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# ***Mauritius: Independence and Dependence***

by JEAN HOUBERT\*

MAURITIUS became independent on 12 March 1968, and was then said to be the paradigm of the small isolated, poor, dependent country, only emerging from the colonial era to fall immediately into neo-colonialism – the Third World's Third World.

## A COLONIAL CREATION

Mauritius is very different from the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia in some important respects, having been entirely created by European colonisation. The economy, the society, the polity, the very flora and fauna of the island are all the direct result of its colonial history. The majority of the present-day inhabitants are the descendants of those who willingly and unwillingly arrived and stayed during the last two centuries, so Mauritius is not a 'settler colony' in the same sense as Australia. It is not a replica of the European 'mother country' beyond the seas, but rather a flotsam left behind by the wreck of the colonial world. In Mauritius, colonialism was not something which came from outside; it was built into the fabric of the whole society. What can be the significance of independence for such an ex-colony? What form does development take?

Profit brought the first immigrants to Mauritius and has dominated life ever since. Originally there was little or no money to be made out of an uninhabited small island, entirely lacking in natural resources, but it soon became part of a bigger scheme, whereby successive European powers – Holland, France, and finally Britain – used Mauritius as a watering place, and later a trading and military base *en route* to India.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter the island became – and remains – a sugar plantation, although in the last few years it has entered in earnest on the Hong Kong road of manufacturing for export.

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<sup>1</sup> For information about the arrival of the Europeans, see G. Visdelov-Guimbeau, *La Découverte des îles Mascareignes* (Port-Louis, 1948). On the historical background of Mauritius in the context of the Indian Ocean, see A. Toussaint, *Histoire des îles Mascareignes* (Paris, 1972), and *Histoire de l'Océan Indien* (Paris, 1961).

Sugar production cannot be explained by the possession of resources specific to the island or by initial factor endowment. Mauritius originally had none: it is in the cyclonic belt, and its small land surface was covered with tropical forests and volcanic boulders. It is thousands of miles away from the markets for raw sugar which is a heavy, bulky commodity.<sup>1</sup> The early European settlers appropriated the land and, since there were no native labourers, slaves had to be brought in from distant Africa and Madagascar to cut the forests and clear the plantations. Initially a variety of crops were grown, but these gradually gave way to sugar, which came to dominate the economy as the result of the place which Mauritius occupied in the overall imperial scheme.

Britain had captured the island for strategic reasons: to deprive the French of a base from which to harass her shipping and challenge her position in India.<sup>2</sup> With British hegemony in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius lost its military and commercial significance, and the settlers turned more and more to the land. A political partnership developed between the British officials and the French-speaking settlers, in which sugar provided the revenue needed to administer the island and maintain troops there. The colonial régime provided a minimum of infrastructure and the coercive apparatus for the plantation system. Slaves were brought in by the settlers with a certain amount of government control, and later, when this trade was abolished, cheap labour was introduced in the form of Indian indentured coolies.

Within the British Empire the Mauritian planters had a vast market for sugar. As the demand for this commodity grew, and as prices rose on the London market, the needs of the growing industry created an institutional structure: centralisation of mills, marketing, research, banking, and insurance, which through economies of scale reinforced the profitability of sugar compared with other forms of production in Mauritius.<sup>3</sup> This in turn led to more expansion, until practically the whole of the cultivable land of the island was under one crop.<sup>4</sup> By then

<sup>1</sup> Mauritius is in latitude 20° 15 S, longitude 57° 35 E, with an area of 1,865 sq.km, being 61 km long by 47 km, with 250 km of coast line. The island is of volcanic origin, fringed with coral reefs that create an extensive lagoon of 2,260 sq.km. A number of small islands, north and east, are parts of Mauritius, Rodrigues being the most important, 560 km to the east. The French *département* of Réunion is 150 km west of Mauritius, and the nearest land mass is Madagascar some 800 km to the west.

<sup>2</sup> On the British conquest of Mauritius, see Raymond M. D'Unienville, *Letters of Sir John Abercromby, September 1810–April 1811* (Port-Louis, 1969), and *The London Gazette Extraordinary* (London), 13 February 1811.

