marked a vital turning point in colonial policy not only in the West Indies but also in Africa and Asia.”<sup>2</sup>

The unrest has typically been attributed to poverty, unemployment, and the rising cost of living, exacerbated by the Great Depression.<sup>3</sup> According to Johnson, the Depression had a significant negative impact on the economies of the West Indian

colonies because it caused the price of exported goods, on which the colonies depended, to decline.<sup>4</sup> Some British Members of Parliament believed that the affluence of oil companies, unwilling to increase spending to improve employee welfare despite their large profits, was a further reason for the Trinidad strikes. The Colonial Office may have contributed to the unrest because it was not adequately looking after the interests of colonial peoples. One writer has suggested that “the root of the problem lay in the inadequacies of the staffing and function of the Colonial Office.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, some colonial citizens’ increasing interaction with Britain may have contributed to frustration with social and economic conditions in the West Indies. According to Waddell, “West Indian consciousness of the inadequacy of the prevailing social standards was growing, due in part to increased contact with higher levels of living through overseas service in World War I and migration to the United States and elsewhere.”<sup>6</sup>

The British public became aware of the disturbances in the colonies.<sup>7</sup> Sahadeo Basdeo believes that the unrest in Trinidad in 1937 had an important impact on the metropole:

For the first time, two top government officials in the colony – the governor, Murchison Fletcher, and his colonial secretary, Howard Nankivell – were prepared to admit that the disturbances reflected the misery and frustration of people who had been neglected and exploited by both employers and successive colonial administrations. And, in the United Kingdom, where the chronic state of affairs in the West Indies was exposed starkly to the British public, the Colonial Office was forced to think again about labour problems in the colonial empire.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the West Indian unrest, Britain sent two successive commissions, the Forster Commission of 1937 and then the West India Royal Commission of 1938-1939



(also known as the Moyne Commission after its chair), to look into the causes of the disturbances and to make recommendations for improving conditions.

The Moyne Commission, the more important of the two, was dispatched in the autumn of 1938. According to those who have discussed this period in the evolution of British colonial policy, the decision to send the Commission was contested. Some officials at the Colonial Office argued that it would only serve to highlight problems at a time when the British Treasury would be unwilling to devote more funds to colonial development.<sup>9</sup> Others, however, believed that the Commission would be of value, and eventually the Colonial Office successfully argued that a royal commission would have “propaganda value” during a period when Britain’s colonial policy was being scrutinized by Germany, Italy and especially the U.S.A.<sup>10</sup> Some colonial officials also thought that it would be useful as a means for Britain to maintain the favour of the colonies themselves during World War II.<sup>11</sup> They noted, however, that in sending the Commission, Britain would be obligated to act on its recommendations, which would require further expenditure on colonial development. In fact, the Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time, Malcolm MacDonald, promoted the Commission for this very reason— he thought that it might act as a “political lever” with which to obtain more funds.<sup>12</sup> In Constantine’s words, “the Treasury’s concession of a Royal Commission on the West Indies and even their acceptance of a new Social Services Department in the Colonial Office were forerunners of their capitulation before the political arguments in favour of a Colonial Development and Welfare Act.”<sup>13</sup>

The literature on British colonialism conventionally marks the year 1940 as an important one in the development of colonial policy. In that year, the Moyne Commission released recommendations, but the British Government delayed full publication of the report until after the Second World War, in 1945. According to Robert Home, this was because its findings “were so politically embarrassing.”<sup>14</sup> Others claim that another reason for the delay was government’s concern that the report might provoke adverse reaction in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, the Colonial Development and Welfare (CD & W) Act was also passed in 1940, signalling a change in Britain’s policy towards its colonies.<sup>16</sup> The new Act was timed to coincide with the release of the Moyne Commission’s recommendations.

Some students of British colonial policy have suggested that the Commission’s recommendations were central in shaping the CD & W Act.<sup>17</sup> One author, discussing its report, writes that “there was nothing particularly new in the Moyne recommendations, but they formed the basis for British policy after 1939: social welfare, limited constitutional change, and encouragement of an orthodox trade union movement.”<sup>18</sup> Others have noted, however, that shifts in colonial policy had been occurring for several years.<sup>19</sup> For example, Havinden and Meredith claim that changes in colonial administration began in the 1930s. These included the establishment of an economic department in the Colonial Office in 1934, and then in 1937, the creation of a social department and labour adviser position.<sup>20</sup> These changes implied a greater willingness to deal with issues associated with colonial development. Furthermore, Constantine writes that immediately after MacDonald had gained permission for the Moyne Commission, he

requested that the Colonial Office begin a review of policy set out in the Colonial Development Act of 1929. Through the review, colonial officials found that the Colonial Development Fund established through the Act was inadequate and that there was a need to revise it. Therefore, the Colonial Office was already aware of the need for a new development policy before the Moyne Commission's recommendations were released. MacDonald later claimed that unrest in the West Indies did not directly lead to the Colonial Development Act, but it did help to create support for the new policy.<sup>21</sup>

Drawing on the Moyne Commission's recommendation that a West Indian Welfare Fund should be created, the CD & W Act set aside funds to support development and welfare schemes in the British colonies. However, these were to be used throughout the colonies, not just the West Indies. The Act departed from previous colonial policy initiatives in that its principal purpose was to improve conditions experienced by colonial peoples, rather than to promote Britain's economic development. As several authors have noted, the 1929 Colonial Development Act had provided some funding for economic development in the colonies, but as Wicker writes, its purpose was to increase colonial trade with Britain.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the CD & W Act was based on the notion that Britain had a responsibility to ensure the social and economic well-being of the people in its colonies.<sup>23</sup> The exact balance between self-interest and genuine concern about conditions in the colonies is open to debate. According to Cain and Hopkins, the objective of colonial policy during the Second World War and in the postwar years "was to harness the resources of empire to metropolitan needs, and then to buy off colonial discontent with a programme of economic development."<sup>24</sup> Others claim that CD & W

policy was developed with the goal of “economic exploitation” of the colonies, but that in addition, “there was an altruistic and idealistic component which sought genuinely to raise colonial standards of living.”<sup>25</sup> Constantine argues that “the emphasis on colonial development and *welfare* was...essentially a defensive operation, to provide a new justification which would legitimise the perpetuation of colonial rule.”<sup>26</sup> Whether self-interest or altruism, the Development and Welfare Act represented a significant change in colonial policy.

The CD & W Act authorized the creation of the West Indies Development and Welfare Organization (DWO). The purpose of this regional agency was to act as an advisory body on development issues in the West Indies and to recommend projects for assistance through Development and Welfare funds. According to Kenneth Blackburne, its Administrative Secretary from 1943, the DWO “represented a completely new departure in British colonial administration- the first time in history that the Colonial Office had established an off-shoot in the colonies themselves.”<sup>27</sup> The DWO was the only regional organization of its kind, and that it was established in the West Indies reflects the area’s importance.

Writers have frequently said that one reason for the development of CD & W policy was emerging public concern in Britain about colonial social welfare. In Wallace’s view, such concern sprang in part from the growth of the welfare state in the developed world that contributed to changing “concepts about the proper relationship between the citizen and the state.”<sup>28</sup> Havinden and Meredith explained the change in colonial policy with their observation that “there was a noticeable air of failure in the



contemporary assessments of the achievements of British colonial rule in the economic and social spheres by the end of the 1930s.”<sup>29</sup> CD & W policy was also the result of Britain’s need to project a clean international image with respect to its treatment of the colonies.<sup>30</sup>

Colonial Development and Welfare policy emerged at a time when Britain was beginning to contemplate the advent of self-government for the colonies. The old idea of trusteeship, in which Britain believed that it had a responsibility to manage the colonies until they were mature enough to govern themselves, was becoming outdated. By 1945, a stated objective of CD & W policy was to prepare the colonies for independence. As Porter and Stockwell suggest, “the concept of ‘trusteeship’ was refurbished in the fashionable language of ‘partnership’ and the government pledged itself not only to the welfare of colonial peoples but also to their eventual self-governance.”<sup>31</sup> There is much literature on the process of decolonization in the British Empire, and Darwin has provided a good summary of the discussion.<sup>32</sup> In his view, international and domestic pressures were not sufficient, on their own, to lead to decolonization. It was the disturbances within the colonies themselves that, in combination with the other forces, permitted colonies to gain their independence.<sup>33</sup> In Darwin’s words, “the history of decolonization requires careful fusion of three ‘sub-historiographies’: the domestic politics of ‘decline’; the tectonic shifts of relative power, wealth, and legitimacy at the international level; and the colonial (or semi-colonial) politics of locality, province, and nation.”<sup>34</sup>

Writers have debated how successful CD & W policy was in promoting social welfare and development. In Wallace's words, "although the disinterested and expert advice of the Colonial Development and Welfare Organisation was undoubtedly valuable, its projects had drawbacks. Most were small, pilot, *ad hoc* schemes which scarcely touched the fringe of British Caribbean problems."<sup>35</sup> In its early years, the Development and Welfare Organization did little but collect information about social and economic conditions and plan for postwar development projects.<sup>36</sup> This was because, due to wartime conditions, funds and supplies were limited. Furthermore, colonies themselves were not submitting many proposals for development projects. According to Porter and Stockwell,

Public criticisms had been levelled at the slow tempo of activity and the limited expenditure approved under the Act, and they were now shown to have been well-justified. The fault lay less with either delay and obstruction in Whitehall or Treasury reluctance to release money than with the limited number and inadequacy of schemes being put forward by colonial governments.<sup>37</sup>

In 1945, a new CD & W Act was passed, increasing funding available to the colonies to a maximum of £17.5 million per year, with an additional £1 million per annum for research.<sup>38</sup> According to some writers, the motivation for the revision was growing American interest in the West Indian Colonies.<sup>39</sup> Johnson, for example, writes that the United States was concerned that British failure to address development issues would lead to new outbreaks of social unrest in the region.<sup>40</sup>

Concern about welfare issues under CD & W extended to housing and town planning. Robert Home, the first to have written a connected history of British colonial town planning, has stated that "in the post-war world order, town planning played a part

in the British attempt to delay and propitiate nationalist pressure for decolonisation and constitutional change, through its apparent promise of better living conditions within the overall programme of 'colonial development and welfare.'"<sup>41</sup> The CD & W Act provided funds for development projects, including housing and town planning schemes, throughout the British Empire in the 1940s and 1950s.

## **Housing and Colonial Policy**

The new concern for colonial development and welfare was key to the gradual expansion of colonial housing policy. We know very little about what form housing and town planning programs took in Britain's colonies from the 1930s to the 1960s since there is only a small body of literature on the subject. As Giles has indicated, the early postwar years have been largely neglected in studies of colonial housing policy.<sup>42</sup> Home has written a book on British colonial town planning in which he considers the CD & W Act in relation to housing and town planning in the colonies. According to him, under CD & W, "housing was not seen as a particularly high priority, and indeed appeared only fifteenth on the list of project headings in the Colonial Office's first circular on the development and welfare programme, under the title 'Housing and Land Settlement.'"<sup>43</sup> However, the items were not actually in rank order, and had they been housing may have appeared higher on the list.

A particularly useful summary of British colonial housing policy is provided by a publication from the United Kingdom Information Service, which looked at housing and planning issues and initiatives implemented in the United Kingdom dependencies after

World War Two. The purpose of the report was to “[sketch] the growth of governmental responsibility, in line with modern conceptions of the State’s responsibilities of social affairs, for both housing and town planning.”<sup>44</sup> The major trends in housing policy, as summarized in the booklet, included the increasing use of aided self-help methods, promoting home ownership and private investment in housing, and adopting new and changing existing housing standards.

Several writers have pointed out that in the first half of the twentieth century, the British Empire was at its “zenith,” so there was much opportunity for transferring British planning and housing ideas around the world.<sup>45</sup> During the same period, town planning was becoming established as a discipline in metropolitan societies.<sup>46</sup> Governments became involved in housing production and ‘new towns’ were created. According to Home, colonial initiatives such as peripheral housing estates often mirrored those built in postwar Britain, and were influenced by garden city ideas.<sup>47</sup> In Britain, garden city principles dominated planning ideology, professional town planning organizations and institutions were established, and important planning legislation was introduced.<sup>48</sup> Anthony King writes that during this time, “town planning, housing, and building ‘expertise’ was increasingly transplanted to the colonial territories, especially in Africa, the West Indies, and elsewhere.”<sup>49</sup> These developments were transferred via “the new professional agents sent to, or appointed by colonial governments; the transplantation of legislation; the growth in and circulation of ‘professional’ publications, or the visits of metropolitan consultants.”<sup>50</sup> In particular, after 1945 the British Building Research Station played an important role in spreading information about housing and town



planning. In this period, organizations such as the United Nations also began to influence planning in the colonies.<sup>51</sup> King's discussions of the spread of planning ideas are useful because examining the development of colonial cities can shed light on colonial relationships. As he suggests, "physical and spatial urban form actually constitute as well as represent much of social and cultural existence: society is to a very large extent constituted through the buildings and spaces that it creates."<sup>52</sup>

Changes within the Colonial Office took place in order to address housing issues that arose in the 1940s. According to Parnell, World War II had witnessed the expansion of slums in colonial cities and officials realized that it would be necessary to establish some kind of urban housing policy. She writes that efforts to provide housing more efficiently— by developing standardized housing types, for example— therefore took place.<sup>53</sup> A Colonial Housing Research Group was established during the War to look into housing issues and its recommendations eventually led to the creation of a Housing Liaison Officer position within the Colonial Office in 1948.

Although developments in the Caribbean seem to have been particularly significant for the development of colonial policy, those in the African colonies have received the most attention. According to the literature, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act had a significant impact on town planning and housing initiatives in the African colonies. Robert Home, for example, suggests that CD & W gave "a new impetus to town planning" in Nigeria and resulted in the formulation of the 1946 Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance.<sup>54</sup> Rakodi claims that changes in

colonial policy were reflected in urban policy beginning in the 1940s. Writing about Northern Rhodesia, she states that:

Retaining wives and dependents in the rural areas ensured that urban employers would not need to pay wages sufficient to cover the full cost of labour reproduction and that the transitory nature of the urban population could be maintained. However, contradictions inherent in such a policy emerged early on and gave rise to a continuing debate on the desirability of 'stabilising' the urban population in order to increase the productivity of the labour force. A concern for productivity, reinforced by welfarist pressures on the colonial government in the core country led to efforts, in Northern Rhodesia as well as in Britain, to improve the urban environment.<sup>55</sup>

Susan Parnell has remarked that urban policy was shaped by "the social context of urbanisation, the political future of Empire and the standard of living of colonial peoples."<sup>56</sup>

Those who have discussed housing in the African Copperbelt area have suggested that beginning in the early 1940s, urban policy was geared towards developing a stabilized urban society. Graham Tipple noted that indigenous people were not considered to be permanent urban dwellers until the 1940s, when the policy objective of stabilization was adopted.<sup>57</sup> According to Heisler, stabilization entailed investment in urban rather than rural areas and was necessary in order to establish a "modern society."<sup>58</sup> A policy of stabilization, including provision of family housing for indigenous workers, was recommended by the Forster Commission that inquired into the unrest in the Copperbelt in 1940. Subsequently the Eccles Commission, which was appointed in 1944 to examine African Locations policy, suggested that improved housing conditions and a policy of stabilization were needed.<sup>59</sup> Tipple reported that its findings marked "a major turning point in African urban housing policy."<sup>60</sup>

Those who have discussed African housing policy have described its relation with labour issues. Home, for example, has written that:

The discourse or negotiation through which the built form of housing was formulated and reproduced included the state and the employers, but largely excluded participation by the workers themselves, at least until riots and disturbances in the 1930s provoked a reappraisal of colonial labour relations and brought about improved housing conditions.<sup>61</sup>

In the early days of mining in the Copperbelt, housing was provided by employers and was seen “as a means of storing one of the raw materials needed for the copper industry— unskilled labour.”<sup>62</sup> Housing was tied to employment because a migrant labour system was in place.<sup>63</sup> Tipple tells us that in the 1940s and 1950s, a program of large-scale building took place in the Copperbelt.<sup>64</sup> At this time, providing family accommodation became one of the objectives of housing policy.<sup>65</sup> In Northern Rhodesia, an African Housing Ordinance was passed in 1948. This was intended to reinforce the policy of stabilization by requiring larger employers to provide housing or to pay the rent for local authority accommodation for their workers.<sup>66</sup>

The literature indicates that there was a connection between worker unrest and housing conditions in Africa in the colonial period. Insecurity of tenure and the inability of Africans to undertake improvements to their housing led to poor conditions prior to the 1940s.<sup>67</sup> In 1940, strikes broke out in the mines of Northern Rhodesia. A Commission of Enquiry chaired by John Forster, who had earlier led the 1937 enquiry into the riots in Trinidad, was struck that year. Home writes that the findings of this Commission, and another appointed after strikes took place in the Rhodesian Copperbelt in 1935, referred to the poor housing conditions of the mine workers.

Authors have shown that one response of African colonial governments to unrest was to revise housing policy. According to Home, the Rhodesian strikes, along with the 1937 riots in Trinidad, were “the key events behind the change in official thinking” regarding worker housing.<sup>68</sup> As a result of this change, “British colonial officialdom came to abandon the name ‘barrack’ in the brief space of a few years between 1935 and 1940, as one response to worker unrest in Zambia and the West Indies.”<sup>69</sup> He claimed that “this shift reflected a new approach to colonial development and welfare prompted by the need to secure colonial loyalty at the time of the Second World War.”<sup>70</sup> Writing about Kenya, Stren has argued that housing policy was a means by which the government could quell the social unrest present in the late 1940s. That country’s Vasey Report, published in 1950, made recommendations regarding African housing policy. It took the view that owner-occupied housing would lead to more stable social conditions. According to Stren, “state housing policy in the fifties in Kenya, then, was generally consistent with other policies which attempted to neutralize and incorporate an emerging petty bourgeoisie (particularly in the Kikuyu areas) and to control and contain worker protests.”<sup>71</sup> In Kenya, the growth of nationalism helped to fuel the development of housing policy. Stren found that by comparison, in Tanganyika where nationalism was not a threat to colonial hegemony, there was less concern with housing.

Events in the West Indies in the 1930s had been a catalyst for the development of a general colonial policy that affected the African colonies as well. This was apparent in the fields of housing and urban planning, as in other areas. A discussion of the development of housing policy in the West Indies follows.



## **The British West Indies and the Development of Colonial Housing Policy**

Although the issue has not received much attention, it would appear that the policy initiatives taken in Africa during the 1940s were in some ways anticipated and influenced by developments in the West Indies. Writers who have considered social conditions in the West Indies agree that housing in the interwar and postwar years was generally bad.<sup>72</sup> The poor state of Trinidad's working class housing, for example, attracted the attention of labour activists and major employers at least as early as 1919. In a study of the development of the labour movement in Trinidad, Basdeo wrote that strikes took place in the colony's oilfields in 1919 and 1920.<sup>73</sup> Subsequently, the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) was able to negotiate improved housing conditions and wages for workers at the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company. In 1926, a British trade unionist, F.O. Roberts, visited Trinidad on a tour of the West Indies as part of an effort to establish a West Indian labour organization. In Trinidad, Roberts visited barracks and slum areas in Port of Spain. According to Basdeo, "during his first visit to Port of Spain [Roberts] was shocked at the deplorable living conditions under which many people in the colony were compelled to live and called upon the local authorities to institute speedy reforms in that direction."<sup>74</sup>

The literature on the growth of labour unrest and trade unionism in the West Indies points to a connection between worker housing conditions and labour unrest in the 1930s, however this linkage is usually made only in passing. According to Ronald Ramdin, for example, employers did not care about the welfare of their workers and "this

attitude was reflected, in the deplorable conditions in which a large number of workers and their families were housed.”<sup>75</sup> Some labourers, demonstrating in 1933, demanded that rent control legislation be re-initiated in Trinidad in order to keep housing affordable for low-income earners.<sup>76</sup> Controls were eventually reintroduced in 1941. Ramdin writes that in 1935, the Secretary of State for the colonies, Malcolm MacDonald, distributed a circular to the colonies regarding labour issues. In it, he indicated that colonial governments need not establish a Labour Department, but that they should develop some mechanism through which they could oversee labour conditions. One issue that would have to be addressed through this mechanism would be the provision of worker housing.<sup>77</sup>

Several writers have mentioned the impact of poor housing conditions on worker unrest in the West Indies in the 1930s.<sup>78</sup> In Trinidad, for example, Singh has pointed out that the Governor appointed a committee to look into housing conditions in 1930, after calls for an investigation into housing issues were made by Port-of-Spain city councillors Alfred Richards and Tito Achong.<sup>79</sup> The committee reported on the poor conditions experienced by barrack dwellers and suggested that the government should pass slum clearance legislation and initiate low-cost housing projects at Woodbrook and Gonzales Place. The houses would be rented or sold on hire-purchase schemes at low rates to families displaced from the barracks. The committee’s recommendations were eventually implemented in 1935.<sup>80</sup> According to Bridget Brereton, the poor “economic condition” of the working classes was the main reason for the Trinidad disturbances of 1937.<sup>81</sup> She followed this statement with a description of housing conditions in the

colony at the time, claiming that the Forster Commission found the sugar estate barracks to be in a very poor state and the oilfield and barrack housing in Port of Spain to be unacceptable. Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago from 1956 to 1981, also wrote about the Forster Commission and noted that the housing situation in the colony contributed to the strikes. In speaking about social conditions at the time of the unrest, he quoted the Forster Commission's findings regarding housing.<sup>82</sup> According to Basdeo, after the release of the Commission's recommendations, Ormsby-Gore, then the Secretary of State for the Colonies, reported that employers in Trinidad "had promised to improve labour and housing conditions for their employees," but these promises had little immediate effect.<sup>83</sup>

Very few writers have chosen to focus on West Indian housing policy, although many have recognized the issue's importance. The case of Trinidad is probably the best-documented, but even for this colony little has been written. There is a very small literature that speaks of the emergence of housing and planning legislation in Trinidad during the interwar and postwar years. The legislation was significant because it was copied in other British colonies, in the West Indies and elsewhere.<sup>84</sup> As Robert Home has told us, the Government of Trinidad introduced the legislation prior to the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act. Specifically, a Slum Clearance and Housing Ordinance was enacted in 1935 and a Housing and Town Planning Ordinance was passed in 1938. These were drafted after a survey conducted in Port of Spain in 1931-32 reported that about 25,000 people were living in barrack-type accommodations.<sup>85</sup> Home, who views the housing issue in a similar light to those who have discussed labour and

trade unionism, has attributed the passage of the 1938 Act to recommendations made by the 1937 Forster Commission. The 1938 Ordinance was drafted by R.B. Walker, a town planner who had previously worked in Nigeria and who had been employed as a planning consultant in Trinidad before the riots of 1937 took place. Provisions of the Ordinance were to be implemented by a new Planning and Housing Commission. Port of Spain city councillors including Mr. Teelucksingh, Mr. Wharton and Captain Cipriani (leader of the Trinidad Labour Party and one of the first elected members of the colony's Legislative Council) all lent their support to the new Housing and Town Planning Ordinance.<sup>86</sup>

Writers who have discussed Trinidad's early housing initiatives generally indicate that these met with several difficulties. According to Home, problems arose in implementing the colony's new legislation. The Second World War and the postwar building material shortages slowed Trinidad's slum clearance programs in the 1940s. Funding shortages also meant that "a qualified town planner...appointed on a long-term basis" did not arrive in the colony until the 1950s. With respect to early public housing projects, Singh claims that because of the general housing shortage, government-built housing became available only to people who could afford it. In his words, "by 1944...it was quite evident that of the modest housing undertaken by the colonial government and the Port of Spain City Council, the real beneficiaries were not the most indigent, but those who could afford to rent or purchase the houses."<sup>87</sup> He attributes the high cost of urban rental housing to rural-to-urban migration triggered by the establishment of American bases in the city, combined with removal of some people formerly living on base lands. The resulting population pressure created "a premium on urban housing,



whose values rapidly rose as demand for purchase and rental increased.”<sup>88</sup> Singh

concludes that:

The low-income groups, the casually employed and the unemployed in the towns could hardly compete with the economically stronger claimants on housing and had to resort to the city barracks and other overcrowded, dilapidated one-room tenements. War conditions, therefore, worsened the already notorious housing situation in the towns, particularly Port of Spain and San Fernando. The colonial government's modest housing programme could at best be only a gesture of good intentions.”<sup>89</sup>

According to Singh, the state of rural housing in Trinidad was also poor during wartime, but the government does not seem to have actively attempted to improve conditions.