<sup>3</sup> See Roland Lamusse, 'The Economic Development of the Mauritius Sugar Industry', B.Litt. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of developments in the economy since World War II, see J. E. Meade et al. *The Economic and Social Structure of Mauritius* (London, 1961), and J. E. Meade, 'Mauritius: a case

sugar and its by-products represented 98 per cent of all exports from Mauritius. With the consequential displacement of other activities, the island had to import most of its requirements, including the bulk of its food.<sup>1</sup>

Mauritius as an entity then, through its very genesis, was doubly dependent on the outside world: for all its exports, and almost all its imports. Changes in the price of the latter, despite the small quantities involved, could seriously affect standards of living. Of vital importance was the quantity and price of the sugar sold on the world market, and Mauritius had only partial control over this. Furthermore, both imports and exports were subjected to variations in the cost of long-distance freight, as well as the external money market, over which Mauritius had little influence. An extreme international specialisation within the colonial empire has produced a vulnerable, fragile economy. But because this operates only on a cash basis – there are no subsistence farmers – with a relatively high G.N.P. *per capita*, as well as universal literacy, the island does not have the same features of underdevelopment that are to be found in so many other areas of the Third World.

Capitalism in Mauritius took root right from the start for the simple reason that there was nothing else previously, so the problem of articulation with pre-capitalist modes of production, posed elsewhere in the colonial world of Africa and Asia, did not arise in Mauritius.<sup>2</sup> Here capitalism, in its colonial variant, found virtually a clean slate, although it did not, and could not, replicate capitalist development in Europe. In Mauritius the economy grew as part of the overall colonial empire, the centre of which was in Europe. In fact, it is not correct to think of the island as a self-contained entity, since important outside

study in Malthusian economics', in *Economic Journal* (London), LXXI, September 1961, pp. 521–34. For a critique of Meade's position, see John King, 'Mauritius, Malthus and Professor Meade', Communications Series No. 49, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, 1970.

<sup>1</sup> Currently 80,000 tons of rice and 50,000 tons of wheat flour, meat, and milk are being imported. Mauritius is now producing sufficient potatoes and poultry for local consumption, but the seeds and feed have to be obtained from South Africa. Some efforts have been made to improve the home supply of fish, but meanwhile, Japanese, Taiwan, and South Korean fleets exploit the resources around the island. *Financial Times* (London), Special Survey on Mauritius, 6 December 1979.

<sup>2</sup> The articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production in Africa is discussed by Pierre-Philippe Rey, *Les Alliances de classes* (Paris, 1978). Slavery was, at first, the most expeditious way for capitalism to secure sufficient labour power to develop this almost uninhabited island. As Marx has argued, 'capitalism does not entirely rule out the possibility of the existence of slavery at isolated points within the bourgeois production system. But this is only possible because it does not exist at other points of the system and appears as an anomaly in opposition to the bourgeois system itself'; quoted by M. C. Howard and J. C. King (eds.), *The Economics of Marx* (London, 1976), p. 87. For a thorough analysis of sugar plantations and slavery, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1964).

socio-economic and political forces penetrated into – and, indeed, became part of – the colonial body of Mauritius. This fundamental dependency was highlighted in the politics of independence by ethnic tensions and the problem of unemployment.

*Indians in the Creole Society*

From the time that sugar began to be grown on a large scale it has determined the peopling of Mauritius. The number of slaves increased with the need for workers on the plantations, and when abolition took place the demand had become insatiable with rising sugar prices and high profits, but by then cheap indentured labour from India was providing a more lucrative form of exploitation for the planters, as well as being more acceptable to the British. The Indians brought a radical and permanent change in the ethnic composition of the island: in 1835 they formed a tiny fraction of the population of 100,000, of whom 80,000 were slaves, but by 1861 they represented two-thirds of all the inhabitants, and this proportion has been maintained to the present day. A total of 450,000 Indians came to Mauritius as indentured labourers, and most stayed.

When the Indians arrived the three-tier colonial creole society was well established in Mauritius. The British on taking the island in 1810 had found a small number of whites of French origin at the top, large numbers of black slaves at the bottom, and an intermediate group – in size as well as colour – in the middle. The colonial administrators kept and strengthened that pyramidal-type of structure, grafting themselves on at the apex. When slavery was abolished, the indentured Indians replaced the slaves on the plantations and moved to the bottom of the creole hierarchy.

Within this rigid social structure some mobility was nevertheless possible through the acquisition of land. The growing of sugar in Mauritius is a seasonal activity, and in time the planters discovered that it was more economical to employ labourers on a daily basis via a contractor, rather than keeping them tied to the plantations all the year round. The contractor was usually an ‘old immigrant’ Indian who could speak creole and one or more Indian languages, and he received an agreed sum for a given number of labourers where and when required. The contractor was thus in a strategic position to draw to himself part of the surplus produced by the labour power of his men, and with the capital thus accumulated he bought land from the planters.