Despite early difficulties with housing programs, the little literature that does focus on Trinidad's housing policy indicates that some important initiatives were carried out during the colonial era. According to Home, while the Planning and Housing Commission made little progress in its early years, it did succeed in building 500 housing units between January and December of 1940 as part of its slum clearance scheme. Between 1940 and 1956, it provided a total of 2,175 housing units. Home describes a rehousing project that took place at Caroni in order to improve the living conditions of estate workers, and notes that public housing was built at Morvant and Frederick Village in the postwar years.<sup>90</sup> According to Singh, these were part of the Governor's attempts to show the people of Trinidad “that the colonial government was indeed committed to... a program of colonial development and welfare.”<sup>91</sup>

A number of recent authors have considered the development of housing policy in the British West Indies in the post-independence years, but few have devoted any attention to it prior to this period. Indeed, many assume that West Indian governments

only began to become interested in housing after independence, in the 1960s and 1970s. Linda Hewitt, for example, has proposed a six-phase model for the development of housing policy, in which she indicates that there were no notable government interventions into housing prior to the 1960s. Hewitt's phases include: a period of inaction to 1956; 1956 to 1972, when the government began to become involved in housing; 1973-1985, in which government housing provision increased; 1986-1991, when policy changes were brought about by a change in government; and a post-1991 era, in which Hewitt identifies continuities from past programs.<sup>92</sup> The first two phases are of particular interest. In her discussion of the pre-1956 phase, Hewitt points out that there was a connection between Trinidadian labour unrest in the 1930s and poor housing conditions. She discusses the importance of the Forster and Moyne Commissions' recommendations regarding housing conditions in the colony. However, she does not mention any state attempts to provide housing. In fact, in describing the second phase of housing policy in Trinidad, 1956-1972, she writes that:

State provision of housing effectively began in the post-colonial years, so that, between 1956 and 1960, only a modest yield of 348 units was realized. It was the problems of the overcrowding of Port of Spain, and the uncontrolled settlement of its immediate precincts at Malick and Morvant, and of the southern town of San Fernando and its encroaching environs of Pleasantville, that brought early responses from the state to the critical housing situations in those rapidly urbanizing areas.<sup>93</sup>

Like other writers, Hewitt has greatly underestimated the significance of housing initiatives in the West Indies prior to independence.

In a series of articles on housing in Jamaica, Thomas Klak implied that government intervention into housing provision was scattered and disorganized prior to

the 1960s.<sup>94</sup> According to Klak, who considers Jamaica along with Latin American states, “until the 1960s Latin American state housing activities generally lacked national agendas, goals, or mandates, were modestly endowed, and were often targeted at special projects such as disaster relief.”<sup>95</sup> This statement is partially true—several housing projects were undertaken in Jamaica as part of hurricane relief efforts in the 1940s and 1950s, and throughout the West Indies, colonies had very limited funds with which to carry out housing programs—but is exaggerated. In a paper that compares government housing agencies in Jamaica, Brazil and Ecuador, Klak claims that up to the 1960s, “the state’s principal contribution to working-class housing was to bulldoze it away.”<sup>96</sup> He fails to note that government intervention extended to measures other than slum clearance and public housing. In another article, Klak puts forward the view that “many of the Latin American and Caribbean countries have based their housing programs on the United States’ approach to private housing.”<sup>97</sup> He does not consider earlier, British colonial influences on postwar housing policy, or whether these affected the design of later programs. In a third article, he notes that an agency called the Caribbean Housing Finance Corporation (CHFC) was created by the British Colonial Development Corporation in 1960, but he makes no other acknowledgement that the Colonial Office was involved in housing activity.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, in a discussion of housing policy in the Caribbean, Katherine Coit discusses aided self-help housing projects carried out in the independence era by the World Bank, USAID and the Dutch international aid organization in Jamaica.<sup>99</sup> Like most people who have considered aided self-help housing, Coit does not look at projects implemented prior to the 1970s.

A similar pattern of amnesia is evident for other islands. Jones, for example, discusses housing in Barbados, but focuses only on the country's experience in the 1980s except to note the continuing impact of colonialism on settlement patterns.<sup>100</sup> Watson and Potter briefly recount the evolution of housing policy in Barbados, noting that government involvement with housing was stimulated by the findings of the West India Royal Commission. They point out that, following the Commission's recommendations, a Housing Board was established in 1939, and slum clearance projects were initiated in Bridgetown in 1944. Responsibility for housing was transferred to the Barbadian National Housing Authority, an organization that was created after a hurricane in 1955 caused widespread damage to housing.<sup>101</sup> These authors have suggested, however, that colonial housing programs were minor, piecemeal attempts to deal with isolated housing problems.

There has been little discussion of the changing forms that housing policy took in the colonial period. Linda Peake has provided one of the few accounts of the evolution of policy in the early postwar years in a West Indian country. In a chapter on British Guiana, she acknowledges that a policy was in place prior to the 1960s, but that "there has not been a recognizable housing policy in Guyana since Independence in 1966."<sup>102</sup> She writes that until World War Two most housing was built privately or by the sugar estates for their labourers. Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Funds, derived from an increased export tax on sugar, were used to provide housing loans to sugar workers, and higher-income groups had access to housing finance through the British Guiana Building and Loans Society.<sup>103</sup> Peake notes that in 1946, a Central Housing and Planning

Authority (CHPA) was established in order to address urban growth issues. It began work on slum clearance and rehousing. Significantly, and unlike most others who have discussed policy in this period, Peake acknowledges that self-help housing strategies were used by the colonial government. Such projects provide assistance to people building or upgrading their homes through their own labour, sometimes with the help of paid workers. Assistance may be granted in any one of a combination of ways: by providing land (free or at low purchase or rental rates); by developing services and infrastructure; by subsidizing building materials; by providing technical assistance; and by supplying housing cores, with or without walls and a roof, for households to complete on their own. According to Peake, "self-help was formally introduced in 1953-54 when the government, together with the Caribbean Development Corporation, sponsored 10 projects."<sup>104</sup> However, she claims that it was not "actively promoted" until after 1966, when the People's National Congress (PNC) government began to use self-help and cooperatives to promote development.<sup>105</sup> These figured in British Guiana's housing program as well, but Peake comments that:

"It is also possible, however, to view the PNC's housing policy merely as a continuation of that of the interim government. The British colonial authorities first introduced cooperatives in 1948, and the PNC adopted the same policy instruments of self-help, rental housing, plot preparation, and hire-purchase, albeit with different emphases."<sup>106</sup>

This recognition that policies introduced in the colonial era may have influenced post-independence initiatives is unusual. This is particularly true with respect to discussions of aided self-help housing projects, which, as Harris tells us, were introduced in the colonial period, even though most authors have failed to observe this.<sup>107</sup>



Most academics have assumed that the theory of aided self-help was developed in the 1960s by John Turner, and have not recognized that it was an important technique employed by British colonial governments and by Puerto Rico beginning in the late 1930s. Harris, however, has shown that the theory was actually elaborated in the 1940s by Jacob Crane.<sup>108</sup> Beginning in 1939, Crane observed aided self-help housing initiatives in Ponce, Puerto Rico. According to Harris, Puerto Rico was the first place in which aided self-help became a significant element of housing policy. The Ponce project was a "land and utilities" scheme that provided serviced lots to low-income slum-dwellers. Harris claims that Puerto Rico shared its experience with aided self-help with the West Indian colonies through conferences and exchanges of experts.<sup>109</sup> More consideration of the importance of aided self-help in West Indian housing policy is needed.

## **Discussion**

The existing literature does not provide a full picture of housing policy in the British West Indies in the interwar and early postwar years. Writers have pointed out that planning ideas, such as garden city principles, influenced the design of colonial housing projects, and that the new professional planning organizations occasionally looked at colonial planning issues. There are a few brief accounts of housing initiatives in selected West Indian colonies during this period, but these do not offer comprehensive overviews of housing policy and some have made significantly misleading or inaccurate statements. In particular, regarding Trinidad, Hewitt has proposed a model for the evolution of housing policy, but her statement that government provision of housing did not begin in

that colony until 1956 is inconsistent with Robert Home's discussion of housing initiatives that took place starting in the 1930s. Such contradictions need to be resolved.

Writers have also provided little discussion of the changing forms that housing policy took in the colonial era. Peake has provided a rare account, noting that public housing was built in British Guiana, but that governments also looked to mortgage finance and, beginning in the 1950s, self-help to provide accommodation. Home has briefly discussed public housing and estate rehousing initiatives in Trinidad in the colonial period. Other writers have also considered the policy changes that took place, but their discussions focus on the post-independence era. None of the existing literature explicitly attempts to place West Indian housing policy in the context of the broad changes in colonial policy that took place in the 1930s and beyond. Given the apparent significance of activities in the West Indies for the development of colonial policy, this is a critical gap.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> S.D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, p. 61.
- <sup>2</sup> S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, p. 90.
- <sup>3</sup> H. Johnson, "Political Uses of Commissions of Enquiry," p. 256; H. Johnson, "Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization," p. 605; Rogozinski, *Brief History of the Caribbean*, p. 255; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, p. 47; D. Waddell, *The West Indies*, p. 110.
- <sup>4</sup> Johnson, "Political Uses," p. 256.
- <sup>5</sup> Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, p. 64.
- <sup>6</sup> Waddell, *The West Indies*, p. 110.
- <sup>7</sup> Johnson, "Political Uses," p. 256; H. Johnson, "Conversion of the British Official Classes," p. 56.
- <sup>8</sup> S. Basdeo, *Labour Organisation and Labour Reform*, p. 151.
- <sup>9</sup> S. Constantine, *Making of British Colonial Development Policy*, pp. 234-235.
- <sup>10</sup> Johnson, "Political Uses," p. 268.
- <sup>11</sup> M. Havinden and D. Meredith, *Colonialism*, p. 202.
- <sup>12</sup> Constantine, *Making of British*, pp. 235-236.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- <sup>14</sup> Home, "Transferring British Planning Law," p. 402.
- <sup>15</sup> D.J. Morgan, *Origins of British Aid Policy*, p. 77; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism*, p. 65.
- <sup>16</sup> C. Jeffries, *Whitehall and the Colonial Service*, p. 16; Johnson, "Political Uses," p. 268; B. Porter, *The Lion's Share*, p. 315; E. Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, p. 47; B. Welch "Table D'hôte or a la Carte?," p. 138; E. Wicker, "Colonial Development and Welfare," p. 183.
- <sup>17</sup> K. Blackburne, *Lasting Legacy*, p. 77; J. Khan, *Public Management*, p. 208; J.M. Lee, *Colonial Development and Good Government*, p. 45.
- <sup>18</sup> B. Brereton, *History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 184.
- <sup>19</sup> Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism*, p. 198; Johnson, "Political Uses," p. 269; Morgan, *Origins*, p. 77.
- <sup>20</sup> Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism*, p. 198.
- <sup>21</sup> Constantine, *Making*, pp. 239, 261.
- <sup>22</sup> Wicker, "Colonial Development and Welfare," p. 174.
- <sup>23</sup> Johnson, "Conversion of the British Official Classes," p. 55; Welch, "Table D'hôte or a la Carte?," p. 139.
- <sup>24</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction*, p. 290.
- <sup>25</sup> N. White, *Decolonisation: The British Experience*, p. 10.
- <sup>26</sup> Constantine, *Making*, pp. 259-260. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>27</sup> Blackburne, *Lasting Legacy*, p. 76.
- <sup>28</sup> Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, p. 47.
- <sup>29</sup> Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism*, p. 205.
- <sup>30</sup> Constantine, *Making*, pp. 231-232; Ingham, "Shaping Opinion on Development Policy," p. 689.
- <sup>31</sup> Porter and Stockwell, *British Imperial Policy*, p. 25.
- <sup>32</sup> J. Darwin, "Decolonization and the End of Empire."
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 552.
- <sup>35</sup> Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, p. 51.
- <sup>36</sup> Morgan, *Origins*, pp. 140-141.
- <sup>37</sup> A.N. Porter and A.J. Stockwell, *British Imperial Policy*, p. 40.
- <sup>38</sup> Great Britain, *United Kingdom Development and Welfare Acts*, p. 9.
- <sup>39</sup> R.F. Holland, *European Decolonization, 1918-1981*, p. 53; Johnson, "The British Caribbean," p. 612.
- <sup>40</sup> Johnson, "Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization," p. 611.
- <sup>41</sup> Home, "Transferring British Planning," p. 407.
- <sup>42</sup> C. Giles, *Housing Policy in the Developing World*, p. 1.
- <sup>43</sup> Home, *Of Planting and Planning*, p. 181.

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- <sup>44</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 1.
- <sup>45</sup> Christopher, *The British Empire at its Zenith*; R. Home, "Town Planning and Garden Cities," p. 23.
- <sup>46</sup> Home, "Town Planning and Garden Cities," p. 23; A. King, "Colonial Cities: Global Pivots," p. 24; A. King, *Urbanism, Colonialism*, p. 62.
- <sup>47</sup> R. Home, "Controlling Black Labour," p. 19.
- <sup>48</sup> King, "Colonial Cities," pp. 24-25; King, *Urbanism, Colonialism*, pp. 61-62.
- <sup>49</sup> King, *Urbanism, Colonialism*, p. 63.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 63.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 64.
- <sup>52</sup> King, "Colonial Cities," p. 12; King, *Urbanism, Colonialism*, p. 1.
- <sup>53</sup> S. Parnell, *Establishing Minimal and Minimum Urban Regulations*.
- <sup>54</sup> Home, "Town Planning, Segregation and Indirect Rule," p. 171.
- <sup>55</sup> C. Rakodi, "Colonial Urban Policy and Planning," p. 212.
- <sup>56</sup> Parnell, *Minimum Urban Regulations*, p. 3.
- <sup>57</sup> G. Tipple, "Colonial Housing Policy and the 'African Towns,'" p. 72.
- <sup>58</sup> H. Heisler, "Creation of a Stabilized Urban Society," p. 142.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Tipple, "Colonial Housing Policy," p. 71.
- <sup>61</sup> R. Home, "From Barrack Compounds," p. 332.
- <sup>62</sup> Tipple, "Colonial Housing Policy," p. 67.
- <sup>63</sup> Rakodi, "Colonial Urban Policy and Planning," p. 199.
- <sup>64</sup> Tipple, "Colonial Housing Policy," p. 73.
- <sup>65</sup> Heisler, "Creation," p. 142.
- <sup>66</sup> Rakodi, "Colonial Urban Policy," p. 199.
- <sup>67</sup> Tipple, "Colonial Housing Policy," p. 69.
- <sup>68</sup> Home, "From Barrack Compounds," p. 337.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 337.
- <sup>70</sup> Home, "From Barrack Compounds," p. 3.
- <sup>71</sup> R. Stren, "Housing Policy and the State," p. 88.
- <sup>72</sup> Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, pp. 177-178.
- <sup>73</sup> Basdeo, *Labour Organisation and Labour Reform*, p. 13.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 66.
- <sup>75</sup> R. Ramdin, *Chattel Slave to Wage Earner*, p. 89.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 86.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 89.
- <sup>78</sup> Basdeo, *Labour Organisation*, p. 23; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, pp. 177-178; Ramdin, *Chattel Slave*, pp. 86, 89.
- <sup>79</sup> K. Singh, *Race and Class*, p. 112.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 113.
- <sup>81</sup> Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, p. 177.
- <sup>82</sup> E. Williams, *History of the People*, pp. 230-231.
- <sup>83</sup> Basdeo, *Labour Organisation*, p. 177.
- <sup>84</sup> R. Home, "Town Planning, Segregation," p. 171; Home, "Town Planning and Garden Cities," p. 33; Home, "Transferring British Planning," p. 403.
- <sup>85</sup> R. Home, *Of Planting and Planning*, p. 113.
- <sup>86</sup> Home, "Transferring British Planning," p. 398.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 194.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>90</sup> Home, *Of Planting and Planning*, pp. 186-187; Home, "Transferring British Planning," p. 404.
- <sup>91</sup> Singh, *Race and Class*, p. 193.

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- <sup>92</sup> L. Hewitt, "Critical Review of State Involvement," pp. 158-160.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 149.
- <sup>94</sup> T. Klak, "Excluding the Poor"; T. Klak, "What Causes Arrears"; T. Klak, "Contextualizing State Housing Programs."
- <sup>95</sup> Klak, "Contextualizing State Housing Programs," p. 662.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 661.
- <sup>97</sup> Klak, "What Causes Arrears," p. 337.
- <sup>98</sup> Klak, "Excluding the Poor," p. 94.
- <sup>99</sup> K. Coit, "Politics and Housing Strategies."
- <sup>100</sup> A. Jones, "The Housing Experience in Barbados."
- <sup>101</sup> M. Watson and R. Potter, "Housing and Housing Policy," pp. 382-385.
- <sup>102</sup> L. Peake, "From Cooperative Socialism," p. 120.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 122-123.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 123.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 124. A. Strachan made a similar claim in a chapter on urbanization and planning in Guyana (Strachan, "Guyana," p. 158).
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 123-124.
- <sup>107</sup> R. Harris, "'A Burp in Church'"; R. Harris, "The Silence of the Experts."
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>109</sup> Harris, "The Silence of the Experts," p.169; Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, pp. 50-51.



# Chapter Three: The Expansion of West Indian Housing Policy

## Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that a comprehensive approach to government housing policy in the West Indies began to emerge in the late 1930s and developed in stages over the next twenty years. Key events in the development of this policy included the investigations of the Forster and Moyne Commissions. Both found that housing in the region was poor and made recommendations for its improvement. A second important event was the passage of the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare (CD & W) Act, which set aside funding for development projects, including housing, and established the Development and Welfare Organization. With the end of the Second World War, enactment of the second CD & W Act in 1945, and creation of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund in 1947, additional building materials, staff, and funding became available for housing initiatives.

In this thesis, housing policy refers to “a course of action or inaction” selected to address housing problems.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the late 1930s, government housing policy in the West Indies was poorly developed. Legislation and building projects were small in scale, scattered and lacked comprehensiveness. However, governments were aware of housing problems and consciously sought to address them, largely through public health

legislation. It was not until the latter half of the 1930s, though, that they were motivated to become more actively involved.

Housing policy varied between the West Indian colonies. As the colonial administration noted in 1945, "it is clearly impossible to lay down in one document principles in regard to housing schemes which will be wholly applicable to every West Indian Colony. Every Colony has its individual problems."<sup>2</sup> Each territory developed its own approach to housing, although governments did exchange information regarding their programs. Furthermore, by the mid-1940s, they were guided by common suggestions and directives from the Colonial Office and the Development and Welfare Organization based in Barbados. Later, the Caribbean Commission, the United Nations and the United States Foreign Operations Administration and Housing and Home Finance Agency also offered advice and assistance that led to common approaches to policy.

Policy did not evolve uncontested. In some cases, colonial governments resisted demands from the metropole that they develop housing programs. Opposition also came from within colonies, as private employers and colonial governments sometimes disagreed on who was responsible for providing worker accommodation.

Evidence in support of the argument presented in this, and the following, chapter was drawn in part from official publications and also from the records of the Colonial Office stored at the Public Records Office in London.<sup>3</sup> Classes of records consulted included those for individual colonies, for the West Indies as a whole (such as Development and Welfare Organization files) and for Colonial Office departments (such as the Social Welfare Department). For a detailed list of records consulted, please refer

to the bibliography. Since the study focused especially on Trinidad, selected issues of the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper were also important sources of evidence regarding contemporary housing problems, the initiatives designed to address them, and the varying responses by government, the media, industry and citizens to the housing problem and its attempted solutions. Issues of the *Guardian* for the years 1937 to 1950 were consulted. The years 1937 and 1938/39 were important because significant events in the formulation of housing policy, including riots and subsequent Royal Commissions sent to investigate them took place at this time. The issues published in the 1940s provided information about early steps in the expansion of Trinidad's housing policy. While it may have been useful to look at the paper for the 1950s, it proved difficult to obtain through interlibrary loan and time did not permit me to consult these. The above sources made it possible to compare the published and official (Colonial Office) approaches to housing policy, local government views, and to a lesser extent, colonial peoples' responses to policy initiatives.

In the West Indies, government involvement in housing began to increase significantly in the late 1930s. From that time, housing policy developed in stages, becoming more fully articulated in the various colonies in the 1950s. In this chapter, I first consider the Royal Commissions that visited the West Indies in the late 1930s. These were critical because they established a picture of contemporary housing conditions, revealed the complaints that individuals had with respect to their accommodation and highlighted the obstacles that governments faced in their attempts to provide adequate housing. As I will argue, these Commissions helped to ensure that housing became a significant issue for policy-makers in the West Indies and in the United

Kingdom. They also established the initial terms of policy. The chapter discusses why the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act was introduced and, later, amended to increase the funding it provided for projects, and examines its impact on the development of housing policy. It concludes by looking at how policy was contested, by colonial governments reacting to directives from the metropole and by private employers and local governments within individual colonies. Before beginning this discussion, however, it is necessary to provide some background information about housing conditions in the West Indies in the colonial period.

### **West Indian Housing Conditions in the 1930s**

Poor housing conditions were common in the West Indies, as accounts such as T.S. Simey's *Development and Welfare in the West Indies* demonstrated. Simey, an informed local observer, provided a description of housing conditions in the 1940s:

Usually the inhabitant of a rural area occupies a small house which would be referred to in Great Britain as a hut, about the same size as the garage put up in an English suburb to house the smallest size of car. Where the house is built on the occupier's own land, or where the tenure of land is reasonably secure, the construction of the house is often satisfactory enough: otherwise standards are nothing less than deplorable....

In the urban areas houses are crowded together in narrow courts ('yards') behind the streets or roads, or clustered together in insanitary slums where the deeply mired roads and the roaming pigs remind the visitor of conditions in English towns as described by contemporary writers during the earliest period of the Industrial Revolution. These districts are generally in close proximity to middle-class residential areas, where the houses erected according to designs copied from North America demonstrate a striking clash in the standards of living.<sup>4</sup>

Simey's observations reflect the different housing problems experienced in urban and rural areas. In general, contemporary descriptions in the 1930s and 1940s suggested that West Indian housing problems were "of a dual nature."<sup>5</sup> In the cities, the difficulty was one of overcrowding and slum conditions.<sup>6</sup> The Moyne Commission claimed that the main urban problems were overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions and lack of development planning.<sup>7</sup> According to the Commissioners, an important issue was the high rate of rural to urban migration. One purpose of any new housing policy should be to find some way to slow this process.<sup>8</sup>

In rural areas, governments had to address the different needs of workers housed on estates and of peasants who farmed their own small holdings.<sup>9</sup> In 1930, the West India Sugar Commission released its report, which stated that poor housing conditions were problematic on sugar estates. The Commission attributed this to "historical conditions," stating that:

After the abolition of slavery the old estate villages, whatever may have been their condition before, were allowed to fall into disrepair and decay, no special proprietary obligation being recognized towards their inhabitants....Secondly, the introduction of indentured Indian immigrants established, under Government sanction, a very low standard of estate housing for labourers.<sup>10</sup>

The Sugar Commission suggested that housing improvements were needed on estates, particularly improved sanitation. By the end of the 1930s, however, many labourers were still housed in barracks. These were buildings that usually consisted of a row of ten to twelve rooms, designed to accommodate single workers, although many had come to house entire families. Living conditions in barracks were generally very poor, as numerous accounts have shown.<sup>11</sup> A report written in 1939 by a Sanitary Inspector in



Trinidad, for example, listed several problems with barracks on sugar estates. These included: “a) Walls decayed and ruinous b) Roofs leaking c) Walls, partitions, and roofs black with smoke d) Rooms not sealed or close-boarded e) Rooms inadequately lighted and ventilated f) Rooms ventilate into one another.”<sup>12</sup>

Major G. St. J. Orde Browne, Labour Adviser to the Colonial Office, provided a good summary of the rural housing problem in a report that he wrote on labour issues in the West Indies.<sup>13</sup> He claimed that the end of the indentured labour system was a major cause of the poor housing conditions on sugar estates. During the days of slavery and subsequently, indenture, barracks had been built to accommodate the slaves and workers. When indenture was abolished, employers no longer had a responsibility to provide housing for their workers. Regardless, many workers continued to occupy the barracks. According to Orde Browne:

The old barracks, squalid, dilapidated and overcrowded though they might be, continued to house a considerable population, who regarded them as their homes and protested vigorously if required to leave them. It would indeed have been difficult for these people to find housing elsewhere, while it was also a convenience for the plantation to have at least the bulk of its labour residing near at hand. Modern opinion continued to demand improvements and the surviving ranges of barracks began to be replaced by small cottages better suited to family requirements than the older buildings intended for transient occupation only.<sup>14</sup>

A similar explanation for the continued existence of barrack housing was made in a later report by the British Government.<sup>15</sup> The report also pointed out that while some workers continued to occupy the old ranges, “a class of peasant occupiers evolved who built themselves houses, usually on rented land without security of tenure. Because they might have to be moved from site to site, these ‘chattel’ houses are small and flimsily built.”<sup>16</sup>

The housing situation in the oil fields of Trinidad was similar to that on the sugar estates in that some accommodation was provided by employers, often in barracks. Other workers lived in nearby towns, either in rental housing or accommodation that they had built themselves. A problem unique to the oil areas was that they had been built up so quickly. Development in the oilfields did not become significant until the early 1900s, after a well was drilled at Guyaguere in 1902. Several oil companies, including Trinidad Oilfields, Trinidad Leaseholds and United British Oilfields of Trinidad were established between 1910 and 1913. Around this time, drilling began at places like Point Fortin, La Brea, Brighton and Forest Reserve.<sup>17</sup> According to one observer, “that there is a housing problem in Fyzabad is hardly to be wondered at. The district never had time to grow up. Overnight as it were, the oil fever transformed Fyzabad from a humdrum peasant hamlet into a seething mound of industrialization.”<sup>18</sup>

Some West Indian oil companies and sugar estates began to improve the housing conditions of their workers in the interwar years. In the opinion of one British advisor who toured the West Indies in 1935, “the best housing I happened to see was on the Trinidad oil-fields,” however, it was built “for artisans rather than the day-labourers.”<sup>19</sup> By the 1930s, several companies were building detached cottages for their permanent workers, especially in Trinidad and British Guiana. As early as 1920, the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company had constructed a model village at Pitch Lake, New Jersey.<sup>20</sup> This included rent-free cottage and barrack-style housing for families and bachelors, respectively. The village was supplied with water, electricity and a sewage system.<sup>21</sup> According to one writer, the Asphalt Company had built the village in an attempt to

appease workers who had been taking intermittent strike action since 1917.<sup>22</sup> Another model village was laid out at Point Fortin by United British Oilfields of Trinidad (U.B.O.T.) in 1930.<sup>23</sup> With this project, the company provided about 300 lots on which labourers could build their own homes. U.B.O.T. also arranged for participating workers to receive credit in order to allow them to acquire building materials.<sup>24</sup> By 1937, about half of the lots had been taken up.

These company initiatives were local and limited in extent. After the 1937 strikes, private employers in Trinidad experimented with new schemes to provide their workers with better housing. While they acted as examples for the types of housing programs that could be instituted, they actually provided little new accommodation.

Prior to the release of the Forster and Moyne recommendations, West Indian governments had done little to improve housing conditions for low-income groups. In rural areas, governments did not actively intervene in housing provision before the 1940s. Instead, they relied upon public health authorities to condemn insanitary barracks. In Trinidad, by 1936, government policy was to eliminate barracks. In their place, “new housing conditions for labourers require[d] buildings of the cottage type consisting of not more than two rooms or sets of rooms each.”<sup>25</sup> It was through public health regulations rather than via public housing programs that governments sought to address rural housing problems. The estates were expected to use their own resources to rehouse workers in detached cottages. In urban areas, public housing programs did not prove an effective way to assist low-income families, either. Some public housing programs had been instituted, but they had not been particularly successful in helping their target groups.

According to a British observer, government schemes had produced “admirable houses,” but these “tended to fill up with artisans and the better paid clerks.”<sup>26</sup> It was not until the 1940s, effectively, that governments began to support workers’ housing schemes.

### **The Growth of Government Housing Policy: A Three-Phase Model**

In the 1930s, West Indian housing policy comprised isolated local initiatives. Government policy was largely restricted to scattered housing projects and to sanitary regulations enforced by Public Health authorities. Nothing like a regional approach to housing existed at this time. In this section, I argue that the expansion of colonial housing policy began in the mid-1930s, and took place in three phases.

In the early 1930s, housing was regulated by public health legislation in most of the West Indian colonies. In 1925, Jamaica passed a Public Health Law that governed conditions in barracks, gave health officers the authority to enforce overcrowding standards, and empowered them to monitor building plans. By 1932, the towns of Kingston and St. Andrew had recognized the need for slum clearance and considered putting plans into effect.<sup>27</sup> A Public Health Law that regulated housing was enacted in British Guiana in 1931.<sup>28</sup> In the early 1930s, the Government of Trinidad passed a Public Health Ordinance that authorized Sanitary Authorities to approve building plans. Building regulations were also in effect in Port of Spain and other larger urban areas.<sup>29</sup> St. Vincent passed “Dwelling House Regulations” in 1930, which gave the Sanitary Department the authority to enforce building plot, house size, ventilation and sanitary (i.e. latrine) requirements. Here, the government had also taken a more active role in

providing working class housing. By 1931, it had used Colonial Development Funds to build a “model village” for labourers.<sup>30</sup>

The first phase in the expansion of housing policy in the British West Indies was characterized by the introduction of early housing and town planning legislation in some of the colonies and by increasing government awareness of the housing problem. The phase began in 1935, when Trinidad passed its Slum Clearance and Housing Act, and lasted until 1939. During this first phase, there was little public investment in housing, but the Forster and Moyne Commissions served to draw government attention to the housing problem. The Commissions undertook investigations into the social and economic causes of unrest in the West Indies over the preceding years. According to their findings, poor housing represented a key aspect of social problems in the 1930s. Significant government activity in the housing sphere does not seem to have emerged until the 1940s, however.

The second stage in housing policy development lasted from 1940, when Britain passed the Colonial Development and Welfare (CD & W) Act, until 1945, when the Second World War came to an end. This phase marked the beginning of significant Colonial Office investment into housing. Through the CD & W Act, colonies were to receive funding for development projects, including housing. The funding that they received was limited and in general, colonial governments made little progress in improving housing during the War. However, uniquely in the West Indies, the Act also created an Office of the Comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies (the Development and Welfare Organization, or DWO), whose purpose was to administer



CD & W projects in the region. The establishment of the DWO was a significant event in the expansion of colonial housing policy primarily, but not only, in the West Indies. It published documents that shaped West Indian policy and that were shared with other colonies overseas. In 1944 a Town Planning Adviser by the name of Robert Gardner-Medwin was appointed to the DWO to assist with housing and planning initiatives. He began to coordinate and promote policy development and research efforts across the West Indies. A Building Development Advisor, Woodhouse, was appointed the following year, and eventually took over some of the duties of the Town Planning Advisor after that section was disbanded in 1947.

The third stage in the growth of colonial housing policy began in 1945, when Britain passed the second Colonial Development and Welfare Act. During this phase, which extended until the colonies began to gain independence in the early 1960s, housing policy gradually became more coordinated and comprehensive, and increased funds were made available for housing initiatives. With the end of the War, according to C.I. Burgess, an official with the Caribbean Commission, most British territories began their public housing programs.<sup>31</sup> Building supplies and staff slowly became more readily available, and the new CD & W Act allocated additional money for development initiatives. In addition, funds for rural housing projects grew with the passage of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund in 1947. By the early 1950s, regional conferences and staff exchanges had contributed to the emergence of a more coordinated regional housing policy.

## **Phase One: New Legislation, Royal Commissions and the Growth of Housing Policy**

The passage of Trinidad's Housing and Town Planning Act in 1935 marked the beginning of the first stage in the expansion of West Indian housing policy. The Act created a Housing and Planning Commission to oversee slum clearance and rehousing schemes in Port of Spain, the capital. Its example was soon followed. In 1936, Barbados passed the Bridgetown Housing Act, which gave the government the authority to undertake slum clearance work in that town. Jamaica established a Central Housing Advisory Board in 1935 and passed slum clearance legislation in 1937.<sup>32</sup> Trinidad's Act was significant because, according to Robert Home, it "reflected a new colonial policy of intervention in housing and welfare."<sup>33</sup> Town planning legislation had previously been introduced in some British colonies such as in India, Palestine and the Federated Malay states, but "these were not part of, and did not result in, any general Colonial Office policy towards town planning."<sup>34</sup> After the CD & W Act was introduced in 1940, Trinidad's legislation became the model for housing and planning laws enacted as part of the new colonial policy in other West Indian colonies in the 1940s.

The Royal Commissions that visited the West Indies to look into social unrest in the 1930s had a strong impact on the development not only of housing policy but of British colonial policy in general. The unrest created concern because of international and domestic pressure on Britain as a colonial power.<sup>35</sup> Trinidad was of particular interest because its oilfields would have strategic value in the event of war. In a

confidential letter to Sir Walter Citrine, later a member of the Moyne Commission,

Ormsby Gore, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote that:

The Trinidad oilfield is one of the few Empire oil fields on which the Admiralty and Air [Ministry] will be able to rely in time of war...Oil wells with their complicated machinery are singularly vulnerable to sabotage, and if fires are started millions of pounds worth of damage can be done.<sup>36</sup> (Refer to handwritten note in Figure 2).

As previous writers have noted, international criticism of Britain's colonial policy also motivated the British government to appoint the Forster and Moyne Commissions.

In the domestic sphere, reports of poor social and economic conditions in the West Indies had attracted the attention of the British press. As a case in point, Britain's *Sunday Express* paper called the British Empire a "neglected garden" and, referring to unrest in the West Indies, called for more British investment in colonial development.<sup>37</sup> In announcing that the Moyne Commission would be sent to the West Indies, Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, acknowledged that Britain had to address social unrest in the colonies in the 1930s:

We must recognize that these outbreaks expressed a sense of unrest which was fairly widespread in the West Indies and which arose from feelings which we must respect, feelings which would remain a source of further troubles....These feelings of unrest were a protest against the economic distress of the colonies themselves, a protest against some of the consequences of that economic distress—uncertainty of employment, low rates of wages, in many cases bad housing conditions, and so on.<sup>38</sup>

MacDonald's speech reveals that he saw a connection between bad housing and poor economic conditions. This link was explored by the Forster and Moyne Commissions in the late 1930s.

12 accidents should not recur. 2

The Trinidad oil field is one of the few Empire oil fields in which the Admiralty and Air Ministry will have to rely in time of war. Already there are large Admiralty & Air Force contracts for the supply of different types of oil fuel which are got and refined in Trinidad, including arrangements for the putting up of a new  $\frac{3}{4}$  million pound plant to produce a special spirit of the highest-grade for our fast fighter aeroplanes for the defence of London. Oil wells and refineries with their complicated machinery are singularly vulnerable to sabotage, and if a fire <sup>is</sup> started millions of pounds worth of damage can be done. It therefore believes

Figure 2. Handwritten note from Ormsby-Gore to Walter Citrine regarding the need to resolve social problems in Trinidad (Source: Ormsby Gore, "Personal and Confidential," 7 October 1937 [CO 295/600/6]).

### **The Forster Commission**

Following Trinidad's 1937 strikes, the British Government decided to send a Commission of Inquiry to the colony to look into the causes of the unrest. The Commission was the most significant of three sent to investigate disturbances in West Indian Colonies around the same time; inquiries were also conducted in Barbados in 1937 and British Guiana in 1936-1937. All three made recommendations pertaining to housing conditions.

Headed by John Forster, Trinidad's Commission arrived in Port of Spain in September of 1937.<sup>39</sup> It began to hear evidence from government officials, oil and agricultural companies and citizens' organizations, amongst others. Evidence given to the Commissioners paints a picture of housing conditions as they existed in the late 1930s and reveals the nature of Trinidad's housing problem. The Commission found that one of the major problems faced by members of the working class was the condition of their housing. In fact, the Commissioners concluded that "in no aspect of our inquiry have we been more impressed by the evidence placed before us and by our own investigations than as regards the conditions in which large numbers of the working population, both urban and rural, are housed."<sup>40</sup> In questioning the Sugar Manufacturers' Association about the estates, Sir Arthur Pugh, one of the Commissioners, made this view explicit. He asked one of the representatives of the Sugar Manufacturers' Association:

If people are housed in unsatisfactory dwellings and insanitary conditions, there is no concept of home life engendered. These people are quite discontented and subject to all kinds of influences and that apart from the question of health and social well-being that may in itself be inimical to the well-being of the Colony or to the Community?<sup>41</sup>



The Forster Report described poor conditions in Fyzabad, the village in which the 1937 riots had first erupted. The Senior Medical Officer of Health for the Northern region, Dr. de Verteuil, offered a report to the Commission that provided an extensive discussion of the housing situation. Identifying a need to remedy unhealthy conditions in several villages, including Fyzabad, de Verteuil wrote that: "it is obvious that the radical cleaning up of these villages by slum clearance and other measures under the Public Health Ordinance is of the utmost importance if a permanent settlement of the present unsettled situation is to be attained."<sup>42</sup>

In 1937, Sir Cosmo Parkinson, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote about a conversation that he had had with Lord Cadman, who was a member of the Advisory Council of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in the late 1930s. Cadman had said that:

He is not surprised that there were riots as Leaseholds [an oil company] have built splendid accommodation for their white employees and done nothing for their coloured and black and that the local manager of Leaseholds, one Johnston, can't be got to realize that it is essential to consider the needs and amenities of native employees. The problem is that Beaumont here and Johnston in Trinidad have got a South African Gold-mining complex about 'niggers.' Leaseholds is very wealthy and paying enormous dividends and is foolishly shortsighted over its treatment of labour.<sup>43</sup>

Many people testifying before the Commission made reference to the poor housing provided by large employers. In giving its evidence to the Forster Commission, the Oilfield Workers Union stated that housing provided by oil companies was inadequate, in both quality and quantity. The Union representatives acknowledged that oil companies had been taking some actions to improve workers' housing, but that these were

inadequate. Mr. Rienzi, a major union leader, told the Commissioners that “it is only, as a matter of fact, since the workers have gone on strike and focused public attention on their difficulties that oil companies are making an effort to provide housing accommodation for workers.”<sup>44</sup> He suggested that they were trying to present themselves in a deceptively favourable light to the Commissioners. Rienzi went on to recount how before the unrest, Trinidad Leaseholds had built some cottages for which they were charging approximately ten dollars per month in rent, but “when the trouble came along, I understood it was reduced to \$7.50. Since the arrival of the Commissioners in Trinidad it has been reduced to \$5 per month.”<sup>45</sup> Rienzi also discussed the barrack system on the sugar estates, claiming that barracks “should have been demolished about 25-30 years ago, but the influence of our Plantocracy with the Government has been mainly responsible for the continuance of these unhealthy and insanitary barracks.”<sup>46</sup>

Some industrial concerns found themselves attempting to justify or explain poor housing conditions on their agricultural estates or oil fields. Responding to criticisms that Dr. de Verteuil had made regarding housing conditions at Woodford Lodge Estate, the Estate Manager, Mr. Robinson, said that the company had been attempting to address the housing problem. According to Robinson, “none of us can say that we have done as much as we might...But I do say that we have had very hard times and the Government has never, in any way, said that barracks should be done away with or that we could not build barrack rooms.”<sup>47</sup> Despite this claim, as of 1934, Trinidad had introduced regulations that stated that barracks could have no more than two rooms each. Government policy was to encourage their replacement with cottage housing.<sup>48</sup>

Oil companies testifying before the Commission challenged the idea that they should be responsible for providing accommodation for their employees. One company official, H.D. Fletcher, told the Commission that there were significant disadvantages to company housing, in particular that accommodation was tied to employment. If dismissed, a worker was required to vacate his lodgings almost immediately. Fletcher opposed the alternative idea of providing company land for workers who wanted to build their own homes because it would not permit them security of tenure. He also said that the oil fields were not a good place for family housing, as they lacked amenities like schools. Rather than living on the oil fields, Fletcher believed that workers would be better off if they commuted from the nearby town of San Fernando.<sup>49</sup> He suggested that there was a role for government and private, speculative builders to play in providing worker housing in the oil region.<sup>50</sup> Another oil company representative, Colonel Hickling of APEX Trinidad, suggested that government should be involved in housing of oil workers by laying out land for housing developments.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to their calls for government involvement in housing provision, the oil companies claimed that existing building standards contributed to the problem because they led to high building costs. A representative of the Trinidad Petroleum Development Corporation, for example, complained that “unless the present building regulations are very considerably modified, it is difficult to see how these conditions can be materially improved.”<sup>52</sup> The Sugar Manufacturers’ Association also cast blame on government building standards for aggravating Trinidad’s housing problem. Major Torrance, one of the Association’s representatives, stated that building regulations had inhibited his

company's attempts to improve worker housing.<sup>53</sup> Torrance told how in 1933, his company had reached an agreement with the Health Authority to construct units that would each accommodate four families. Shortly thereafter, the Health Authority "suddenly" introduced new building regulations that made these buildings illegal, restricting new housing to two-room, two-family buildings.

The Forster Commission seems to have accepted some of the arguments advanced by the employers. It recommended that in rural areas, the government should provide serviced lots on which people could build their own homes. Furthermore, the Commission suggested that the government should give out small grants to allow people to purchase building materials. Although the term had not yet been coined, this amounted to a recommendation for aided self-help.

The Commission did not absolve the employers of blame for their contribution to the housing crisis. In their analysis of the "underlying causes" of the disturbances, the Commissioners noted that many employers had not provided for the well-being of their workers and that housing conditions represented a glaring example of the employers' neglect. Under such conditions, the Commissioners said that "it would be unreasonable to expect anything but discontent."<sup>54</sup> Oil companies were seen as particularly villainous in this regard as they were allegedly making large profits. The Commission also advised the colonial government to force agricultural estates and oil companies to upgrade workers' housing where it was found to be of poor quality. According to the Commissioners, barrack accommodation should be eliminated and the government should grant financial assistance to the estates in order to allow them to re-house their

workers. In addition, the Commission urged that Trinidad's Health Department should be given the authority to order the demolition of "insanitary" property.<sup>55</sup> It had found that even within Port of Spain, barracks left over from the days of slavery and indentured labour were still common and that these were "indescribable in their lack of elementary needs of decency."<sup>56</sup>

The Forster Report attracted much attention, both in Trinidad and in Britain.<sup>57</sup> Before the Commission's investigations began, an editorial in the *Trinidad Guardian* had expressed the view that it would be "of great importance not only to Trinidad, but to other Colonies, as its results may influence policy in several departments of West Indian affairs."<sup>58</sup> This view was shared by some members of the British House of Lords.<sup>59</sup>

While many people in Trinidad approved of the work of the Commission, others did not. The editor of one newspaper, the *Trinidad Sunday Chronicle*, accused the Commission of bias, writing that it had only "grudgingly" heard from labour representatives. In the editor's view, "certain interests" (i.e. the oil and sugar estates) received more consideration during the inquiry. This led him to ask: "shall we again be treated with the traditional histrionics comprising, among other things, crocodile tears for the workers, reams of paper on which are written picturesque rhetorical balderdash and amoral platitudes [sic]."<sup>60</sup> A correspondent for *The Times* of London reported in March of 1938 that the Forster Report was received with opinion "varying from strong approval to enthusiastic condemnation" in Trinidad. According to the article, most of the large employers found the Commission's recommendations to be reasonable.<sup>61</sup> After the Commission's report was released, the *Trinidad Guardian* maintained that it had done



useful work: "The report will help to crystallize and encourage effort already begun or contemplated for the benefit of the worker."<sup>62</sup> Conversely, in British Parliament, the Labour member Arthur Creech Jones said that Commissions had repeatedly reported on conditions in the West Indies and had had no real effect in the past. However, Creech Jones, who was to become Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Labour Government after 1945, also claimed that "some of the proposals in the report, if adopted, would be the beginning of a new chapter in social and industrial legislation and the repercussions would be felt in other parts of the West Indies."<sup>63</sup>

Employers began to work on improving housing conditions immediately following the release of the Forster Commission's recommendations. A few had started soon after the July strikes had ended. The *Trinidad Guardian* ran a series of articles on "Industrial Housing Problems" in late 1937 and 1938. These outlined private initiatives to improve workers' housing. Among these was a move by United British Oilfields (U.B.O.T.) to expand its housing program, with the intent of promoting home-ownership amongst its employees.<sup>64</sup> To this end, it decided to expand its existing owner-builder scheme in which it provided lots upon which employees could build. In addition, U.B.O.T. planned to build houses for sale through the hire-purchase system. In such schemes, the vendor retains ownership of the house until all payments have been received. Articles on APEX Trinidad and Trinidad Leaseholds indicate that these companies were also expanding their housing programs, as were sugar companies such as Usine St. Madeleine and Esperanza.<sup>65</sup> Several were building "model villages," which provided not only better housing, but also recreational, medical and child care facilities.

This was a continuation of the practices of some employers prior to 1937, which gained a new momentum as a result of the unrest.

Following the Forster Report, the Trinidad Government prepared new Housing and Town Planning Ordinances, created a new Planning and Housing Commission and applied for a loan of \$1,000,000 from Britain, to be used in part for housing projects. The government began constructing workers' housing at Laventille, although this was not "directly" because of the Forster Commission since it had been planned previously.<sup>66</sup> In addition, it began to rebuild housing on the Government Farm.<sup>67</sup> All this took place as Britain prepared to send another Commission to the West Indies to look into social welfare issues.

### **The Moyne Commission**

The West India Royal Commission, commonly known as the Moyne Commission after its chair, began its investigations in the West Indies after it arrived in Jamaica on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1938.<sup>68</sup> It differed from the Forster Commission in that its purpose was to investigate the causes of the social unrest across the British West Indies as a whole, although it heard similar evidence. It was a much greater investigation and had a larger impact. The Commission toured all of the West Indian colonies, arriving in Jamaica in November, 1938 and departing from Trinidad in March, 1939. It proved to be significant because it drew further attention to development issues in the colonies. According to an editorial in the *Trinidad Guardian*, "public opinion in Britain has been sufficiently aroused to make it easier than heretofore to attract and maintain sympathetic interest in

the affairs of these Dependencies and ensure some continuity of policy.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the editorial stated that “we regard the appointment of the Royal Commission as *prima facie* evidence, at least, that the Mother Country is no longer content to disregard her responsibility for rescuing these dependent and undeveloped parts of the Empire from conditions over which, in the nature of things, they have no control.”<sup>70</sup>

The Moyne Commission had a significant effect on the development of West Indian housing policy. According to the later official view, “the recommendations of the West India Royal Commission ... provide[d] a landmark in the development of modern social housing policies in the dependencies.”<sup>71</sup> The Commission’s recommendations were released in 1940. Publication of its full report was delayed until after the war, in 1945, because of concern that the findings might provoke adverse reaction in the United States.<sup>72</sup> Its recommendations addressed a range of housing and planning issues in both urban and rural areas. One of its suggestions was that West Indian governments should develop town planning legislation. The Commissioners advocated that “where they do not exist, powers should be taken to control the siting of new housing and...this control should be exercised with regard to considerations of health, sanitation and water supply.”<sup>73</sup> The different housing conditions and challenges faced in urban and rural areas led the Commissioners to suggest that different strategies were needed for housing people in each setting. Therefore, a second recommendation was that in the cities the focus should be slum clearance, with rehousing programs that provided rental accommodation.<sup>74</sup> West Indian governments that had not already done so should enact slum clearance and rehousing legislation similar to that already in place in Britain. In the

countryside, programs should help people to build their own homes. Alternatively, initiatives could provide people with chattel housing that they could acquire through hire-purchase.<sup>75</sup> Estate labourers should be given security of tenure and workers' housing on the estates should generally take the form of separate cottages. However, some range accommodation might be permitted for unmarried men and small families. Finally, the Commission recommended that a small staff should be appointed to oversee and advise West Indian governments on housing and town planning initiatives.