Sugar milling has always been more profitable than growing sugar. The white planters would sometimes, in bad years, decide to sell or lease part of their land in plots to Indians, but only on the understanding that they would grow sugar and bring the cane to their mills. The Indians, using family labour, were able to produce sugar on marginal land which had become uneconomical for the planters when prices fell. Planters might also give their favourite *sirdar* – a kind of field foreman – small inferior plots of land for market gardening and hence extra cash. Thus, gradually, by hard work and saving, with favours from the planters, and through the exploitation of their fellow countrymen, a number of Indians amassed money and bought land. A few acquired great prosperity as large and rich sugar-estate owners in their own right, while many others became ‘small planters’, owning anything from less than one to several hundred acres of cane.

Just under half the cultivated land of Mauritius is owned today by Indians.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, in recent years, the sons of many of these planters have moved up the educational ladder into the public services and the professions, while more and more have entered politics. Thus, slowly at first, but much more rapidly since World War II, a sizeable Indian middle stratum has emerged, closely linked with the sugar industry, but now helping to mitigate the class confrontation of the white millers/planters and the Indian sugar proletariat.

#### THE POLITICS OF INDEPENDENCE

There are only a few examples where an indigenous society has been able to liberate itself from the domination of a foreign power and its local agents, and Mauritius could hardly be one of them. Here ‘decolonisation’ was merely a rearrangement of the internal balance of political power, and the colonial government played a major rôle in ensuring that there would be continuity in the internal structure of the society, as well as the external linkages. Hence the explanation for the leisurely pace set by the British, because although electoral and constitutional reforms started in 1948, the island did not become independent until 1968.

Internal pressures for change had taken a class basis at first. A number of creole artisans and intellectuals had joined with a few Indian professionals to press for constitutional reforms, and for the right to

<sup>1</sup> For the division of sugar plantations into plots and their sale to Indians, see H. C. Brookfield, ‘Problems of Monoculture and Diversification in a Sugar Island: Mauritius’, in *Economic Geography* (Worcester, Mass.), 35, 1959, pp. 25–40.

strike and form trade unions. They started the Mauritius Labour Party on a non-ethnic basis just before World War II. The birth of the M.L.P. coincided with unrest on some of the estates, provoked by a conflict over the quantity of sugar accruing to the 'small planters' for the canes they brought to the millers/planters. After the extension of the suffrage in 1948, ethnic considerations began to dominate Mauritian politics, and the leadership of the M.L.P. passed into the hands of Indians.<sup>1</sup> Their kith and kin, although largely 'creolised', have retained enough 'Indianness' to make it possible for them to be mobilised politically on an ethnic basis. Rich Indian planters, civil servants, and the sugar proletariat could be rallied together to provide a large electoral base for the 'moderate' Indian leaders of the M.L.P. who were being groomed by the Colonial Office to take over at independence.

By way of contrast, a kind of franco-Mauritian nationalism emerged, especially during periods of strain in the colonial partnership between the British administration and the white French-speaking owners of the sugar industry, and this had the effect of strengthening the attachment of all categories of creoles to the French language, and even to demands for the island to be returned to France.<sup>2</sup> But the nationalism of the creoles could never go very far because the interests of the sugar plantocracy were so closely tied with the British Empire. The French-speaking planters protested now and again, but on the whole they were not too dissatisfied with an arrangement which guaranteed their privileges, their supply of labour, and a market for their sugar, without interfering unduly with their cultural and sentimental attachment to France. Large numbers of coloured creoles had their interests tied to their jobs in the civil service, and however francophile they remained they could not afford to be too anti-British. For many years creole 'reactionaries' and 'liberals' were divided more virulently over questions of colour and voting rights than the constitutional status of the island. Moreover, to the extent that creole nationalism aimed at reintegration with France, rather than independence for Mauritius, it alienated the majority of the population which by then was Indian.

With the advent of even limited constitutional and electoral reforms, the white sugar barons could see political power slipping to the descendants of 'their' indentured labourers, and so they looked for and

<sup>1</sup> A consultative committee on the revision of the constitution under the chairmanship of the Governor of Mauritius, Donald Kennedy, held several meetings in 1946 and 1947, during which questions of ethnicity were debated at length. This led to an exchange of correspondence with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech-Jones, and to the extension of the suffrage. See *Revision of the Constitution of Mauritius* (London, 1947), Cmd. 7228. The text of the 1947 constitution is to be found in D. Napal, *Les Constitutions de l'île Maurice* (Port-Louis, 1962), pp. 110-27.