The Moyne Commission played a significant role in shaping the new British colonial policy that emerged in 1940. Its most significant recommendation, in terms of the development of colonial policy in general, was that Britain should create "a central organization, presided over by a Comptroller" to manage development and welfare projects in the West Indies.<sup>76</sup> This was soon done. The Commission also suggested that a West Indian Welfare Fund should be established in order to "finance schemes for the general improvement of education, the health services, housing and slum clearance, the creation of labour departments, the provision of social welfare facilities, and land settlement, apart from the cost of purchase of land."<sup>77</sup> The Fund would provide the West Indian colonies with £1,000,000 per year for development and welfare initiatives. These recommendations informed the Colonial Development and Welfare (CD & W) Act, which was passed in 1940.

## **Phase Two: The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940**

The second phase in the growth of West Indian housing policy was ushered in by the passage of the CD & W Act, which was significant to British West Indian housing policy for two principal reasons. Firstly, it reflected a new, general colonial policy that was concerned about social welfare issues, including housing. As such, it provided funding to undertake housing and other welfare schemes. Secondly, the CD & W Act established an organization, known as the Office for the Comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies (or the DWO). The purpose of this organization was to advise colonial governments on development projects and to make recommendations for funding these.

The movement towards a new colonial policy began in the 1930s, as evidence of discontent throughout the British colonial empire grew. The Royal Commissions that visited the West Indies were not the first to identify the social causes of unrest in the region. As already noted, in *Warning from the West Indies: A Tract for Africa and Empire*, W.M. MacMillan cautioned that Britain needed to become more concerned about colonial development issues. He characterized the Colonial Development Fund, established in 1929 in order to finance development initiatives, as “a modest but useful beginning,” but he believed that “to meet the fundamental problem more is needed than the Colonial Development Fund as now restricted.”<sup>78</sup> His was an early call for increased British investment into colonial development projects, such as the CD & W Act represented.



In its early years, Development and Welfare policy was focused on collecting social and economic information on the colonies, providing staff training, carrying out a limited number of development schemes and planning for postwar projects.<sup>79</sup> The DWO experienced initial difficulties in promoting development projects. As Kenneth Blackburne, Administrative Secretary to the DWO between 1943 and 1946 later recorded in his memoirs, there were tensions between the organization and colonial governments. In the DWO's early years, its staff had prepared recommendations for improving conditions in the various colonies, but their suggestions had not been implemented. As several authors have emphasized, the organization was advisory in nature, having no authority over colonial governments.<sup>80</sup> Blackburne explained that "it is one thing to recommend action to remedy obvious ills; it is quite another to persuade no less than thirteen legislatures, six colonial governors and eight administrators—frustrated themselves, but also apathetic and suspicious after years of neglect—that the recommendations could and should be carried out."<sup>81</sup>

The low level of activity undertaken through the CD & W funds in the early 1940s has also been attributed to a lack of proposals for projects from the colonies. In a discussion of colonial development, Hilton Poynton, the Deputy Under-Secretary of State with the Colonial Office, confirmed that "the war made it impossible to take full advantage of [the CD & W] Act."<sup>82</sup> In fact, it seems that the British Government never anticipated that the whole amount of funds allocated to CD & W in 1940 would be spent. According to the *Statement of Policy on Colonial Development and Welfare*, the initial figures of up to £5,000,000 per year to be made available for colonial development

schemes and a maximum of £500,000 per year for colonial research projects through the Act were “maximum figures.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, the British Government claimed that “it is not expected that, in either, the scale of expenditure will be attained at once; indeed it is improbable that conditions will permit of its being reached at any time during the war.”<sup>84</sup>

Despite the funding provided by the CD & W Act, little progress was made in improving the condition of West Indian housing during the war.<sup>85</sup> Housing schemes in the early 1940s were inhibited by wartime materials shortages and lack of staff.<sup>86</sup> In 1945, an official British publication reported that:

The extent of the housing problem cannot yet be determined accurately, but from such information as is available it is probably fair to say that at least half the population of the British West Indian Colonies is living in conditions which call for improvement. The problem is immense. It amounts to the provision of new houses or the repair of existing houses for one and a half million people. The problem has been made worse by war conditions. The general shortage and the high cost of building materials have forced many house owners to postpone the execution of normal repairs.<sup>87</sup>

According to the Comptroller for Development and Welfare in 1945, Sir Frank Stockdale, CD & W funds were inadequate to implement the housing recommendations of the Moyne Commission. Even with the increased funding under the new Act, CD & W money would not permit of a resolution to the housing problem. A report on CD & W for 1945-46 noted that:

The housing problem in the West Indies cannot be solved by subsidies under the CD & W Acts of 1940 and 1945. If all the funds available over the next 10 years were devoted to housing improvement, conditions would still be far from satisfactory. This stark fact has to be faced in forming a housing policy. In any country, economic improvement is the forerunner of housing improvement.<sup>88</sup>

The British government agreed that additional funding was needed if colonies were to carry out successful development programs. In 1945, a new CD & W Act was passed, increasing funding available to the Colonies to a maximum of £17.5 million per year, with an additional £1 million per annum for research.<sup>89</sup> Blackburne later wrote that it was at this time that “the new colonial policy was...well and truly launched.”<sup>90</sup>

### **Phase Three: Housing Policy After 1945**

The third phase in the expansion of housing policy was characterized by increasing government involvement in housing provision. The Development and Welfare Organization took on an important role in promoting housing policy and in creating a regional approach. During this phase, the end of World War II and the passage of the second CD & W Act meant that greater levels of funding were available for housing after 1945. Further stimulus was given by the creation of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (SILWF) in 1947, and later, by agreements with the United States Foreign Operations Administration to provide technical assistance to the West Indies for aided self-help projects.

The DWO first intervened significantly into housing programs by publishing *Housing in the West Indies*.<sup>91</sup> This was produced in 1945 because the end of the war and the increase of funds available under the new Colonial Development and Welfare Act (1945) made it likely that governments would soon be able to expand their housing programs.<sup>92</sup> It was important because it established standards and program guidelines that formed the basis for policies adopted by governments in the region during the latter

half of the 1940s and into the 1950s. Through *Housing*, the DWO influenced policy in the region, and apparently elsewhere, for several years. In 1949, G.A. Atkinson, the new Colonial Housing Liaison Officer with the British Building Research Station, suggested that the document “seems to me still one of the best, if not the best, manuscript on housing in the Colonies and I would like to send copies to my non-West Indian correspondents.”<sup>93</sup>

In publishing *Housing*, the DWO made it clear that it assumed that a housing program was necessary in the West Indies. This publication suggested that “the first step towards a comprehensive housing programme is the enactment of housing and planning legislation on the line now commonly accepted by local authorities in Great Britain.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, DWO staff believed from the beginning that Britain should be a model for the West Indies in terms of housing.

One of *Housing*’s important contributions to policy was that it argued that estates and governments should have “joint responsibility” for the housing of rural workers.<sup>95</sup> Before 1945, most West Indian programs had focused on urban housing. According to an official British publication, “Colonial Governments, apart from land settlements, have mainly directed their attention to the improvement of urban housing conditions.”<sup>96</sup> Contemporary official publications made little mention of government-funded efforts to improve rural housing. This is despite the fact that both the Forster and Moyne Commissions had suggested that government assistance was needed in rural areas. Immediately following World War II, governments reconciled themselves to the principle that they should assist with estate housing. Later, Sugar Industry Labour Welfare



Committees took over most of the responsibility for rural housing. These were established after “bulk purchasing agreements” between Britain and the colonies in 1947 led to an increased price for sugar. The extra funds that were generated were used to create the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (SILWF). Its purpose was to improve the living conditions of sugar workers in British Colonies and it was principally used to carry out housing projects. Barbados, British Guiana, Jamaica and Trinidad all benefited from the Fund.<sup>97</sup>

The DWO also shaped West Indian housing policy through conferences and meetings. In 1950, it sponsored an informal meeting of housing and planning staff in Barbados. This paved the way for the discussion that took place at the West Indian Housing Conference the following year. Participants at the 1950 meeting noted that less progress had been made than had been hoped. They cited several reasons for this. Firstly, building materials were very costly. Secondly, public housing was too expensive for the working class population that it was intended to accommodate because governments wanted to charge an “economic” rent. This meant that they did not want to provide subsidies for low-income housing; they hoped that income from rental fees would cover the cost of land acquisition, development and building. Thirdly, building standards were too high, resulting in housing that was not affordable to low-income groups. Finally, colonies that had enacted housing legislation had based it on the United Kingdom’s 1936 Housing Act. This was inappropriate because it resulted in “over-elaborate legislative and administrative structures.”<sup>98</sup>



In 1951, the DWO sponsored a British West Indian Conference on Housing in Barbados. Participants reflected on the ideas presented in *Housing in the West Indies* and articulated new directions for housing policy. The idea for the conference originated Trinidad, where Member of Parliament Victor Bryan had suggested that it would be useful in light of the poor housing conditions throughout the West Indies.<sup>99</sup> Like the 1950 meeting, one significant conclusion was that, in the words of the Conference Report, “housing legislation based on the United Kingdom Housing Act of 1936 was not now applicable to the Caribbean.”<sup>100</sup> Delegates advised that the DWO should devise standard planning and housing legislation that could be applied throughout the West Indies and that these new laws should be based on those already enacted in Trinidad and Jamaica. This recommendation was paradoxical, however, as the Trinidad and Jamaica legislation was also based on the 1936 British Act.<sup>101</sup>

An important advancement in West Indian housing policy took place after 1947, when the SILWF was created. It significantly increased the scale of rural housing provision, which had not been a focus of early government initiatives. In Trinidad, for example, the government passed an Ordinance that established a SILWF Committee in 1951. The Committee’s purpose was to manage the colony’s share of the SILWF. In its first six years of operation, between August, 1952 and December, 1957, it distributed funds that helped 3,314 workers to build homes. By 1957, the goal of Trinidad’s SILWF Committee had become the eradication of all barrack housing within two years.<sup>102</sup> In British Guiana, SILWF funds were used to house “superfluous” labour on the sugar estates. The Venn Commission of 1949, which inquired into the colony’s sugar industry,

found that estates should only be required to house their “key” workers.<sup>103</sup> The Moyne Commission had earlier made a similar suggestion, stating that if estates were to house non-essential labourers, they should receive government aid.<sup>104</sup> For other workers, loans should be provided by government. In British Guiana, SILWF funds were used for these workers because government funds were inadequate. Under the SILWF Commission’s policy, estates were to provide the land for non-nuclear workers and the Committee would grant them loans for building. In Trinidad, the SILWF Committee operated slightly differently, normally acquiring land from estates, with government paying for development.<sup>105</sup>

In rural areas in particular, housing policy further evolved through the efforts of technical advisors from the United States Foreign Operations Administration. The first agreement for assistance was made in Antigua, where a pressing housing shortage resulted after a hurricane hit the island in 1950. Within individual colonies, the Colonial Office continued to promote the development of housing policy into the 1950s.

Between 1935 and the 1960s, housing policy in the West Indies became more coordinated and comprehensive. As the Colonial Office put it in 1952, “the period has been one of some achievement, much anxious thought and, in more recent years, some valuable classification of policy and sharing of experience.” The housing problem had not been resolved when the colonies began to gain their independence in the 1960s—far from it—but policy had advanced, benefiting from the light of experience.

## Contesting Housing Policy

Policies and programs suggested by the DWO and the Colonial Office were sometimes resisted in the colonies. In the early 1940s, according to one author, “not quite all Governors and officials were interested in [the] longer term issues [that were of concern to the Development and Welfare Organisation]; a few were parochial in outlook and resented what they regarded as outside interference with their jurisdiction and administration.”<sup>106</sup> In discussing conditions in the British and American Caribbean territories in the 1950s, Mary Proudfoot remarked that governments “are by tradition extremely suspicious of any attempt on the part of the United Kingdom to interfere in their affairs, and the underlying fear that grants might result in subsequent financial controls died hard.”<sup>107</sup> Sometimes, colonial governments argued that they did not have adequate funds to carry out development projects. The example of British Guiana demonstrates this. At other times, housing policies developed within colonies were contested. This was the case in Trinidad, where government and the estates and oil companies disputed their responsibility for housing workers.

Colonial governments were occasionally reluctant to take on major housing programs, as in British Guiana in the 1950s. Housing initiatives were costly and governments believed that their funds were inadequate. In such cases, the metropole occasionally forced colonies to expand their building programs. In the 1950s, British Guiana’s housing remained in poor condition. The Governor, Sir A. Savage, telegraphed the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1953 to report on a recent visit that he had made to the sugar-producing region. On this trip, against a background of ongoing labour

unrest, he had found that “estate housing, while improving, represents [a] threat to public security.”<sup>108</sup> The poor housing conditions attracted much attention in the colony that year. In a letter to Savage, S.E.V. Luke, the Comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies, wrote that “so much attention has been focused by the Press and in Parliament on the contribution made by bad housing conditions to your present political difficulties.”<sup>109</sup>

The Colonial Office had become concerned with events in British Guiana because a serious constitutional crisis developed in the fall of 1953 and suspension of the colony’s constitution was imminent.<sup>110</sup> In order to help restore order in the colony, the Colonial Office planned to establish a “housing drive.” It claimed that a new administrative structure for the housing authority was needed. Savage, however, did not think that this was necessary and officials debated how best to convince him that it was. Responding to the Colonial Office’s suggestion that British Guiana needed a new Housing Authority, Savage replied that the colony did not have plans to carry out any major schemes. Public housing was too expensive and government programs would primarily be limited to sites and services and to the building “of moderate size houses.”<sup>111</sup> Savage’s memo created consternation in the Colonial Office. According to one official, the “absence of a large Government building plan is to my mind disastrous- he will never get a housing drive going quickly if he relies mainly on lending money to people to build their own houses- and those that will get built will not be for the poorest income groups- housing experience in the U.K. before the war showed that.”<sup>112</sup>



Philip Rogers, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, was concerned that a draft memorandum to Savage regarding the need for reform of the housing program administration had not been worded with enough tact. Rogers "[thought] we should give Sir A. Savage an opportunity of further consideration before overruling him."<sup>113</sup> Colonial officials believed that in order to carry out an effective housing drive, new planning staff would have to be found for the colony. Bishop, Atkinson and Woodhouse agreed that someone with administrative abilities was needed. In Woodhouse's view, Michael Costello, British Guiana's existing planner, had technical abilities but his administrative skills were inadequate.<sup>114</sup>

In November of 1953, Savage telegraphed the Secretary of State regarding his intention to renew Costello's contract. The Colonial Office reacted to this news with some dismay. Mayle, Assistant Secretary at the Colonial Office, noted that "the Governor's telegram...is disturbing. He apparently contemplates carrying out the housing drive with the existing local machinery and staff in which case there won't be much of a drive."<sup>115</sup>

Savage eventually yielded to Britain's insistence on the need for administrative reform and a major housing program. In order to help the colony prepare, two advisers travelled to British Guiana from the United Kingdom. One of these men was A.E. Hickenbotham, an Assistant Secretary at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. The other was J.C. Walker, who worked as an architect with the Office of the Housing Adviser to the Colonial Office. Hickenbotham and Walker helped to prepare a report that outlined British Guiana's housing program.<sup>116</sup> Presented in May, 1954, it described



government policy, which was primarily designed to help low-income families. The emphasis was to be on aided self-help, although for the poorest families the government would construct housing “for rental or sale.” Through the housing drive, approximately 4,500 houses were to be built by the end of 1955, with an additional 2,000 houses per year to be furnished subsequently.<sup>117</sup> Pushed by the Colonial Office, British Guiana eventually responded to the housing problem, but only after a constitutional crisis forced it to do so. Furthermore, the colony never actually achieved the target of 4,500 homes; only 3,218 were built and these were not completed until 1959.<sup>118</sup>

## **Discussion**

In a 1951 article on “the World-Wide Housing Problem,”<sup>119</sup> Jacob Crane and Edward Paxton outlined postwar housing conditions and policies in both industrialized and undeveloped countries. They remarked on the growing level of state involvement in housing, noting that problems such as materials and labour shortages had led to government interventions in the form of price and rent controls, materials control, and central purchasing of building materials.

Within the British colonies, governments were not always so committed to the idea that they should facilitate social development. In the housing sphere, governments and private industries sometimes came into conflict regarding who was responsible for providing working class accommodation. This debate remained unresolved during the early expansion of West Indian housing policy. Trinidad’s oil and sugar companies argued that the government should look after workers’ housing. The Moyne Commission

had suggested in 1940 “that in the case of estate housing, estates should provide the land, including vegetable plots, and give reasonable security of tenure, and the houses should be built under approved schemes financed by government at low rates of interest.”<sup>120</sup> In Trinidad, Governor Young responded negatively to this recommendation. In a letter to Lord Lloyd, he wrote that he did not believe that government should finance housing initiatives on land that it did not own.<sup>121</sup>

West Indian governments did not undertake any rural housing programs before 1945, despite recommendations from the Forster and Moyne Commissions that they should do so. *Housing in the West Indies* referred to estate housing as a “vexed question,”<sup>122</sup> but it set out the principle, first established in the Moyne Commission recommendations, that estate housing was a “joint responsibility”<sup>123</sup> of government and the estates. After 1945, governments gradually accepted more responsibility for rural housing. In 1945, Trinidad began a workers’ housing project carried out jointly with Caroni and Williamsville estates. Similar projects in other colonies soon followed. Assistance to rural home owners in sugar-producing colonies also increased after 1947, after the SILWF was established.

Evidence given to the Forster Commission by the oil companies indicates that, like the sugar estates, they did not feel obliged to provide worker housing. Rather, they believed that this responsibility should fall to the government. Mr. Fletcher, representing Apex Trinidad, said that when the oil industry was first becoming established in Trinidad, it had been necessary for companies to provide housing for their labourers because the oil fields were located in isolated, undeveloped areas. As the industry grew, Fletcher

claimed that “men come up to the office and ask for a job the same way as they might in Port-of-Spain or anywhere else.”<sup>124</sup> Oil companies no longer needed to provide housing in order to ensure a supply of workers. Furthermore, villages had since developed in the oil field region and workers could obtain their own housing there.

Different levels of government within the colonies also had disputes regarding housing policy. Again, Trinidad demonstrates this well. In the late 1930s, Trinidad was experimenting with model houses for use in public housing projects. The Governor of the day, Sir Murchison Fletcher, approved of a design developed by the Town Planner and suggested that government should build a model version on land owned by the City of Port of Spain. This led to some tension between Port of Spain Council and the government, as some Council members “were dubious as to whether it was not another way of taking away one more privilege of the Council...Members inclined to that view emphasized that hitherto, the Municipality was the sole authority in regard to housing matters in Port-of-Spain.”<sup>125</sup> The houses were never built, and in an editorial, the *Trinidad Guardian* later attributed this to “a peculiar apathy.”<sup>126</sup> Power struggles between different levels of government sometimes derailed progress in housing.

West Indian governments and the Colonial Office developed an increasing understanding of the housing problem between the 1930s and 1960s. The unrest of the 1930s triggered an initial awareness of the scale of the housing shortage in the region, and surveys were conducted to determine its exact nature and scope in many of the colonies.<sup>127</sup> During the 1940s, and in some cases earlier, each colony created its own housing authority to administer projects. Understanding of the housing problem and

strategies to address it grew as colonies benefited from building research projects and growing experience with various types of housing projects throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Despite these advances, by the end of the 1950s, housing difficulties in the West Indies remained unresolved. Colonial officials increasingly started to recognize that the expansion of social services, of which housing was one, depended on broader economic development. In the view of Hilton Poynton, economic development was necessary for social and political progress, an idea that was surfacing in discussions of housing policy by the late 1940s. According to C.I. Burgess, Executive Secretary with the Caribbean Commission, housing deficiencies would not be corrected unless income increased so that “revenues necessary for providing adequate accommodation” were realized.<sup>128</sup> Even housing experts, such as William Woodhouse with the DWO, realized that simply implementing building programs would not bring about a solution to the inadequate condition and quantity of housing in the West Indies.<sup>129</sup> According to Woodhouse, “housing development is a function of income, and any widespread improvement depends on the production of enough wealth to support it. It can only follow a marked expansion in productive capacity accompanied by a rise in income and savings.”<sup>130</sup> Burgess remarked in 1951 that “the housing problems facing the Caribbean are deep-seated, and incapable of solution through isolated acts of policy or single strokes of legislation... There is no immediate solution and no magic formula.”<sup>131</sup>

The specific challenges encountered by governments implementing housing programs included staff and materials shortages and administrative difficulties, but above



all, inadequate funding. Even the SILWF, helpful in providing housing to sugar workers, created new problems. Estimates of the number of houses built by the SILWF are scattered and sometimes inconsistent, but it seems that the fund provided about 14, 484 loans for self-built housing in British Guiana between 1950 and 1956, and 4,312 loans in Trinidad between 1952 and 1958.<sup>132</sup> The West Indian Ministry of Labour and Social Services reported that in 1958-1959, the SILWF was used to build about 4,000 houses in the West Indies, excluding Jamaica.<sup>133</sup> In most colonies, SILWF projects were not managed by the Central Housing and Planning Authority or the planning or housing departments, but rather by separate committees. The only exception to this rule was in Barbados. In the other Colonies, separation of SILWF projects from other initiatives was inefficient; as one report stated, “this can make it difficult to secure proper co-ordination of policy and the best use of available resources. There may be avoidable duplication of staff and planning.”<sup>134</sup>

Despite their inability to solve the housing problem, West Indian governments, assisted by the Development and Welfare Organization and by international institutions, increased their efforts to improve conditions throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Each colony developed its own housing program, shaped by its particular social and economic circumstances, but they shared common features because they were guided and shaped by the same external organizations and pressures. Therefore, I argue that a comprehensive and coordinated housing policy did develop across the West Indies and within individual colonies in the colonial era. The next chapter discusses the changing forms that this



policy took between 1935 and 1960. Its purpose is to show how policy developed in light of postwar socioeconomic conditions and of early experience with housing programs.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> L. Pal, *Public Policy Analysis*, p. 2.
- <sup>2</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing in the West Indies*, p. 6.
- <sup>3</sup> I am grateful to the School of Geography and Geology at McMaster University, the McMaster Graduate Students Association and my supervisor, Richard Harris, for funding that enabled my research at the Public Records Office in London.
- <sup>4</sup> T.S. Simey, *Development and Welfare*, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>5</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing*, p.5.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission 1938-1939. Report*, p. 177.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 183.
- <sup>9</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing*, p. 5.
- <sup>10</sup> Great Britain, *West Indian Sugar Commission*, p. 52.
- <sup>11</sup> B. Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 177; Great Britain, *Housing and Town and Country Planning*, pp. 7-8; Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances 1937*, p.5; R. Home, *Of Planting and Planning*, pp. 98-100; K. Singh, *Race and Class Struggles*, pp. 194-195.
- <sup>12</sup> Charles, "Housing and Sanitation on Sugar Estates," The Sanitary Inspectors' Association of Trinidad and Tobago Brochure (Port of Spain) [CO 950/828], p. 20.
- <sup>13</sup> G. St. J. Orde Browne, *Labour Conditions in the West Indies*.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 16.
- <sup>15</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p.8.
- <sup>16</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 8; M. Watson and R. Potter, "Housing and Housing Policy," p. 376. Chattel houses are low-cost, generally built of wood. According to Watson and Potter, they are often divided into two partitions, with one section for sleeping. The number of partitions can be increased as the family grows and its financial situation permits. The houses are built so as to be moveable, so are often places on loose rock foundations.
- <sup>17</sup> Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, p. 201.
- <sup>18</sup> "Workers Provided With Homes in Fyzabad," *Trinidad Guardian* 16 Jan. 1938, p. 2. Fyzabad is a town in the oil region, where the 1937 unrest originated.
- <sup>19</sup> W.M. MacMillan, *Warning from the West Indies*, p. 134.
- <sup>20</sup> "Dr. De Verteuil Presents Health Report," *Trinidad Guardian*, 11 Sept 1937, p. 11; "Model Workers' Village at Pitch Lake," *Trinidad Guardian*, 30 Jan 1938, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> B. Samaroo, "The Trinidad Workingmen's Association," p. 216.
- <sup>23</sup> "U.B.O.T. To Launch Big New Year Housing Scheme," *Trinidad Guardian*, 25 Dec 1937, p. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1936*, p. 10.
- <sup>26</sup> W.M. MacMillan, *Warning from the West Indies*, p. 134.
- <sup>27</sup> Great Britain, *Jamaica, 1932*, p. 12.
- <sup>28</sup> Great Britain, *British Guiana, 1931*, p. 11.

- <sup>29</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1931*, p. 11.
- <sup>30</sup> Great Britain, *St. Vincent, 1934*, p. 6; Great Britain, *St. Vincent, 1931*, p. 6.
- <sup>31</sup> C.I Burgess, "Issues in Caribbean Housing Improvement," pp. 205-206.
- <sup>32</sup> Great Britain, *Jamaica, 1935*, p. 11; Great Britain, *Jamaica 1937*, p. 12.
- <sup>33</sup> R. Home, "Transferring British Planning Law," p. 397.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Johnson, "The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission," pp. 181-198.
- <sup>36</sup> Ormsby Gore, "Personal and Confidential," 7 October 1937 [CO 295/600/6]
- <sup>37</sup> "Britain Urged to Aid Colonial Empire." Reprinted in the *Trinidad Guardian*, 5 July 1938, p. 7.
- <sup>38</sup> Quoted in "West Indian Affairs Debated," *Trinidad Guardian* 2 July 1938, p.3.
- <sup>39</sup> Members of the Commission included: Mr. John Forster (the Chairman); Sir Arthur Pugh; Mr. Thomas Fitzgerald; Mr. Kenneth Vincent-Brown; and Mr. G.A. Jones.
- <sup>40</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances*, p.5.
- <sup>41</sup> "Sugar Manufacturers Present Their Case," *Trinidad Guardian*, 28 Sept 1937, p. 12.
- <sup>42</sup> Dr. De Verteuil Presents Health Report," *Trinidad Guardian*, 11 Sept 1937, p. 11.
- <sup>43</sup> C. Parkinson, Note from Sir Cosmo Parkinson to Henry Moore, 08 October 1937 [CO 295/601/3].
- "Leaseholds" refers to Trinidad Leaseholds, one of the oil companies operating in the colony.
- <sup>44</sup> Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, p. 185; "Oilfield Workers Union Give Evidence," *Trinidad Guardian*, 22 Sept 1937. Rienzi was president of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Union. He was also a founder of the Federated Workers Trade Union. All of these organizations were established in the fall of 1937, after the unrest earlier in the year.
- <sup>45</sup> Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, p.8.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.2.
- <sup>47</sup> "Woodford Lodge Officials Give Evidence," *Trinidad Guardian*, 29 September 1937, p. 9.
- <sup>48</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1934*, p. 10.
- <sup>49</sup> "Officials Tell About Labour Disputes," *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 Sept. 1937, p. 12.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> "Oilfield Managers Give Evidence," *Trinidad Guardian*, 24 Sept. 1937, pp. 8, 12.
- <sup>52</sup> "T.P.D. Give Personal Evidence," *Trinidad Guardian* 30 Sept. 1937, p.6.
- <sup>53</sup> "Sugar Manufacturers Present Their Case," *Trinidad Guardian*, 28 Sept 1937, p. 12.
- <sup>54</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances 1937*, p.76
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.84.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.36.
- <sup>57</sup> For example, S. Basdeo, *Labour Organisation and Labour Reform in Trinidad*, p. 171; "Secretary for Colonies' Statement," *Trinidad Guardian*, 3 Feb 1938, 1.
- <sup>58</sup> "An Important Task," *Trinidad Guardian*, 2 Sept 1937, p. 8.
- <sup>59</sup> "Parliament- Farm Workers' Conditions in West Indies," *The Times*, 24 Feb 1938, p. 7.
- <sup>60</sup> Watchman, "Enquiry Commission," *Trinidad Sunday Chronicle*, 17 Oct 1937. Clipping in [CO 295/600/6].
- <sup>61</sup> "New Confidence in Trinidad," *The Times*, 1 March 1938, p. 15.
- <sup>62</sup> "The Commission's Report," *Trinidad Guardian*, 2 Feb 1938, p. 8.
- <sup>63</sup> "Trinidad Report- Plea for Improved Conditions," *The Times*, 1 March 1938, p. 8.
- <sup>64</sup> "U.B.O.T. to Launch Big New Year Housing Scheme," *Trinidad Guardian*, 25 Dec 1937, p. 2.
- <sup>65</sup> "Leaseholds," *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 Jan 1938; "Model Workers' Village at Pitch Lake," p. 2; *Trinidad Guardian*, 30 Jan 1938, p. 2; "Workers Provided With Homes in Fyzabad," p. 2; *Trinidad Guardian*, 16 Jan 1938, p. 2; "Workers' Villages on Sugar Estates," *Trinidad Guardian*, 19 Dec 1937, p. 12.
- <sup>66</sup> "Steps Taken to Implement the Trinidad Commission's Recommendations," note prepared for the Moyne Commission, 31 Aug. 1938 [CO 295/606/9].
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.



- <sup>68</sup> Members of the Moyne Commission included: Lord Moyne, the Chairman; Sir Edward Stubbs, Vice-Chairman; Dame Rachel Crowdy; Sir Walter Citrine; Sir Percy Mackinnon; Mr. Ralph Assheton; Dr. Mary Blacklock; Professor F.L. Engledow; Mr. H.D. Henderson; and Mr. Morgan Jones (Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission. Recommendations*, p. 7).
- <sup>69</sup> "A Momentous Inquiry," *Trinidad Guardian*, 19 Feb 1939, p. 6.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.
- <sup>71</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 10.
- <sup>72</sup> D.J. Morgan, *Origins of British Aid Policy*, p. 77.
- <sup>73</sup> Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission Recommendations*, p.14.
- <sup>74</sup> Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission 1938-1939. Report*, p. 177.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>76</sup> Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission Recommendations*, p.3.
- <sup>77</sup> Great Britain, *Statement of Policy on Colonial Development*, p.9.
- <sup>78</sup> MacMillan, *Warning*, pp. 198-199.
- <sup>79</sup> Morgan, *Origins*, pp. 140-141; Stevens, "Planning in the West Indies," p. 505.
- <sup>80</sup> G. Seel, "Development and Welfare in B.W.I., p. 152; P.H.M. Stevens, "Planning in the West Indies," p. 505.
- <sup>81</sup> K. Blackburne, *Lasting Legacy*, p. 78.
- <sup>82</sup> H. Poynton, "Recent Trends in Colonial Economic Development", p. 455.
- <sup>83</sup> Great Britain, *Statement of Policy on Colonial Development and Welfare*, p. 6.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>85</sup> H. Johnson, "Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization," p. 611.
- <sup>86</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing*, p. 2.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>88</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare, 1945-46*, p. 117.
- <sup>89</sup> Great Britain, *United Kingdom Development and Welfare Acts*, p. 9.
- <sup>90</sup> Blackburne, *Lasting Legacy*, p. 82.
- <sup>91</sup> *Housing* was first compiled by K.W. Blackburne, the Administrative Secretary to the Development and Welfare Organization, from available information on housing. Blackburne claimed to have no special knowledge of housing, as he informed Gardner-Medwin, the Town Planning Adviser to the Development and Welfare Organization (K.W. Blackburne, Development and Welfare in the West Indies, Circular No. 61/44, 19 May 1944 [CO 1042/12]). According to his Circular, Blackburne had tried to consider the housing issue "from the point of view of the practical financial and administrative difficulties." *Housing* was revised before publication by Gardner-Medwin and his assistant, De Syllas.
- <sup>92</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing*, Foreword.
- <sup>93</sup> G.A. Atkinson, Letter to W.M. Woodhouse, 7 January 1949 [CO 1042/256]
- <sup>94</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing*, p.7.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>97</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 37.
- <sup>98</sup> "Notes Based on Informal Conference of Government Architects and Town Planning Officers," Barbados, February 1950 [CO 318/509/2]
- <sup>99</sup> Development and Welfare in the West Indies, Report of the British West Indies Housing Conference, Bulletin No. 30, June 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Barbados [CO 859/320]
- <sup>100</sup> "British West Indian Housing Conference," in *Aspects of Housing in the Caribbean*, p. 80.
- <sup>101</sup> Home, *Planting and Planning*, p. 181, indicated that the Trinidad Act (and legislation subsequently enacted across the West Indies using Trinidad as a model) was based on the British 1932 Town and Country Planning Act, "with housing and slum clearance provisions also based upon British legislation." H. McCoubrey, "English Model of Planning Legislation," p. 372, and P.H.M. Stevens "Planning Legislation in the British West Indies," p. 65, have both made similar claims.

- <sup>102</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1957*, p. 103.
- <sup>103</sup> G. Giglioli, *Further Developments in the Population*, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>104</sup> Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission. Report*, p. 177.
- <sup>105</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare in the West Indies, 1954*, pp. 101-102.
- <sup>106</sup> Morgan, *Origins*, p. 145.
- <sup>107</sup> M. Proudfoot, *Britain and the United States*, p. 19.
- <sup>108</sup> A. Savage, Telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 12 August 1953 [CO 1031/235]
- <sup>109</sup> S. Luke, Letter to Sir A. Savage, 26 October 1953 [CO 1031/236]
- <sup>110</sup> R. Smith, *British Guiana*, p. 172; T. Spinner, *A Political and Social History of Guyana*, p. 43. Suspension of the constitution took place after the colony elected the socialist Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) to government.
- <sup>111</sup> A. Savage, Telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 12 January 1954 [CO 1031/1682]
- <sup>112</sup> Minute to file (signature illegible), addressed to Mr. Mayle and Mr. Bishop, 14 January 1954 [CO 1031/1682].
- <sup>113</sup> P. Rogers, Minute to file to Sir T. Lloyd, 30 November 1953 [CO 1031/236] By the late 1940s, Rogers was with the West India Department.
- <sup>114</sup> D. Bishop, Minute to James Vernon, 4 January 1953 [CO 1031/236]
- <sup>115</sup> N.L. Mayle, Minute to file, 28 November 1953 [CO 1031/236]
- <sup>116</sup> P.A. Cummings, "Housing Under the Development Programme," British Guiana Legislative Council No. 6/1954, May 1954 [CO 1031/1682]
- <sup>117</sup> Great Britain, *British Guiana, 1954*, pp. 115-116.
- <sup>118</sup> West Indies, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Planning and Housing*, p. 10.
- <sup>119</sup> J. Crane and E. Paxton, "The Worldwide Housing Problem."
- <sup>120</sup> Great Britain, *West India Royal Commission Recommendations*, p.14.
- <sup>121</sup> H. Young, Letter to Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, 17 June 1940 [CO 318/444/10]
- <sup>122</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing*, p. 29.
- <sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 31.
- <sup>124</sup> "Officials Tell About Labour Disputes," *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 Sept 1937, p. 12.
- <sup>125</sup> "Island-Wide Housing Plan," *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 Dec 1937, p. 1.
- <sup>126</sup> "Housing at Laventille," *Trinidad Guardian*, 24 Aug 1938, p. 8.
- <sup>127</sup> De Syllas, "Report on Preliminary Housing Survey"; "Summary of Actions Taken on the Recommendations of West Indian Conference of March, 1944" [CO 1042/12]; Stevens, "Planning in the West Indies, p. 505.
- <sup>128</sup> Burgess, "Caribbean Housing Improvement," p. 205.
- <sup>129</sup> "Housing in the West Indies." Synopsis of talks by Mr. W.M. Woodhouse given to the Trade Union Training Course, Barbados, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1948 [CO 1042/256]
- <sup>130</sup> W.M. Woodhouse, Letter to Sir Hugh Foot, 12 December 1953 [CO 1031/1685]
- <sup>131</sup> Burgess, "Caribbean Housing Improvement," p. 212.
- <sup>132</sup> Great Britain, *British Guiana, 1957*, p. 129; West Indies, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Planning and Housing in the West Indies*, p. 8.
- <sup>133</sup> West Indies, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Planning and Housing*, p. 8.
- <sup>134</sup> Bain, *Low-Income Housing*, p. 10.

# Chapter Four: The Changing Forms of West Indian Housing Policy, 1935-1960

## Introduction

The preceding chapter traced the expansion of government housing policy in the West Indies beginning in the 1930s. As it grew, policy changed in several ways. This chapter describes the changing mix of programs and legislation that were developed between 1935 and 1960 and explains why these were adopted.

The most fundamental policy shift, from which other changes evolved, entailed a movement away from slum clearance and public housing. The latter generally took the form of rental housing, often let to tenants at subsidized rates. It soon became obvious that slum clearance and public housing was too expensive. As early as 1940, for example, Trinidad's Governor realized that government programs "can do no more than scratch the surface of the problem" and that instead, they would have to look to private initiatives.<sup>1</sup> This helps to explain why governments began to turn increasingly towards the private sector and also to aided self-help in the postwar years. Trinidad was not the only colony to make use of slum clearance in the 1930s; Jamaica introduced a similar program in the latter part of the decade. Trinidad's was the earliest, however, and since it met with many problems that arose in similar programs elsewhere, it provides a good case study for slum clearance and public housing initiatives in the mid-1930s. Its



program provides insight into the ideas circulating in, and the problems encountered, during the early years of government involvement in urban housing projects.

The increasing importance of aided self-help initiatives in the West Indies marked a second trend in policy development. In the 1930s and 1940s, aided self-help did not provide large amounts of accommodation, but by the 1950s, it had become a pillar of housing policy across the region.

A third trend involved a variety of initiatives designed to strengthen the private sector. Local governments began to look at ways to attract private investment into housing, including providing mortgage guarantees and supporting friendly societies. These initiatives resulted primarily in housing for the middle class.

Helping to fuel shifts in housing policy were ideas generated through building research. Beginning in the 1930s, West Indian governments tested new and local building materials and developed type designs for houses. The results of these experiments were used in public and private building projects and in aided self-help initiatives. Associated with the research programs were experiments with prefabricated houses. Conducted by local governments, these were supplemented by information gathered by the British Building Research Station, the Development and Welfare Organization (DWO) and the Caribbean Commission.

In this chapter, I argue that, starting in 1945, the DWO exerted a strong influence over the form of housing policy in individual colonies. It circulated memoranda on policy, produced documents that established regional standards, and sponsored meetings of planners and housing experts. As noted in the previous chapter, one of its

publications, *Housing in the West Indies*, established the initial direction for postwar West Indian housing programs.<sup>2</sup> It set out overall policy goals, suggested region-wide standards and put forward some basic type designs for houses. Other organizations were also influential, however. These included the Colonial Liaison Office at the Building Research Station, the Caribbean Commission, the United States Foreign Operations Administration, and, to a lesser degree, the United Nations.

### **Slum Clearance and Public Housing Programs**

Between the late 1930s and 1960, West Indian governments experimented with a variety of housing programs in an attempt to meet the needs of their populations. Isolated slum clearance and rehousing programs were carried out in most West Indian colonies in the interwar and early postwar years. In Jamaica, for example, slum clearance legislation was first passed in 1937. In 1938, it began its first clearance scheme, at Smith Village and Trench Pen in Kingston.<sup>3</sup> The need for such a scheme had been identified by the Central Housing and Planning Authority as early as 1936, when it produced a memorandum stating that it wished to create a model township, but would require the government to introduce new standards so that slum conditions did not develop.<sup>4</sup> Between 1948 and 1953, the colony introduced twenty-two slum clearance schemes.<sup>5</sup> In British Guiana, public rental housing was built by Georgetown Council at Wortmanville in 1946.<sup>6</sup> In 1950, the Colony began a slum clearance scheme at Albuoystown and similar projects were later carried out at Ruimvelt and La Penitance. It was Trinidad, however, that was the first West Indian colony to introduce slum clearance legislation.

The evolution of its slum clearance policy will be recounted here as a case study illustrating the ideas that shaped and the debates that challenged such programs.

In 1932, the Government of Trinidad had already begun to consider the slum problem and in 1935, it passed its first Slum Clearance Act.<sup>7</sup> Modelled on the British Act of 1932, Trinidad's legislation created a Housing and Town Planning Commission. Its purpose was to manage slum clearance and rehousing projects in Port of Spain. In 1936, a section of the city was declared a slum clearance area. At the same time, the Planning and Housing Commission built one hundred rental cottages for residents of the designated area on government land at Gonzales Place.<sup>8</sup>

In 1938, Trinidad received a new Governor, Sir Hubert Young, who had formerly been the Governor of Northern Rhodesia. According to the *Trinidad Guardian*, Young had been brought in to implement the recommendations of the Forster Commission, including those pertaining to housing.<sup>9</sup> "If Sir Hubert Young has come to Trinidad to carry out the recommendations of the Forster report, as the former Secretary for the Colonies told Parliament he would," the *Guardian* commented, "it is to be expected that he will push on as rapidly as may be with the provision of homes for workers in town and country."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Young did give priority to the improvement of Trinidad's housing. Only weeks after his arrival, he wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Malcolm MacDonald, that he wanted to establish a new and more effective Housing and Planning Authority in the colony.<sup>11</sup> This Authority would be responsible for developing a new slum clearance policy. In his letter, Young made it clear that he intended to have new housing and town planning ordinances drafted.

Young was not the first to perceive the need to revamp Trinidad's existing slum clearance program. In December of 1937, the Trinidad Government was already at work on legislation to create a new Planning and Housing Commission and an "island-wide housing scheme."<sup>12</sup> A significant problem with the existing legislation was that the interests of some city councillors were in conflict with slum clearance measures. According to a 1937 memorandum regarding Port of Spain Council, some members of Council owned slum houses; in fact, there were councillors who were "among the owners of some of the worst slum property."<sup>13</sup> The *Trinidad Guardian* reported that the 1935 Ordinance gave slum clearance powers to Port of Spain Council.<sup>14</sup> The potential conflict of interest that resulted was recognized by the Forster Commission, which had identified a need for new legislation.<sup>15</sup> Trinidad's Attorney General also found fault with both the 1935 Act and Port of Spain Council.<sup>16</sup> In his report for 1938, he wrote that "no serious attempt has been made by the City Council to carry out the purposes of the [1935] Ordinance and in consequence the Housing Commission has not been able to function in the manner intended."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Attorney General concluded that a new Planning and Housing Commission with "wider powers" was needed.<sup>18</sup>

New slum clearance legislation was passed in Trinidad in December of 1938. The Act established a Planning and Housing Commission consisting of five "officials," five "unofficials" and a chair.<sup>19</sup> By the end of March, 1939, the Commission had been appointed, although at the end of April it still had no permanent chair.<sup>20</sup> In the Governor's view, the chair would have to be someone selected from outside of Trinidad, as nobody in the colony was suitable. He claimed that "those who are capable are

already fully occupied, while those who have leisure are not fully capable.”<sup>21</sup> Among the “unofficials” who were members of the Commission were Rienzi and Cipriani, workers’ representatives who had testified before the Royal Commissions.<sup>22</sup>

The *Trinidad Guardian* approved of the new Commission, stating that its appointment “is a welcome intimation that definite steps will at last be taken for the elimination of slum areas in the Colony.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the paper expressed the view that the Commission’s work would be “watched with interest” in other parts of the West Indies,<sup>24</sup> foreshadowing the fact that Trinidad’s program would become a model upon which other West Indian governments would base their housing programs in the 1940s.

An early housing project carried out by the Planning and Housing Commission with the purpose of providing rental accommodation for those removed from slums in Port of Spain was developed at Morvant. According to an editorial in the *Guardian*, “the commencement of the scheme should do something to break the mesmerism of apathy which for so long has dominated the housing situation.”<sup>25</sup> Morvant was located in the outskirts of town, where City Council had acquired land in about 1936. Development began after the Forster Commission had completed its inquiry. During the Moyne Commission’s visit, the Planning and Housing Commission was in the process of laying out lots and roads in the new town. Described as a “model township,” Morvant provided residents with a school, church, health centre, recreation area and shopping and service facilities.<sup>26</sup> Initially, the project was to have included two hundred houses, and more were to be built if it proved successful.<sup>27</sup> Additional building did indeed take place later, but the process of developing amenities at Morvant was slowed by war shortages.



Allegedly, most of the first residents of Morvant approved of their new homes, although some former slum residents were unhappy. Apparently, they would have preferred to remain in their old neighbourhoods, where new flats had since been built.<sup>28</sup> Rents were subsidized, but the project still suffered from rental arrears.<sup>29</sup> After 1945, the Planning and Housing Commission began to have trouble collecting from some tenants. This was because some became unemployed when the nearby U.S. military base closed, and also because a large number of tenants were low-income families forcefully removed to Morvant from the slums.<sup>30</sup>

Evidence given to the Moyne Commission highlighted some of the difficulties created by slum clearance and public housing programs. A memorandum submitted by the 'People's Royal Commission Evidence Committee' to the Moyne Commission conveyed the view that slum clearance was good in principle, but not in reality. In Trinidad, clearance schemes failed to provide enough alternative accommodation for displaced slum residents. The Committee claimed that slum clearance "is so laudable...but the means are so silly."<sup>31</sup> By this, it meant that improving housing was an important goal, but that slum clearance programs were an ineffective solution. In his testimony before the Moyne Commission, Major Orde Browne claimed that no slum clearance schemes in the West Indies had actually served the residents of slums. Instead, he argued that "they have built quite nice and suitable little villas which have been promptly taken up and occupied by the middle class."<sup>32</sup>

From the early days of the 1938 legislation, Trinidadians debated the effectiveness of slum clearance programs. A letter to the editor appeared in the *Trinidad*

*Guardian* in March of 1945, from a self-described “slummer.” The writer claimed that residents wanted slum clearance and public housing projects to proceed because they recognized that they led to healthier living environments.<sup>33</sup> It seems, however, that this was not the majority view. In removing slums, many individuals were displaced and new and affordable accommodation had to be provided for them.<sup>34</sup> Some new government-built accommodation was criticized for being too small, lacking in privacy, and being prone to flooding.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, it was expensive and inconveniently located. In 1945, Port of Spain Council complained that, in the words of one contributor to the *Trinidad Guardian*, “Government was adopting Hitlerite methods and taking away the rights, privileges and freedoms of the people not only of Port-of-Spain but of the entire Colony in launching out on what was described as ‘wild cat’ schemes.”<sup>36</sup> The same year, another correspondent to the *Guardian* wrote that “scores have been rendered homeless to make room for the building programme and even the Government slum clearance and housing schemes have failed to relieve the problem.”<sup>37</sup> Writing in 1946, T.S. Simey, Social Welfare Advisor to the DWO in the early 1940s, asserted that slum clearance had, in fact, aggravated the problem of overcrowding in Port of Spain. He emphasized that at the time of writing, no solution to the slum clearance issue could be foreseen: “there was in 1945 no sign that anything better could be accomplished in the future.”<sup>38</sup> Simey further claimed that “the problem of slum clearance has proved insoluble in such towns as Kingston, Jamaica, or Port of Spain, Trinidad, since...the cost of rehousing those who are rendered homeless has been prohibitive.”<sup>39</sup> A contradictory assessment, however, was made in a 1946 official report which claimed that housing had been provided “for an

equivalent number of families who were dispossessed” by schemes in San Fernando and Port of Spain.<sup>40</sup> Recognizing the problems that resulted when slum clearance schemes failed to provide accommodation for displaced residents, the DWO advised that people should only be evicted once alternative shelter had been arranged for them.<sup>41</sup>

Trinidad’s general housing shortage slowed slum clearance schemes in the 1940s because the government was reluctant to demolish any existing accommodation, no matter how poor. This was also the case outside the West Indies, including Britain, in the postwar years. In Trinidad, the problem is well-illustrated by the case of the “Slum Palace” at 29 Joseph St. in Port of Spain. The Slum Palace consisted of three insanitary barracks that could not be included in a slum clearance area because they were unsewered. The *Guardian* reported that the Medical Officer of Health felt trapped, because if the barracks were demolished, tenants would have no alternative accommodation.<sup>42</sup> Naturally, the tenants also wanted the ‘Palace’ to stand, but hoped for repairs to some of the rooms, including the kitchen, and for more toilet facilities. Given the housing shortage, Port of Spain’s Mayor was unwilling to see the area condemned.<sup>43</sup>

As the 1940s progressed, the financial resources of Trinidad’s Planning and Housing Commission diminished. Public housing had been proving uneconomical, with government subsidizing rents to a high degree. As a result, in 1948, the Commission announced that it would look for ways to build less expensive rental housing.<sup>44</sup> Port of Spain Council was critical of government attempts to address the housing problem. G.A. Atkinson, the Colonial Liaison Officer with the Building Research Station, also found fault with the colony’s public housing program, noting that it was charging rents that



were too low to allow it to build more housing.<sup>45</sup> The *Trinidad Guardian* suggested that one solution to the problem was to build on cheap land at the urban periphery.<sup>46</sup>

Peripheral housing projects presented tenants with a new set of challenges. The Planning and Housing Commission reported that rental arrears were especially significant in estates like Morvant, where “the high cost of traveling to work is undoubtedly a contributory factory [sic] in this state of affairs.”<sup>47</sup> A memorandum from the Port of Spain Ministerial Association pointed out that tenants forced to live on the edge of town often lost income opportunities or had longer travel times to work.<sup>48</sup> The Association’s memorandum provided a vivid illustration of the plight of low-income residents evicted from the slums, such as, in the example below, people who earned money by doing washing. The Association wrote that:

Weary days spent in a fruitless search for a room at a rent within their means, and in the end having to leave the inner city, results in their inability to serve in many cases their former patrons by washing. Others are compelled to spend considerable time or money, sometimes both, in travelling to and from work. They are separated from their families and associates, and removed long distances from their Church.<sup>49</sup>

Slum clearance deprived people of income and altered their social networks. Despite criticism of slum clearance and public housing, however, they remained an important component of Trinidad’s housing strategy. According to a 1947 report, slums were “foul, dark and insanitary. It is in [the slums] that the most pressing problem lies and the Slum Clearance Committee is continuing forcibly to acquire and demolish the insanitary buildings and build new modern accommodation.”<sup>50</sup> Government continued to build public housing on inexpensive land around Port of Spain and San Fernando and on the

cleared slum properties. At this time, the Planning and Housing Commission retained ownership of most of the housing that it built, renting it out to tenants.

The Commission's financial problems continued into the 1950s. They reached a peak in 1949, when clearance schemes came to a halt. In that year, the Commission reported that:

The housing problem remains unsolved to a large extent, particularly with regard to persons of the lower income group who cannot afford the rentals of the flats erected in the Slum Clearance areas...and many of whom, in the meantime, have been provided with temporary accommodation in decanting centers—a most unsatisfactory state of affairs.<sup>51</sup>

The DWO reported in 1951 that the Commission had not built any housing for over two years.<sup>52</sup> The rehousing program did not receive sufficient funding to be reactivated until 1952, when the government allocated £41,000 for urban housing projects. According to the DWO, however, no new housing was constructed in 1952.<sup>53</sup> A report on West Indian housing prepared for the Fijian government suggested that in light of the Planning and Housing Commission's financial difficulties, "Trinidad is no model for Fiji, but is a warning of the problems that can build in the future if there is not a realistic approach to the financing of housing schemes from their inception."<sup>54</sup>

Despite financial concerns, public housing programs were eventually resumed in Trinidad. In 1953, the Commission built some apartments and cottages in Port of Spain and San Fernando, although the DWO claimed that year that "public housing in Trinidad has again been limited by shortage of funds."<sup>55</sup> Throughout the West Indies, the British Government estimated that public housing was subsidized to a rate of between one-third to two-thirds by the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> While public housing remained one way that government



addressed the housing problem, by the late 1940s it was obvious that it was expensive and would have to be supplemented by other initiatives.

### **Aided Self-help Housing Programs**

Forms of aided self-help figured in the housing programs of every West Indian colony by the late 1950s. However, some governments began their forays into the technique in the early 1940s. The emphasis on aided self-help was largely the result of greater government concern regarding rural housing. Although they did not use the term, both the Forster and Moyne Commissions had recommended that governments use aided self-help as part of their rural housing programs. The Moyne Commission, for example, suggested that peasants "should be expected- as they should certainly be encouraged- to undertake themselves much of the work of constructing their new dwellings provided that simple plans for doing this are made available and explained to them by officers of Government or local authorities."<sup>57</sup> Financial help, presumably in the form of loans, was also recommended for owner-builders. The Development and Welfare Organization began to promote aided self-help in the mid-1940s. After the creation of Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (SILWF) Committees in several West Indian colonies in the late 1940s and early 1950s, housing initiatives financed by the SILWF took the form of aided self-help.

Associated with aided self-help was co-operative housing provision, in which groups of people worked together to build their own houses. According to one contributor to the *Trinidad Guardian*, the appeal of this building method was its

Britishness: "we are British in this Colony, and, I hope that we shall never be anything else. We must, therefore, adopt British methods to run our affairs, especially when we are convinced that British methods of business are second to none in the World."<sup>58</sup>

Jamaica Welfare Ltd., for example, directed a co-operative scheme in Bonnett, Jamaica after a hurricane destroyed housing in 1944.<sup>59</sup> One report by the Caribbean Commission in the 1950s stated that in co-operative projects, groups of owner-builders participated in the designed of a housing project, and that this gave them "a greater sense of responsibility."<sup>60</sup> As West Indian governments realized that it helped them to make maximum use of their limited funds, they began to rely increasingly upon aided self-help and cooperative methods.

In the early 1940s, West Indian governments and the Development and Welfare Organization began to use Colonial Development and Welfare funds to promote various types of self-help initiatives. The Colonial Office approved £5,000 to be disbursed by the DWO under a scheme known as D13 in 1941. The scheme's purpose was "to facilitate the provision of minor amenities in the West Indies, by the encouragement and stimulation of local and communal self-help."<sup>61</sup> Sir Frank Stockdale, the Comptroller for Development and Welfare in the West Indies, requested that rural housing projects be made eligible for funding under D13.<sup>62</sup> In 1941, British Guiana received funds for a project aimed at "encouraging and demonstrating in selected rural areas the construction of well-built wattle-and-daub houses."<sup>63</sup> In its application for funding, the government had pointed out that public housing schemes were too costly. Owner-builders, however, had "recently constructed wattle and daub houses containing two good living rooms and a

large kitchen gallery...which are said to cost their owners about £25 in addition to their own labour.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, some officials in British Guiana thought that aided self-help presented an affordable alternative to public housing. This early argument that public housing was too expensive is significant because it presaged later statements about the value of aided self-help in the colonial context. The Colonial Office found that the D13 scheme was productive and in 1943, extended it as D13A, with increased funding. In 1943, it provided Jamaica Welfare Limited with money to execute a “community project” for “building or improving houses for poor residents by the clubs in the area and Co-operative work on the houses of club members.”<sup>65</sup>

In Trinidad, aided self-help was used in joint government/estate housing projects to address the rural housing problem. A Member of Parliament had suggested in 1945 that a commission should be struck to look into conditions on sugar estates in the colony. This idea was dismissed by government, which stated that two yet-to-be-implemented projects at the Caroni and Williamsville Estates represented an attempt to address the problem.<sup>66</sup> In these projects, the estates provided land that the government paid to service.<sup>67</sup> The Development and Welfare Report for 1947 described these as aided self-help projects, in which participants built their own homes using subsidized materials.<sup>68</sup> Plots were ready for rental by May of 1948. Priority was to be given to residents of the barracks and estate villages such as Jumbie Piece and La Paille at Caroni.<sup>69</sup>

In 1945, the DWO, in *Housing in the West Indies*, suggested that aided self-help projects should become the primary method employed to better the living conditions of peasants. The Organization recommended that the approach might also be used in urban

areas, although the primary focus of urban housing initiatives was to remain rental housing since owner-occupier schemes were most effective in the countryside. A 1946 Circular from the DWO dispensed advice on sites and services schemes in both urban and rural slum clearance areas.<sup>70</sup> The letter that accompanied the Circular explained that:

The enclosed note suggests a method whereby some improvement in housing conditions can be effected without incurring the heavy expenditure attendant on the construction of new houses for all persons removed from slum areas. This method—the provision of building plots and of services and the grant of financial assistance to enable house owners in congested areas to move their houses to the new plots—has already been adopted in some parts of the West Indies.<sup>71</sup>

According to the Circular, the chattel form of housing that was common in the West Indies was well-suited to sites and services schemes. Rents charged for the sites should be kept very low, “preferably not much more than the rents which are being paid in the congested areas from which the tenants are to be removed.”<sup>72</sup> However, it was thought possible to recapture money spent on preparing the sites through rent.

At a meeting of housing experts held in Barbados in 1950, participants echoed the 1946 Circular, suggesting that governments should take advantage of West Indian self-help tendencies through initiatives like sites and services schemes. Delegates to the 1951 Housing Conference reiterated the point.<sup>73</sup> Here, they claimed that aided self-help was “the most economical method of providing housing for poor people.”<sup>74</sup> Subsequently, participants in a 1952 conference on aided self-help held in Jamaica came to the same conclusion.<sup>75</sup>

In a 1953 article published in a journal for members of the British Colonial Service, C.Y. Carstairs, who worked as Administrative Secretary of the DWO and who



had been Secretary for the Colonial Research Council, wrote that colonial governments should take advantage of the self-help building tradition present in many territories:

Let us not think only of houses designed and built for people, but think also of houses built by people. Many people start with an asset which we should not lightly throw away, the habit of building for themselves, and certain traditional methods of doing so. We need not I think throw all this overboard when we think of the growing towns.<sup>76</sup>

Carstairs went on to recommend the use of aided self-help housing schemes. In his view, housing built by owner-occupiers was often much better adapted to local conditions than that constructed by “Western” building techniques.<sup>77</sup>

In the 1940s, the social and economic benefits of aided self-help housing were discussed most fully by the American Jacob Crane. In a 1949 article titled “Huts and Houses in the Tropics,” Crane made the case for aided self-help as a means to resolve housing shortages in developing countries.<sup>78</sup> As a planner with the United States Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA), Crane was an important figure in early postwar housing policy. Harris has pointed out that Crane was the first to develop a theory of aided self-help housing.<sup>79</sup> According to Crane, tropical “huts” had some positive features in that they were well-suited to warm climates and made use of local building materials. However, they also had important disadvantages: they were often small, unclean, infested with “vermin,” and lacking in sanitation.<sup>80</sup> Crane believed that it was important to improve the living conditions of people inhabiting such huts, but that “modern” construction methods were too expensive because they relied on contractors and commercial building materials. Until industrialization and economic development



brought down the cost of modern houses, Crane argued that aided self-help was an appropriate interim strategy for low-income groups.

In 1950, Crane and McCabe, who also worked with the HHFA, wrote that governments were realizing that they could assist citizens' self-help efforts in a number of ways. These included: providing land; helping with the development of new building materials; promoting the building materials industry; providing training and technical research into building technologies; organizing self-help efforts; supplying sanitation to housing sites; and facilitating the international exchange of equipment, information and materials. According to Crane, aided self-help was advantageous to both governments and their people. It required low public expenditure, gave project participants a feeling of "satisfaction and pride" in their houses, bettered the housing conditions of many people compared with expensive government-built public housing projects and used local building materials resulting in lower-cost houses.<sup>81</sup> Others, including the DWO and the Caribbean Commission, had begun to acknowledge these benefits of aided self-help in the 1940s.

Crane's ideas had some influence in the British West Indies. It is clear that by 1952, and likely earlier, William Woodhouse, the Building Research Advisor with the DWO, was aware of Crane's writing. Woodhouse mentioned Crane's article "Huts and Houses in the Tropics" in a note on aided self-help, and a copy of Crane's "Homes of Earth" is on file with Development and Welfare records for 1952.<sup>82</sup> Crane and the DWO appear to have come into contact through Crane's work on self-help in Puerto Rico, which served as a model for British West Indian programs in the 1950s. Drawing on

Puerto Rico's experience, Antigua began an aided self-help program after a hurricane destroyed much housing on the island in 1950. Antiguan visitors to Puerto Rico in 1951 to observe aided self-help projects, and Crane travelled to Antigua at around the same time.<sup>83</sup>

Many colonies came to rely extensively upon aided self-help by the 1950s, especially in their SILWF projects. Perhaps this was nowhere more true than in St. Vincent and Antigua. St. Vincent was a small, cash-strapped colony with little money to spend on housing. It found that promoting home ownership, especially through owner-building, was an effective way to use its limited funds.<sup>84</sup> The Central Housing and Planning Authority believed that aided self-help was a good solution to the housing problem because it was best to help "those who can show that they are willing to help themselves."<sup>85</sup> A 1951 summary of aided self-help projects carried out in St. Vincent showed that five had been or were being completed at that time. These were all rural projects, built at Sandy Bay, Chester Cottage, New Enhams, Mangaroo and Mt. Bentnick.<sup>86</sup> In Antigua, a team of U.S. experts that visited in April of 1951 suggested that aided self-help was "the only feasible solution to Antigua's housing problem in the wake of the hurricanes."<sup>87</sup> Their suggestions were implemented in the island's hurricane rehousing program.

Aided self-help expanded in the West Indies after the United States agreed to an initiative to supply technical assistance for housing programs beginning in 1952.<sup>88</sup> Known as the Point Four Technical Programme, it provided two American housing advisers in the Caribbean region to assist with pilot projects, conduct experiments with

local building materials, promote aided self-help and train locals to build inexpensive houses. The program included workshops, such as a 1953 meeting in Puerto Rico, where officials from throughout the West Indies could learn about aided self-help.<sup>89</sup> In 1958, one of the U.S. experts, Donald Hanson, reported that aided self-help had been successful in the Caribbean for a number of reasons: people wanted to own their own homes and land, and self-help provided a means for them to do so; self-help was a familiar concept in the region; and it was inexpensive, providing housing for as much as fifty per cent less than other methods.<sup>90</sup>

Different colonies introduced variations on aided self-help. In Jamaica, it was combined with prefabrication. A workshop, operated by the local Department of Housing, was set up to build partially prefabricated components.<sup>91</sup> In Trinidad, a type of aided self-help known as “Hired-Help/Self-Help” was employed by the Trinidad Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee. In this scheme, a family hired a carpenter to put up their dwelling, with the assistance of the family.<sup>92</sup> In most colonies, aided self-help became one aspect of the overall housing program. In at least one, however, adherence to aided self-help verged on the dogmatic by the mid-1950s. In British Guiana, policy makers may have initially adopted the method for pragmatic reasons, but early successes appear to have contributed to their continuing zeal for it.

A sessional paper on housing policy prepared in 1954 set out British Guiana’s housing policy, making it clear that the government would make use of aided self-help in its ‘housing drive.’ Of approximately 4,500 houses to be built during the drive, 800 were to be provided via aided self-help.<sup>93</sup> That year, the Planning and Housing Department set

up an aided self-help section. An “Induction Training Programme,” established with the assistance of F.J. O’Brien, Donald Hanson and Theo Vaughan, United States advisors on self-help, was held in order to orient the new staff to self-help.<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, one recommendation that came out of the program was that “the philosophy of Aided Self-Help” should be taught to primary school children.<sup>95</sup> Aided self-help had applications beyond housing provision- it was seen as a means by which several aspects of social welfare could be promoted. Hanson, for example, claimed that it had been described as “a way of life, a philosophy, even a religion.”<sup>96</sup>

In December of 1954, a supplement on housing was published in *The British Guiana Bulletin* (See Figure 3).<sup>97</sup> According to the supplement, “easily the most interesting, novel, satisfying and yes, EXCITING aspect of the Housing Programme is AIDED SELF-HELP.” Describing the operation of British Guiana’s aided self-help program, it highlighted the community-building effects of self-help projects:

Aided self-help housing has a powerful appeal to our instincts as no other form of house-building has.

Apart from satisfying housing needs in an economical fashion, it also holds the brightest prospects of capturing the imagination of the people, of setting a spark to the innate resources of a community for a better way of life....

Within recent years, the idea has slowly taken root that, by working together, with guidance, the families can do many things for their own benefit which they could not have done singly.<sup>98</sup>

After a few months in operation, Hanson reported that British Guiana’s aided self-help program had thus far been quite successful. He claimed that, “in some of the villages the programme has captured the community’s imagination with a comprehensiveness such as I have never witnessed personally heretofore.” Furthermore, he believed that “the



# AIDED SELF-HELP IS A WAY OF LIFE

## Five Teams Now About To Build Own Homes

### COULD LEAD TO OTHER COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Early the most interesting, novel, satisfying and yes, EXCITING aspect of the Housing Programme is AIDED SELF-HELP.

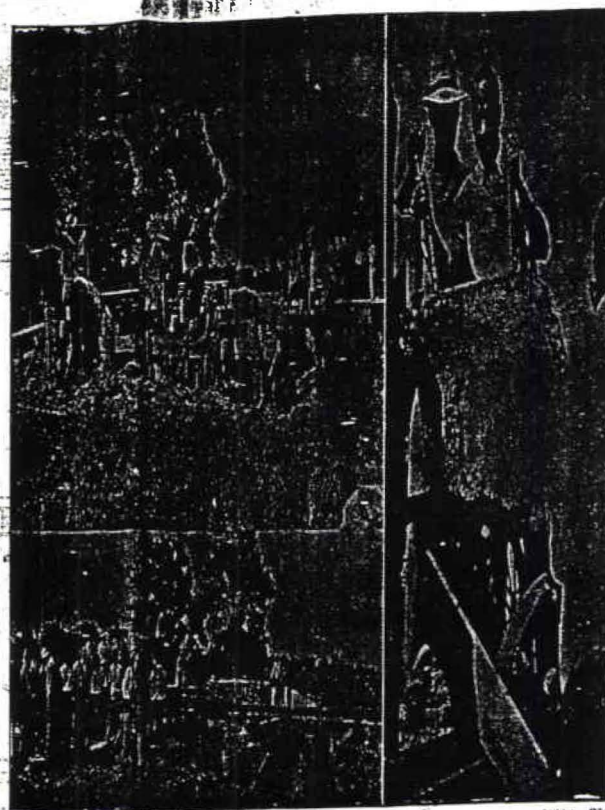
By this method people in the lowest income group willing to build their homes literally with their own hands, working in teams under skilled supervision, have a chance to cut the cost by as much as one-third. That is no idle boast. It has actually been done in neighbouring West Indian Colonies.

Government's assistance with guidance, the families the bottom up. That is in a community can do many what community development is."

#### Town vs. Country

It is a sad fact that in many parts of the world, although the vast majority of people live in rural areas, the townspeople have more facilities than schools, hospitals, and other services.

Here is a simple example of what can be achieved: A community which started by building a small set back by needed footbridge across a stream, built a half-mile of feeder road out to a highway, constructed a school with crude poles,



This composite picture reports the launching of the Training Programme for Community Organisers and Foremen of Aided Self-Help Housing. In the top picture the Foremen can be seen working on the foundation of one of the two low-cost houses they erected by Aided Self-Help methods. In the bottom picture the Hon. P. A. Cummings is declaring the Training Programme open. In picture at right, Mr. Cummings is now pouring the first barrel of concrete.

The Start ↑

↓ The Finish



Figure 3. Special Supplement to the *British Guiana Bulletin*, December 1954 [CO 1031/1683).



programme, if continued along the same lines but with greater acceleration, has the potential of becoming one of the better Aided Self-Help programmes in this region of the world.”<sup>99</sup> He credited this to the staff training program, the design of the houses and their “relatively low cost.”<sup>100</sup> Between 1954 and 1958, 664 out of a total of 3,207 low income houses were built by aided self-help as part of British Guiana’s housing drive. Aided self-help thus provided over twenty per cent of government-funded housing.<sup>101</sup> This was in addition to housing provided by the SILWF, all of which was built by aided self-help. According to the 1956 Colonial Annual Report for British Guiana, the SILWF Committee granted 14,484 loans between 1950 and 1956 (this included 3, 054 in additional loans for completing houses and 3, 719 for painting and guttering).<sup>102</sup> Linda Peake claims that from 1954 to 1964, the government provided 3,900 housing units; over the same period, the SILWF supplied 10,785 units.<sup>103</sup>

In general, local governments, planning and housing staff and the Colonial Office viewed aided self-help in a favourable light. There were, however, exceptions. A report on West Indian housing programs written for the Fijian government in 1958 claimed that “in some areas, high enthusiasm has waned into cynical disbelief; in others, the view of aided self-help as a ‘religion’ and ‘philosophy of life’...still prevails. The truth, perhaps, lies somewhere in between.”<sup>104</sup> One official view was that aided self-help was “plainly no panacea” for the housing problem.<sup>105</sup> British Guiana’s intention to rely upon aided self-help and private initiatives to resolve its housing problems prior to the 1954 housing drive caused consternation in the Colonial Office, where one official noted that public housing would also have to be built. In Jamaica, a report dating from 1956 stated that

there were problems with aided self-help projects there. Apparently, “these [had] only achieved limited success, but the attendant administrative costs have been high, having regard to the spasmodic and/or dilatory manner in which allottees perform the self-help which is very often a prerequisite to the commencement or completion of a building.”<sup>106</sup>

While labour costs associated with aided self-help were low, administration was often expensive.<sup>107</sup> An observer of aided self-help in the late 1950s found that “reality does not always support theory. In spite of the spate of words and pious hopes of its protagonists, aided self-help housing has in some areas not been the success that was forecast.”<sup>108</sup>

Such a rejection of aided self-help was based on pragmatic experience with the method.

Perhaps the most serious reservations about aided self-help were expressed by Michael Costello, British Guiana’s planner, in the early 1950s. This rejection was ideological rather than pragmatic. He formed an opinion of aided self-help before West Indian colonies had gained much experience of it, and therefore he drew on theoretical assumptions. Costello wrote that the method resulted in low standards of construction and that it was wasteful because it trained participants in building skills that “will be exercised but once or twice in a lifetime.”<sup>109</sup> In his view, “there is implicit in the doctrine of self-help housing a confession of failure to grasp the principles by which civilisation and the civilising process have developed or to realize that only through the application of those principles can civilisation be extended or improved.”<sup>110</sup> Costello believed that what was needed was economic development and that this was best achieved by training people in activities that would allow them to generate incomes. Building should be left to those specially trained to do it.

## Strengthening the Private Housebuilding Industry

In the 1940s, West Indian governments began to consider the way that the private house-building industry operated. According to C.I. Burgess, who worked for the Caribbean Commission, until the early 1950s governments had relied on enabling strategies to “creat[e] the conditions under which housing agencies may conduct their activities to the benefit of the community.”<sup>111</sup> ‘Enabling strategies’ is a term developed later to refer to measures to improve the efficiency of the housing market. In the West Indies of the 1950s, these consisted of mortgage guarantee programs, removal of rent restriction legislation and promotion of housing and building society activity.

Government emphasis on private housebuilding seems to have emerged as a result of the great housing shortage throughout the West Indies after the Second World War.

An editorial in the *Trinidad Guardian* in 1945 claimed that:

It would be neither politic nor possible for the Government to provide all the new construction needed, and the question resolves itself into one of encouraging private enterprise to build. This building, however, must not be limited to houses for sale as is largely the case at present. To meet the urgent needs of the community houses for rent must be provided, and it is this type of activity that requires a stimulus. It is clear that people will not build to rent unless they can make something from it, and this is the crux of the whole problem.<sup>112</sup>

Of course, private initiative had always supplied middle-class housing through the activities of private building firms and contractors. The *Trinidad Guardian* described several new housing projects initiated in the colony in the 1940s. Mr. Salvatori Jr.’s Fairview housing project, for example, provided between 120 and 150 houses for middle class families in 1944.<sup>113</sup> Luxury highrise apartments were constructed by a Mr. Gomes in Port of Spain in 1949.<sup>114</sup> New rental housing, however, was not being built.



The Rent Restriction Ordinance was often perceived as the reason for the lack of new rental housing in Trinidad because it decreased rental profits. The Ordinance had been introduced in 1941 in order to protect low-income families by limiting the rents that landlords could levy. Its impact was debated in the *Trinidad Guardian* throughout the 1940s. In one letter to the paper, the author voiced the opinion that “the landlord has to face the high cost of living equally with tenants, and Government officials whose wages and salaries have been raised to meet the high costs of living.” Therefore, the writer questioned “why must the landlord be compelled to receive the same rent as he received before the cost of living soared?”<sup>115</sup> In order to make investment into rental housing profitable, the *Guardian* suggested the Rent Restriction Ordinance should be amended to permit higher rents. In April of 1953, Trinidad struck a Housing Policy Committee charged with the task of articulating a housing policy for the colony. One of its major assignments was to consider the Rent Restriction Ordinance. In its report, released in 1956, the Committee claimed that the Ordinance “has had an adverse effect on the housing situation by substantially reducing the construction of dwellings by private enterprise for rent.”<sup>116</sup>

Governments also wanted to promote housing construction for owner-occupiers. Mass housing projects carried out and funded by private developers were sometimes advocated as a means to help resolve the housing shortage in the West Indies. In a 1951 article, C.I. Burgess wrote that this idea offered a possible solution to the middle class housing problem. Essentially, he suggested that suburban tract development might be employed in the West Indies; his proposal for such schemes sounds like he envisioned a

series of Caribbean Levittowns (Levittown, New York, was the first mass, planned suburban housing development in the United States).

West Indian governments primarily used enabling strategies to provide housing for the middle classes. The cases of Jamaica and Trinidad illustrate this. In Jamaica, the *Development and Welfare Report* for 1951 attributed the government's growing interest in middle-class housing to the hurricane which hit the colony in that year.<sup>117</sup> The report claimed that one difficulty faced by governments in providing middle-class housing was that they needed "outside capital."<sup>118</sup> Governments began to provide mortgage guarantees in order to increase private investment into middle-class housing.<sup>119</sup> At the Development and Welfare Organisation, Woodhouse advocated such programs.<sup>120</sup> A report on Jamaica suggested that the best way to help the middle classes was by providing mortgage guarantees.<sup>121</sup> A pilot scheme was approved in 1952 in which the government was to guarantee up to twenty five per cent of the mortgage on fifty houses in Kingston.<sup>122</sup> According to a 1956 report, in Jamaica, "the middle income housing estates do not involve building on the part of Government, which, instead, endeavours to interest various companies in financing building programmes."<sup>123</sup> Approval for a large housing scheme targeting middle-class buyers in the colony was granted in 1958. Through this scheme, the government was to provide land and guarantee portions of the mortgages; capital for the project was to come from a private company and from Colonial Development Corporation funds.<sup>124</sup>

In Trinidad, the Housing Policy Committee recommended in 1956 that the focus of policy should be on enabling the private sector:



This is in essence, the policy which we formulate...It proposes that the Government should primarily provide the conditions in which new building can flourish by freeing the 'market' in houses and by legislative and administrative improvements, but it also contemplates a substantial measure of 'pump-priming' by Government through that provision of a large amount of loan capital on favourable terms. It leaves the final responsibility for housing on the individual citizen where it rightly belongs.<sup>125</sup>

Trinidad's Housing Encouragement Act of 1958 was designed to provide houses for the middle classes by encouraging private construction companies to undertake building projects.<sup>126</sup> Through this scheme, building lots were prepared, "income tax concessions" were given to owner-builders and developers, and mortgage guarantees were provided.

Governments also looked to finance institutions such as building and friendly societies in order to encourage private investment. These institutions mainly served efforts to provide middle-class housing.<sup>127</sup> Trinidad, for example, passed a Friendly Societies Housing Corporation Ordinance in 1951. This gave Societies the authority to lend their members money for housing.<sup>128</sup>

Although West Indian enabling strategies seem to have directly targeted the middle classes, policy-makers thought that they would also benefit low-income families. According to the Trinidad Housing Policy Committee's report, providing new middle-class housing would have a 'trickle down effect.' The Committee's recommendations hinged on the principle that "the movement of the middle and upper- working-class families from their present homes to the new homes that will be built, and the consequential freeing of their present homes for the lower income groups," would take place.<sup>129</sup> Thus, according to the colonial government's reasoning, middle-class housing initiatives would contribute to the resolution of low-income housing problems.

## Housing Research Programs

To support their housing programs, in the postwar years, West Indian governments became intent on finding inexpensive building designs and efficient building methods that they could use to rapidly house a maximum number of people with limited funds. As the Colonial Office put it:

There has been great difficulty in deciding what degree of simplicity of design and austerity in amenities should be accepted to make available resources go as far as possible, and there has always been great hope (not peculiar to the West Indies) that somewhere there exists some design or method of construction which would dramatically reduce the cost of housing.<sup>130</sup>

Research programs involved experiments with housing designs and building materials. Some were intended to help advance urban public housing programs, others to identify materials and designs appropriate for rural building.

Experiments with housing design began prior to World War II. Trinidad, for example, conducted experiments into the design of public housing in the 1930s. In December of 1937 the Town Planner, R.B. Walker, presented the design for a two-storey “apartment house” intended for low-income earners. Late in the 1930s, following a suggestion by the Forster Commission, seven model houses were erected on the Government Farm at St. Joseph, Trinidad.<sup>131</sup> The houses, three of which were built by the Public Works Department and the others by private contractors, were completed around the end of March, 1939. One of the models was to have been used as the design for the public housing to be built at Morvant, discussed earlier.

Early housing experiments were not restricted to Trinidad. The 1938 *Colonial Annual Report* for St. Vincent claimed that the government there had been experimenting

with low-cost building and had developed a tapia house.<sup>132</sup> In Grenada, a Committee had been struck in 1938 to look into housing and was conducting experiments with model houses.<sup>133</sup> By 1943, Barbados' Bridgetown Housing Board had completed at least one experiment with housing design, having constructed 66 wooden houses, each in one of three styles.<sup>134</sup>

Early research was not restricted to design, but also considered the siting of houses and public health issues. This was the case in British Guiana in the 1930s. As a result of research into malarial mosquitos, the colony introduced a series of regulatory changes designed to address housing conditions on sugar estates in the 1930s. In 1931, Sir Wilfred Beveridge, who had become Director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1928, suggested that semi-detached and detached cottages should replace ranges on the estates.<sup>135</sup> British Guiana's Surgeon General accepted this proposal, and for much of the following decade only cottage housing was built. However, during the 1930s, investigations into malaria control measures showed that it was best to minimize the space taken up by housing, in order to reduce the area that needed to be included in malaria control initiatives. Detached and semi-detached cottages were a land-extensive form of accommodation, so not ideal. Instead, more compact two-, four- and six- block housing units, built on pillars, were recommended. This view was endorsed by the Moyne Commission and by Orde Browne in his 1939 report on *Labour Conditions in the West Indies*.<sup>136</sup> By 1945, however, the government had learned that DDT could be used to control the *anopheles* mosquito that carried malaria, so cottage housing again became favoured on British Guiana's estates.

By 1943, some officials were calling for coordination of research efforts in the West Indies. H.W. Malcolm, who had been with the India Office and became Executive Officer in the Commonwealth Relations Office in the 1940s, said that regional cooperation was necessary because “each colony was going ahead without knowledge of the success or failures of other similar schemes elsewhere.”<sup>137</sup> Orde Browne, responding to a report on housing in Barbados, said that he “could not help but feeling that there is something seriously lacking as long as colonies produce these purely local efforts in connection with housing; surely this Office should have available a good supply of information on the subject of tropical housing.”<sup>138</sup> That year, a Housing Research Study Group was set up under the Colonial Research Committee to determine whether “United Kingdom experience in this field might contribute, whether as regard (sic) substance or as regards method, to the solution of Colonial problems.”<sup>139</sup> A Colonial Housing Research Group was subsequently created. According to one official, the Group was initially to focus its research efforts on the West Indies.<sup>140</sup>

It was not always easy to initiate housing research projects in the West Indies. Attributing his comments to Woodhouse and Burnett, who both worked as Building Development Advisers, C.Y. Carstairs wrote that “to get building (or housing) research going it is heavy sledding. The difficulties seem to include vagueness as to objective, the multitude of Committees and preoccupations, skepticism as to the need for research anyway, complicated here and there by personal animosities.”<sup>141</sup>

Interest in West Indian housing research was not confined to Britain; Americans also saw the need for a research program. At a meeting of the West Indian Conference in

1944, a sub-committee was created to consider “the Planning of Public Works for the Improvement of Agriculture, Education, Housing and Public Health.” The sub-committee suggested that within the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission (AACC), a Building and Engineering Research Bureau should be established.<sup>142</sup> Its purpose would be to look into things such as new and local building materials, building types, and the impacts of natural hazards and climate on building. The subcommittee also suggested that the Bureau should inquire into the application of standardization and prefabrication to building in the region.

The use of prefabricated housing was an important area of research. Michael Costello, who worked as Town Planner in Trinidad in the late 1940s before he moved to British Guiana, believed that “prefabrication offers the cheapest and most rapid means for large scale housing development.” He suggested that research into prefabrication should be conducted in order to allow colonies to “take advantage of the economies intrinsic in the mass production prefabrication techniques.”<sup>143</sup> By the 1950s, most individuals and organizations agreed that completely prefabricated houses were too expensive for the West Indies. Few, if any, colonies attempted to prefabricate whole houses, although many experimented with prefabricated components such as windows, doors and roof trusses. There was a general consensus that these would be useful, for example, in aided self-help programs.<sup>144</sup>

Colonies continued to develop model houses to support their public housing and aided self-help projects, as well as private building initiatives. In British Guiana, “Walker houses,” which according to J.C. Rose, “set a much higher standard than any other



Government houses in the West Indies” were being constructed by 1954.<sup>145</sup> Walker houses were so named because they were designed by J.C. Walker, the Acting Chief Architect of the Colony’s Housing and Planning Department. The original Walker house (the “Walker No. 1”)<sup>146</sup> was improved upon in a series of houses designed by Walker, O’Brien, H. Mackey, an American housing specialist, and N.C. Flanders and G.M. Leather, both of whom were on contract with the British Guiana Government.<sup>147</sup> Photographs of some of the houses that were frequently used in aided self-help schemes and built for the Housing Department are reproduced in Figures 4 (a, b, c, and d).

### **Sources of West Indian Housing Policy Ideas**

Through the exchange of information about housing initiatives, something approaching a common approach to policy began to develop in the West Indies in the 1950s. The conferences held by the Development and Welfare Organization and by the Caribbean Commission provided a forum for trading policy ideas. So, too, did planning and housing staff exchanges between colonies. Colonies also sponsored exhibitions; in 1954, for example, Jamaica’s Ministry of Health and Housing had held a demonstration in which staff from other West Indian housing departments visited the island to see what was being done. According to one account of the event, “considerable benefit was gained by all concerned from the exchange of ideas and mutual constructive criticism.”<sup>148</sup>

The most influential organization, in terms of the development of West Indian housing policy up to the late 1940s, was the DWO. Other significant institutions included the British Building Research Station and, through the Caribbean Commission,

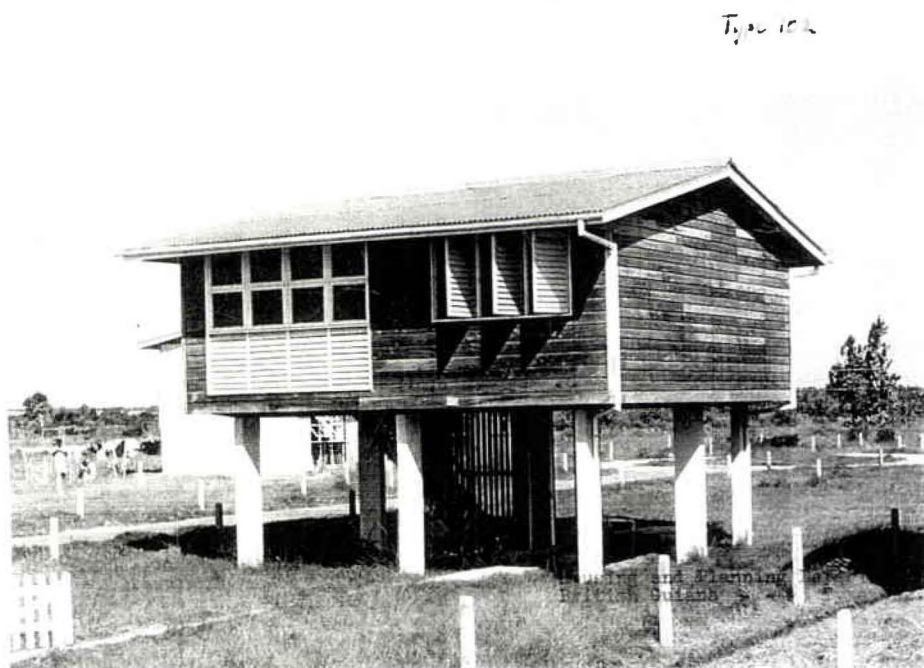


Figure 4 (a). Walker House, Type 102. This model was frequently used in aided self-help projects, even though officially, it was “not encouraged” because it was not made completely of concrete.



Figure 4 (b). Walker House, Type 109. A three-bedroom model with walls of hollow concrete blocks. Popular in aided self-help projects and built for the Housing Department under contract.



Figure 4 (c). Walker House, Type 111. A house designed to minimum standards, aimed at low-income families, and built under contract for the Housing Department.

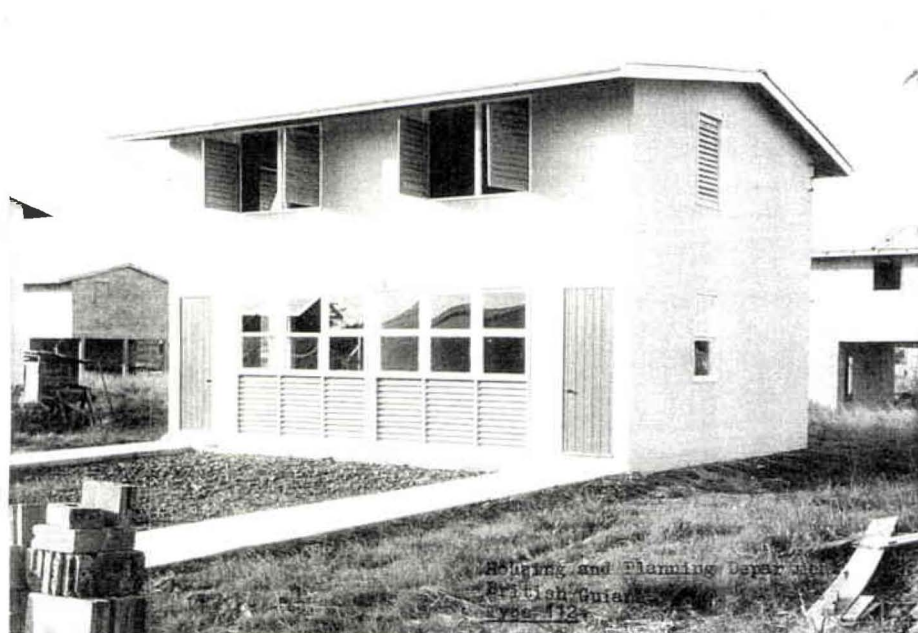


Figure 4 (d). Walker House, Type 112. A detached version of Type 111.

Figures 4 (a, b, c, d): Source: Housing and Planning Department, British Guiana [CO 1031/1683].



the United States Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) and the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA). In addition, the United Nations seems to have played a small role in contributing housing information and also in funding a housing advisor to work in Jamaica.<sup>149</sup> In order to understand why housing policy took the form that it did, it is important to consider the role played by these organizations.

The DWO issued policy documents and circulars and sponsored conferences that shaped housing policy throughout the West Indies. The first important housing policy statement that it produced was *Housing in the West Indies*. Participants at the British West Indian Conference on Housing held in Barbados in 1951 re-evaluated the principles laid out in *Housing in the West Indies*, articulating new standards. The participants came up with a number of recommendations for improving housing conditions.<sup>150</sup> Their primary objective was to reduce building costs. According to the delegates, savings could be achieved by standardizing legislation and building designs.<sup>151</sup> The region-wide standards that had been set out in *Housing* were too high, resulting in high building costs. Complaints about these standards were not new; in 1949, for example, Woodhouse had reported to Atkinson that they were too costly.<sup>152</sup> Conference delegates suggested that the DWO should produce a set of building plans and standardized housing components for use throughout the West Indies. This would enable the DWO to organize "bulk purchase" of building materials.<sup>153</sup> The delegates also suggested that more regional cooperation in housing was needed. In particular, they recommended that all colonies should contribute funding for projects with regional benefits, such as the establishment of a cement factory on one island that would produce cement for the whole region.<sup>154</sup>

Ideas about housing policy came from British sources beyond the West Indies. In 1948, a Colonial Liaison Officer was employed by the British Building Research Station in order to provide information on building to colonial governments. In 1952, the Colonial Liaison Section was expanded because of the interest shown by the colonies in building research. The Section, headed by G.A. Atkinson, experimented with building materials and provided advice on house designs. In addition, it published a series of Colonial Building Notes and a number of other reports as a way to provide information on various building-related topics. Furthermore, it acted as a source of information on housing projects in British colonies overseas.<sup>155</sup>

British assistance with housing policy was not always welcome in the West Indies, however. As a case in point, officials within the Colonial Service occasionally forwarded information on United Kingdom programs to planning officials in the colonies. In the mid-1940s, C.Y. Carstairs sent some notes and diagrams relating to United Kingdom housing experiments to the DWO, thinking that they might be useful. However, K.W. Blackburne, Administrative Secretary at the DWO, disagreed. In a letter to Carstairs, he wrote that while staff had found the information interesting, it was “hardly applicable to the West Indies in view of the conditions prevailing here.”<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, he quoted Gardner-Medwin’s response to the information: “I say it regretfully, but this is just the kind of research that we must avoid in the West Indies, because at this still primitive stage of development it can have no connection with our problem.”<sup>157</sup>



British organizations were not the only source of influence over West Indian housing policy. American and international institutions also played a role. One important agency was the Caribbean Commission, originally established in 1942 as the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission (AACC). Its purpose was to provide a forum for cooperation between Britain and the United States in social and economic development initiatives in the West Indies. Issues like housing, agriculture and labour all came within its scope of interest. The AACC was renamed the Caribbean Commission in 1946, when France and the Netherlands, which also held colonies in the area, joined the organization. The Commission was closely associated with the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) of the United States. West Indian governments received American advice on housing programs through this relationship. Beginning in 1957, for example, ICA advisers provided assistance to Trinidad's Housing and Planning Commission. The influence of the ICA and the projects in Puerto Rico that were promoted by Jacob Crane helps to explain the prevalence of aided self-help housing policies in the British West Indies. As one report on housing noted, "[ICA] advisers visit most of the territories in the area, especially in connection with aided self-help schemes."<sup>158</sup>

Last and probably least, the United Nations also influenced the development of housing policy in the British West Indian colonies.<sup>159</sup> U.N. bulletins on housing in developing countries were available to Britain's Building Research Station, which disseminated information to the colonies. Publications by the Caribbean Commission, such as *Aspects of Housing in the West Indies*, included articles written by United Nations housing experts.<sup>160</sup> Additionally, U.N. housing advisers were sent to some

British colonies, including Jamaica and British Guiana. Giles has shown that the U.N. recommended aided self-help schemes to developing countries in the early post-war years.<sup>161</sup> This likely influenced decisions by West Indian governments to use aided self-help in their housing programs, but the U.N.'s advice was not decisive.

## Discussion

It is clear from the recommendations of the Moyne Commission that ideas originating in the metropole informed early West Indian housing policy, particularly with regard to slum clearance. The Commission suggested that West Indian "legislation and procedure should follow those of the United Kingdom, unless it is certain that United Kingdom provisions are inappropriate."<sup>162</sup> In questioning government officials from Trinidad, the Commissioners referred to Britain's experience with slum clearance policy. Lord Moyne, for example, said that the question of compensation for owners of houses had been debated in Britain, and that it might also surface as a problem in Trinidad.<sup>163</sup>

Some officials, however, did not believe that the metropolitan experience with slum clearance was applicable in the colonies. Comparing the compensation issue in Britain and the West Indies, Edward Stubbs (a member of the Commission) stated that:

A thing which is insanitary in the eyes of the authorities is frequently not so in the eyes of the owner. In most cases the landlords are poor people who only have a few shillings to live on and something would have to be provided for these people. You may not come across such cases here [i.e. in England].<sup>164</sup>

Similarly, three years after the Moyne Commission had completed its investigations, William McLean, an engineer who had recently retired from an appointment with the

Egyptian Ministry of the Interior and who continued to advise the Colonial Office, produced a memorandum on "Slum Clearance and Housing in the West Indies."<sup>165</sup>

McLean said that due to the lower "standard of living and of housing" in the British Colonies, slum clearance could not work the same way that it did in Britain.<sup>166</sup>

As skepticism about the value of policies developed in Britain increased, the emphasis shifted away from public housing and slum clearance to the promotion of private initiatives. This was primarily because local governments, the Colonial Office and the Development and Welfare Organization found that public housing projects were too costly. By assisting private efforts, they could increase the number of people that they helped. One of the most significant objectives of postwar colonial housing policy was to promote home ownership, rather than to build public housing for rent. According to an official report published in 1960, this policy had several advantages:

Families who own their own houses are more likely to feel that they have a stake in society, and so have an active interest in the building up of a stable community...Home ownership is also likely to engender a sense of pride in the house, which if sympathetically fostered, will encourage the householder to look after and improve his property. Finally, assistance to home owners is the most effective way of making use of limited financial resources and of raising standards of housing over a wide front.<sup>167</sup>

An emphasis on private housing efforts had always dominated rural housing programs in the West Indies, but in the 1940s, urban public housing projects also began to adopt a similar approach.

The growing emphasis on aided self-help resulted from the movement away from public housing. Aided self-help became prevalent because it was adopted by the SILWF and because it was promoted by outside interests, especially the U.S. Foreign Operations

Administration and the Caribbean Commission. Even before these institutions began to promote the method, however, colonial governments and the Colonial Office had found that it was an inexpensive means by which large amounts of housing could be provided. Furthermore, it helped people to achieve home ownership. However, it did meet with some disfavour because it presented administrative challenges and often, houses built through the method took long to complete.

The findings presented in this chapter lend support to Giles' contention that there were two phases in housing policy in the period between 1950 and 1996. In her research on Thai housing policy and the United Nations, Giles found that the first phase lasted from 1950 to 1985 and was characterized by a number of approaches to housing provision, including aided self-help. The second phase, 1986 to 1996, was dominated by enabling approaches.<sup>168</sup> Cedric Pugh had previously identified three phases in self-help housing policy between 1950 and 1996.<sup>169</sup> These were: 1950-1971, in which self-help was not enshrined in official housing policies; 1972-1985, in which aided self-help in the form of sites and services and slum upgrading schemes became dominant; and 1986-1996, when enabling approaches came to be the favoured official approach to housing. The West Indian documents studied in this thesis confirm that aided self-help was an important component of a set of different housing strategies used by governments in the early postwar years.

Another result of the move away from public housing was the use of policies designed to stimulate the private sector. By providing mortgage guarantees, governments could encourage private house-building for rental or sale and thus assist families to

acquire housing without overstressing their limited budgets. Such initiatives were of most direct benefit to the middle classes, although governments thought that the benefits would filter down to lower-income groups because they would result in an overall increase in the housing supply. The middle classes would move to newer and better accommodation, leaving their older houses for the lower income groups. New legislation such as Trinidad's Friendly Societies Housing Corporation Ordinance and the removal of rent control legislation were other low-cost ways by which governments attempted to increase private housing investment at little cost to themselves.

The emphasis on private sector involvement in housing provision may have resulted in part from the changing views on housing and social development. At the time that the Forster and Moyne Commissions were active in the late 1930s, housing was viewed as a social service, which governments and major employers had a duty to provide for the working classes. This view changed, at least in some circles, in the 1950s. In Trinidad, for example, the Housing Policy Committee argued against major public housing projects, except in slum areas, because its members believed that "any large-scale provision of houses as a welfare service would militate against the policies for the economic development of the country."<sup>170</sup> The shift in thinking towards a greater emphasis on the private sector in a colonial context therefore reflected developments in Britain and other developed states.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> H. Young, Letter from Sir Hubert Young to Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, 17 June 1940, No. 192 [CO 318/444/10].
- <sup>2</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing in the West Indies*.
- <sup>3</sup> Great Britain, *Jamaica, 1938*, p. 14.
- <sup>4</sup> Jamaica, Central Housing and Planning Authority, "Memorandum Dealing with Development of Trench Pen."
- <sup>5</sup> Jamaica. Central Housing Authority, *Reports for the years 1948 to 1953*.
- <sup>6</sup> West Indian Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare, 1947-1949*, p. 76.
- <sup>7</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1932*, p. 13; Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1935*, p. 11; R. Home, "Transferring British Planning Law," p. 400.
- <sup>8</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1937*, p. 11.
- <sup>9</sup> "Housing at Laventille," *Trinidad Guardian*, 24 Aug 1938, p. 8.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> H. Young, Letter from Sir Hubert Young to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald, 4 July 1938 [CO 295/602/6]; R. Home, *Of Planting and Planning*, p. 185.
- <sup>12</sup> "Island-Wide Housing Plan," *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 Dec 1937, p. 1.
- <sup>13</sup> M. Poynton, "Memorandum," 22 November 1937 [CO 295/599/5]
- <sup>14</sup> "The Problem of Housing," *Trinidad Guardian*, 28 April 1938, p. 8.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> J.L. Devaux, "Slum Clearance and Housing Ordinance, 1938. Attorney General's Report," 22 December 1938 [CO 295/610/14]
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> H. Young. "Letter from Sir Hubert Young to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald," 4 July 1938 [CO 295/602/6]. 'Unofficials' were local people, usually prominent citizens, who were not a part of the colonial administration.
- <sup>20</sup> "Housing Commission Appointed," *Trinidad Guardian*, 31 March 1939 p.1; J. Huggins, Letter to Malcolm MacDonald, 20 March 1939 [CO 295/611/1]
- <sup>21</sup> H. Young, Letter from Sir Hubert Young to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald, 4 July 1938 [CO 295/602/6]
- <sup>22</sup> "Housing Body Sees Valsayn," *Trinidad Guardian*, 5 April 1939, p. 2. Other members of the Commission included: Errol Dos Santos, Treasurer and Chairman; J. Macgillivray, the Sub-Intendant of Crown Lands; H.A. Tyler Smith, the Director of Works and Transport; G. de Nobriga; Mrs E.R. Pashley; Major R.A. Torrance, the Mayor of San Fernando; Mr. R. B. Skinner; Mr. E.F. Maginot; and Trinidad's Director of Medical Services.
- <sup>23</sup> "The Housing Commission," *Trinidad Guardian*, 1 April 1939, p. 8.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> "Housing at Laventille," *Trinidad Guardian*, 24 Aug 1938, p. 8.
- <sup>26</sup> Great Britain. *Trinidad and Tobago, 1946*, p. 51.
- <sup>27</sup> "Workers' Housing Scheme to Start," *Trinidad Guardian*, 21 Aug 1938, p. 3.
- <sup>28</sup> "Government Aids Rural Housing," *Trinidad Guardian*, 30 Jan 1947, p. 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1947*, p. 51.
- <sup>30</sup> "No Site Found," *Trinidad Guardian*, 26 Oct 1948: p. 11.
- <sup>31</sup> People's Royal Commission Evidence Committee, Memorandum Submitted by the People's Royal Commission Evidence Committee on Matters Pertaining to the Social, Economic and Political Welfare of the Colony. West India Royal Commission, Trinidad and Tobago, 1938 [CO 950/796]. Members of the Committee included Lionel Gabriel (a carpenter), Algernon Burkett (a journalist), David Morris (a seaman), James Lovell (a chiropractor) and Ignacio Joseph (a former civil servant). The Royal

Commission refused to grant the Committee an audience because it claimed that it would simply duplicate evidence already provided by others.

<sup>32</sup> Major G. St. J. Orde Browne, Oral Evidence to the West India Royal Committee, 7 March 1939 [CO 950/933]

<sup>33</sup> Slummer, "Slum Clearance Must Not Be Impeded," *Trinidad Guardian*, 20 March 1945, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> "Public Health Problems," *Trinidad Guardian*, 13 Jan 1939, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> "New Workers' Flats in City," *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 Sept 1945, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> "Slum Clearance Unfair," *Trinidad Guardian*, 6 April 1945, pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> "Building Scheme Renders Scores Homeless," *Trinidad Guardian*, 12 Sept 1945, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Simey, *Development and Welfare*, p. 229.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>40</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 1946, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing*, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> "New 'Slum Palace' Causes Debate," *Trinidad Guardian*, 20 March 1948, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> "Mayor Visits New 'Slum Palace,'" *Trinidad Guardian*, 24 March 1948, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> "Housing Body Plans Cheaper Rental Houses," *Trinidad Guardian*, 6 Aug 1948, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> G.A. Atkinson, Office Minutes, 8 July 1952 [CO 1031/237]

<sup>46</sup> "New Policy Suggested in Slum Clearance," *Trinidad Guardian*, 8 April 1945, p. 4; "Slum Acquisition Policy," *Trinidad Guardian*, 2 June 1945, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare Report*, 1947, p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> Port of Spain Ministerial Association, "Memorandum Submitted by the Port of Spain Ministerial Association on Ways and Means of Improving the Social and Economic Conditions of the People," West India Royal Commission, Trinidad and Tobago, 1939/39 [CO 950/951]

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 1947, p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> Trinidad and Tobago, *Report of the Planning and Housing Commission*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare*, 1951, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 1952; West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare*, 1952, p. 61.

<sup>54</sup> Bain, *Low-Income Housing*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare*, 1953, p. 85.

<sup>56</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 23.

<sup>57</sup> Great Britain. *West India Royal Commission. Report*, p. 178.

<sup>58</sup> "Co-operative Societies Will Enhance," *Trinidad Guardian*, 3 April 1945, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> "Jamaica Co-operative Scheme," *Trinidad Guardian*, 7 Dec 1946, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Caribbean Commission, *West Indian Conference, Seventh Session*, p. 88.

<sup>61</sup> F. Stockdale, Despatch to Lord Moyne, 16 June 1941 [CO 318/452/12]

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> G.D. Owen, Letter to Frank Stockdale, 29 October 1941 [CO 318/452/14]

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> M. Fletcher, Letter to Colonial Secretary, Kingston. 29 April 1943 [CO 318/453/2]

<sup>66</sup> "Better Homes Sought," *Trinidad Guardian*, 20 April 1945, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago*, 1946.

<sup>68</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization. *Development and Welfare*, 1947-49, p. 73.

<sup>69</sup> "Applications for Rural Housing," *Trinidad Guardian*, 2 May 1948, p. 3; J.A.M. de Verteuil, "Memorandum on Frederick Settlement- For the Rehousing of Sugar Estate Labourers at Caroni," February 1950 [CO 859/245/4]

<sup>70</sup> J.S. MacPherson, "Housing Improvement with Limited Funds." Circular No. 102/46, Development and Welfare in the West Indies, 21 November 1946 [CO 1042/255]

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*



- <sup>73</sup> Development and Welfare in the West Indies, Report of the British West Indies Housing Conference. Bulletin No. 30. June 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Barbados [CO 859/320]
- <sup>74</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, "Self-Help Housing in the British West Indies," p. 103.
- <sup>75</sup> "Conference on Aided Self-Help." Report. Jamaica, 12 August 1952 [CO 1042/257].
- <sup>76</sup> C.Y. Carstairs, "Architecture in the Tropics," p. 307.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> J. Crane, "Huts and Houses in the Tropics."
- <sup>79</sup> R. Harris, "Silence of the Experts," p. 165.
- <sup>80</sup> Crane, "Huts," p. 100.
- <sup>81</sup> J. Crane and R. McCabe, "Programmes in Aid of Family Housebuilding," p. 369; Crane, "Huts," p. 102.
- <sup>82</sup> W.M. Woodhouse, Note on self-help housing, 1952 [CO 1042/257]. CO 1042/257 contains a copy of Crane's "Homes of Earth."
- <sup>83</sup> T.O. Lashley, "Report on Tour of Inspection and Study of Housing in Antigua and Puerto Rico; Jamaica and Trinidad During April-May 1952," 11 June 1952 [CO 1042/257]; Blackburne, Letter to J.L Crane, 22 February 1952 [CO 1042/257].
- <sup>84</sup> K. Bain, *Low Income Housing*, pp. 10-11.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 98.
- <sup>86</sup> J.L. Chapman, "Aided Self-Help Housing in St. Vincent," p. 98.
- <sup>87</sup> E. Foster, L. Munoz-Morales, D.W. Spreull and W.M. Woodhouse. "Aided Self Help Housing Programme for Antigua." Draft. 13 April 1951 [CO 1031/248]
- <sup>88</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare*, 1952, p. 60.
- <sup>89</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare*, 1953, p. 84.
- <sup>90</sup> D.R. Hanson, "Aided Self-Help Techniques in Planning," p. 131.
- <sup>91</sup> Bain, "Low Income Housing," p.12.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 16.
- <sup>93</sup> P.A. Cummings, "Housing Under the Development Programme," May 1954. British Guiana Legislative Council No. 6/1954 [CO 1031/1682]; Great Britain, *British Guiana*, 1955, p. 134.
- <sup>94</sup> E.H. Barrow, "Report of the Induction Training Programme for Community Organisers, Aided Self-Help Section, Housing and Planning Department," Georgetown, 16-30 October 1954 [CO 1031/1683]
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>96</sup> Hanson, "Aided Self-Help Techniques," p. 131.
- <sup>97</sup> Special Housing Supplement, *British Guiana Bulletin*, December 1954, p. 4 [CO 1031/1683]
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>99</sup> D.R. Hanson, "Observations and Recommendations on British Guiana Aided Self-Help Housing," n.d. (circa 1955) [CO 1031/1683]
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>101</sup> Great Britain. *British Guiana*, 1958, pp. 130-131. Note that the figure of twenty per cent is an approximation as the numbers given in the report do not add up correctly; the report lists 2,543 contract-built houses and 664 self-help houses, for a total of 3,207 houses built over the period, but it states that a total of 3,219 houses were provided.
- <sup>102</sup> Great Britain, *British Guiana*, 1957, p. 129.
- <sup>103</sup> L. Peake, "From Cooperative Socialism," p. 123.
- <sup>104</sup> Bain, *Low Income Housing*, p. 16.
- <sup>105</sup> Great Britain, *British Dependencies in the Caribbean*, p. 66.
- <sup>106</sup> Great Britain. *Jamaica*, 1956, p. 267.
- <sup>107</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare*, 1953, p. 84.
- <sup>108</sup> Bain, *Low-Income Housing*, p. 19.
- <sup>109</sup> M. Costello, "A Note on Aided Self-Help," p. 107.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 108.
- <sup>111</sup> Burgess, "Issues in Caribbean Housing Improvement," p. 207.

- <sup>112</sup> "Building Houses for Rent," *Trinidad Guardian*, 13 Dec 1945, p. 4.
- <sup>113</sup> "New Township Grows," *Trinidad Guardian*, 18 Aug 1946, p. 8.
- <sup>114</sup> "Port-of-Spain Going Skyscraper?" *Trinidad Guardian*, 1 May 1949, p. 13.
- <sup>115</sup> "Landlord's View Rent Control," *Trinidad Guardian*, 7 December 1945, p. 4.
- <sup>116</sup> Trinidad and Tobago. *Report of the Housing Policy Committee*, p. 43.
- <sup>117</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare Report*, 1951, p. 72.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- <sup>119</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 32.
- <sup>120</sup> Woodhouse, "Housing in the West Indies," p. 231.
- <sup>121</sup> Great Britain, *Jamaica, 1952*, p. 93.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>123</sup> Great Britain, *Jamaica, 1956*, p. 264.
- <sup>124</sup> Great Britain, *Jamaica: The Making of a Nation*, p. 30.
- <sup>125</sup> Trinidad and Tobago, *Housing Policy Committee*, p. 2.
- <sup>126</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, pp. 32-33.
- <sup>127</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 33.
- <sup>128</sup> Great Britain, *Trinidad and Tobago, 1952*, p. 103.
- <sup>129</sup> Trinidad and Tobago, *Housing Policy Committee*, p. 2.
- <sup>130</sup> Great Britain, *British Dependencies in the Caribbean*, p. 65.
- <sup>131</sup> "Homes for Workers," *Trinidad Guardian*, 11 March 1939, p. 8.
- <sup>132</sup> Great Britain. Colonial Office, *St. Vincent, 1938*, p. 6. Tapia consisted of clay, mixed with grass or other materials, and built on a wooden framework.
- <sup>133</sup> Great Britain, *Grenada, 1937 and 1938*, p. 10.
- <sup>134</sup> "Memorandum on Housing Experiments in Barbados." Typescript. July 1943 [CO 28/330/6].
- <sup>135</sup> G. Giglioli, *The Population and Housing Problem*, p. 11.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>137</sup> "Memorandum on Housing Experiments in Barbados." Typescript. July 1943 [CO 28/330/6]
- <sup>138</sup> G.J. Orde Browne, Minute, 10 July 1944 [CO 28/333/8]
- <sup>139</sup> G.H. Hall, Circular from Secretary of State, 4 December 1945 [CO 1042/254]
- <sup>140</sup> W.M. Robertson. 10 August 1944 [CO 28/333/8]
- <sup>141</sup> C.Y. Carstairs. Minute to file. 25 September 1947 [CO 1042/254]
- <sup>142</sup> The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission was established in 1942 to promote cooperation between British and American interests in the West Indies. The French and Dutch joined the organization in 1944, when it was renamed the Caribbean Commission.
- <sup>143</sup> M. Costello, quoted in "Town Planner Urges Prefabrication," *Trinidad Guardian*, 5 March 1948, p. 5.
- <sup>144</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Development and Welfare Report, 1953*, p. 84.
- <sup>145</sup> J.C. Rose, "Report on a Visit to British Guiana," April 1955 [CO 1031/1683]
- <sup>146</sup> Special Housing Supplement, *British Guiana Bulletin*, December 1954 [CO 1031/1683]
- <sup>147</sup> "Information on Recent Housing Development in British Guiana," n.d. (circa 1956) [CO 1031/1683]
- <sup>148</sup> Great Britain, *Jamaica, 1954*, p. 98.
- <sup>149</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 50.
- <sup>150</sup> Development and Welfare in the West Indies, *Report of the British West Indies Housing Conference*, Bulletin No. 30, June 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Barbados [CO 859/320]. Those who attended the Conference included: Woodhouse; Grossmith (Administrator of the Development and Welfare Organization); Went and Lashley (from Barbados); Bird and Spreull (Jamaica); Know (Leewards); Osborne and Littlepage (Trinidad and Tobago); Hetherington, Renwich, Rose and Chapman (Windward Islands); and other observers.
- <sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>152</sup> W.M. Woodhouse, Letter to Atkinson, 20 May 1949 [CO 1042/256]
- <sup>153</sup> Development and Welfare in the West Indies, *Report of the British West Indies Housing Conference*, Bulletin No. 30, June 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Barbados [CO 859/320]
- <sup>154</sup> "British West Indian Housing Conference," in *Aspects of Housing*, p. 81.

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- <sup>155</sup> C. Jeffries, *A Review of Colonial Research*, pp. 70-73.
- <sup>156</sup> K.W. Blackburne, Letter to C.Y. Carstairs, 8 November 1946 [CO 1042/254]
- <sup>157</sup> R. Gardner-Medwin, quoted in K.W. Blackburne, Letter to C.Y. Carstairs, 8 November 1946 [CO 1042/254]
- <sup>158</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, pp. 50-51.
- <sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>160</sup> Caribbean Commission, *Aspects of Housing*.
- <sup>161</sup> Giles, *Thailand Resists the U.N.*
- <sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.
- <sup>163</sup> "Trinidad's 5-Year Plan Reviewed by Commission," *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 February 1939, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>164</sup> Proceedings. West India Royal Commission. 7<sup>th</sup> Session, 11 May 1939, p.4 [CO 950/889]
- <sup>165</sup> W. McLean, Slum Clearance and Housing in the West Indies. Memorandum, 17 August 1942 [CO 318/454/15]
- <sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>167</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 29.
- <sup>168</sup> Giles, *Thailand Resists the U.N.*, pp. 66-67.
- <sup>169</sup> C. Pugh, "Changing Roles of Self-Help," pp. 91-92.
- <sup>170</sup> Trinidad and Tobago, *Housing Policy Committee*, p. 2.



## Chapter Five: Conclusion

Most writers have assumed that there was no housing policy in the British West Indies prior to the 1960s, and that when it did emerge it took the form of public housing. This thesis has demonstrated that a limited form of policy was in place in most colonies by the early 1930s, when housing regulations were largely enforced by public health authorities. Policy became steadily more comprehensive in the 1940s and 1950s, and during this time it came to include a diversity of measures in addition to public housing, notably aided self-help and initiatives to strengthen the private sector.

Formal housing and urban planning legislation was initially passed in Trinidad in 1935. It was not until the end of the war, however, when funds, materials and staff became available to implement housing programs, that governments became more actively involved in low-income housing provision. The West India Royal Commission estimated in the late 1930s that approximately £16,000,000 would be required to house people in the region to minimum levels.<sup>1</sup> In 1945, the Development and Welfare Organization estimated that 1.5 million people required new or improved housing across the region.<sup>2</sup> By the early 1960s, when several islands achieved independence, housing and town planning laws, together with administrative organizations, were in place in every colony, although these were not always effective.<sup>3</sup> According to the British

Government, West Indian governments had built about 28,000 homes between 1946 and 1955; a further 100,000 were supplied through private initiatives.<sup>4</sup> Great deficiencies in housing, including slum conditions, were still in evidence by 1960, however. According to a 1957 estimate, 400,000 new houses, as well as repairs for another 180,000 houses, would be required over the subsequent ten years.<sup>5</sup>

Insufficient funding meant that housing policy was not always sustained, and this contributed to governments' inability to solve the housing problem. Sometimes, too, the local planning authorities contributed to the ineffectiveness of housing programs. This was true in Trinidad, for example, whose Planning and Housing Commission had been accused of inefficiency since its inception. Criticisms of the organization continued into the 1950s. In 1952, G.A. Atkinson noted that the Commission was virtually inactive in slum clearance and rehousing. In his view, "lack of funding may be the excuse but indifference and lack of drive are more the reasons."<sup>6</sup> He characterized Trinidad's inability to effectively address the housing problem as "astonishing."<sup>7</sup> Another official came to a similar conclusion the following year, but found that "it is difficult to see how we can usefully intervene in the matter" without stepping into the jurisdiction of the colonial government.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, the Constitution allowed government to have "responsible self-government in matters of this sort."<sup>9</sup> The official expressed disgust that, in normal times, there was no mechanism for Britain to intervene when the colony's housing program was so impotent.<sup>10</sup> The development of housing policy, then, reflected broader issues of control in the relationship between colony and metropole.

In the 1940s and 1950s, West Indian housing policy was composed of a variety of initiatives that met with varying degrees of success. Some governments built public housing estates on the outskirts of the larger urban centres. Public housing was also erected on cleared slum sites. Aided self-help schemes were used in both urban and rural areas, and on the estates cottages were built to replace barracks. Governments removed rent control legislation and provided mortgage guarantees to stimulate private investment. Nevertheless, progress was limited as restrictive budgets continued to challenge efforts to provide better housing. The magnitude of the housing shortage was huge, and one colonial administrator in the West Indies in the early 1950s likened the problem to "Alice in Wonderland who 'had to keep running merely to remain in the same place.'"<sup>11</sup>

Writing about housing in the mid-1950s, another British observer noted that in Jamaica "some good subsidized public housing has been put up within the last few years, but the amount of money available is as a drop in the ocean compared with the needs."<sup>12</sup>

In this thesis, I have shown that unrest due to the poor social and economic conditions in the West Indies was a major reason that colonial policy as a whole began to change in the 1930s. Recognizing the need to remedy these conditions, the British Government passed the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act with the purpose of funding social welfare projects, including housing schemes. In 1944, a Town Planning Section within the Development and Welfare Organization was established in order to assist the West Indian colonies. Housing and planning programs expanded when additional funding became available through the second Colonial Development and

Welfare Act, passed in 1945. Rural housing initiatives expanded further after the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund legislation was enacted in 1947.

The preferred forms of housing policy changed between the late 1930s and 1960s for several reasons. A major cause was cost. Similar economic and social conditions guided governments towards initiatives that promoted the private sector and aided self-help. Governments soon found that urban slum clearance and public housing initiatives were too expensive, and came to see aided self-help as a low-cost alternative. While most writers have indicated that public housing projects dominated early forms of housing policy, this thesis supports Harris' and Giles' contentions that other types of initiatives had become common by the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> Local governments and housing experts in the West Indies generally believed that by improving the functioning of the private housing market and by making use of aided self-help, they could secure accommodation for a larger number of people at a lower cost. Outside influences helped to shape policy and led to similarities in programs implemented across the West Indies. The role of the United States Foreign Operations Administration in promoting aided self-help is notable in this respect. In the early stages of housing policy development, the Development and Welfare Organization, the British Building Research Station and the Caribbean Commission also provided information and direction that led to consistency among the West Indian colonies, and indeed beyond the region.

Although I have surveyed the general West Indian scene I have concentrated especially on Trinidad because it pioneered housing and slum clearance legislation and adopted variations of all of the types of housing programs that were used in the region.



As one of the larger and better-developed West Indian colonies, policy in Trinidad was comparable to that in the other larger West Indian colonies with similar levels of industrialization and urbanization, particularly Jamaica and British Guiana. Smaller islands such as St. Vincent, Antigua, Grenada and St. Lucia, for example, had a slightly different experience. With small urban centres and minimal funds, their programs emphasized rural housing and aided self-help methods.

The notion that there was no housing policy in the British West Indies prior to the 1960s is a misconception that points to a need for more detailed studies of housing policy in colonies elsewhere. A closer examination of these areas may provide new insight into programs adopted by national governments and international organizations like the Colonial (later Commonwealth) Development Corporation (CDC) in the post-independence era, explaining why certain strategies were adopted. As a case in point, an account of the CDC's involvement with housing in the Caribbean showed that it assisted with a rehousing program after a fire destroyed housing in Castries in 1948. Otherwise, it had no further involvement in housing projects in the region until the late 1950s, when it financed subdivision development and home mortgages.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that in taking on the role of mortgage financier, the CDC was continuing policies promoted by the colonial administration and local colonial governments prior to independence. Without knowledge of programs in the colonial era, it is not possible to identify potential linkages between colonial and postcolonial policies. Studies of housing policy in other colonies may also reveal how the West Indies influenced (and was influenced by) initiatives in



other colonies, and thus provide a clearer picture of the way that colonial policy was formulated and disseminated throughout the Empire.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Great Britain, *British Dependencies in the Caribbean*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> West Indies Development and Welfare Organization, *Housing in the West Indies*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago became independent in 1962, after the short-lived federation of the West Indies, formed in 1958, disintegrated. Barbados and British Guiana followed suit in 1966, and the other West Indian colonies gained independence at various later dates.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain, *Housing and Town Planning*, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> G.A. Atkinson, Office minutes, 8 July 1952 [CO 1031/237]

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> J.A.B. Shaw, Minute to file, 30 January 1957 [CO 1031/237]

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> D. Bishop, Minute to file, 5 February 1953 [CO 1031/237]

<sup>11</sup> W.M. Woodhouse, "Housing in the West Indies," p. 227.

<sup>12</sup> M. Proudfoot, *Britain and the United States*, p. 265.

<sup>13</sup> R. Harris, "Silence of the Experts," p. 165; C. Giles, *Thailand Resists the U.N.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>14</sup> Commonwealth Development Corporation, "Housing in the Commonwealth Caribbean," p. 65.

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