<sup>2</sup> 'Le Retour de l'île Maurice à la France', Documents publiés par la délégation mauricienne, Paris, 1919; also J. Rivière, *L'île Maurice à la France* (Paris, 1920).

found political allies on an ethnic basis. The coloured creoles were traditionally intermediaries, not only between the white owners and the Indian sugar proletariat, but also in the civil service between the British administrators and the public at large. With the rise of the Indian middle-class they felt that they were being squeezed out of government employment, and had a number of real grudges which could easily be activated politically. The ex-African slaves, displaced from the plantations with the coming of the Indians, had moved to the coast and to the towns. They earned a meagre living by fishing in the lagoons with primitive equipment, and by working as stevedors, drivers, and artisans. Many were more-or-less permanently unemployed and formed a *lumpenproletariat* on the margin of the sugar economy. Most of the creoles, the rich white mill-owners, the middle-class coloured civil servants and professionals, and the black unemployed were Roman Catholics. In spite of their colour/social conflicts, and the growing class gulf between them, they all in their different ways felt threatened by the Indians, and responded readily to an ethnic political appeal.

The creoles also gained political support from other minority groups. They were joined naturally by the Chinese shop and restaurant-keepers who had emerged as middle-class Roman Catholics.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the creoles found allies among the Muslim minority, some of whom had taken the lead in establishing religious and cultural institutions that helped maintain a sense of communal identity among Muslim labourers, thus keeping them apart from the Hindus.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the constitutional reforms, helped by the colonial administration, gave rise to two large ethnic alliances: one dominated by the white creole plantocracy, the other by the high 'caste' of rich Indian planters and professionals. Both cut across deep divisions of class interests, although the stress on ethnicity served to camouflage various internal differences. The contest fought by these two alliances over the issue of independence gave rise to a good deal of ethnic strain and some violence, but did not bring into question the foundation of the colonial society based on class exploitation. The leaders on both sides had nothing to gain by radical changes, and all of them wanted to keep Mauritius linked with Britain and Europe.

The *Parti mauricien social démocrate*, backed by the creoles, advocated a form of integration with Britain, while the Mauritius Labour Party,

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese came to Mauritius during the late nineteenth century as labourers, but rapidly moved into retail trading where they gained a virtual monopoly. In recent years they have entered the professions, while retaining a strong position in commerce; well 'creolised' they now identify themselves fully with Mauritius. See M. Ly-Tio-Fane, 'The Chinese in Mauritius', n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Moomtaz Emrith, *The Muslims in Mauritius* (Port-Louis, 1967), and for an anthropological analysis, see Burton Benedict, *Indians in a Plural Society* (London, 1961).



prompted by London, opted for independence. The impending accession of Britain to the European Economic Community loomed large in the preoccupation of both parties. Integration with Britain was presented by the P.M.S.D. as a formula for curing all the ailments of Mauritius, and there is no doubt that they were heavily influenced by the status of nearby Réunion. The creole leaders argued that by integration/association with Britain, Mauritian sugar would continue to enter the United Kingdom without contravening the Treaty of Rome, and that inside the Common Market there would be a large assured market, as well as high European prices. Moreover, Mauritians with British passports would be able to find work in Europe: the close links with beloved France could be renewed at last, and the 'Hindu Menace' would vanish.<sup>1</sup>

The M.L.P. argued that integration with Britain was not feasible, and that in any case Mauritius would continue to benefit from the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement even if Britain joined the E.E.C. Furthermore, an independent Mauritius would be better placed to make its own arrangements with Europe – and, in particular, with France – while retaining its close relations with Britain.<sup>2</sup>

The strategy of the P.M.S.D. was to press for a referendum to be held in Mauritius on the straight issue of independence versus association, and at the same time to make a general appeal to all Mauritians, irrespective of communities, to reject independence. The party conducted a skilful campaign, ably led by a young populist leader, Gaëtan Duval, and 'Hindu mon Frère' became the slogan on island platforms, if not in the intimacy of creole clubs and drawing rooms. The enormous resources of the sugar industry helped the P.M.S.D. to draw large numbers of Indians – particularly the young – to its ranks.

It is most improbable, however, that London would have agreed to the plans of the P.M.S.D. whatever the wishes of the inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The P.M.S.D. was originally known as *Le Parti mauricien*, but *social démocrate* was later added, mainly to impress the British Labour Government, and a long document tried to establish its credentials as a social democratic party (Port-Louis, n.d.). The early P.M. had the reputation of being anti-Hindu, and members of the M.L.P. later embarrassed the leaders of the P.M.S.D. by reminding them of the days when 'Malbar nous pas oulé' had been their slogan; *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 23 March 1965.

<sup>2</sup> The revised *Constitution of the Mauritius Labour Party* (Port-Louis, 1957), reaffirmed the socialist principles of the party. The ten years (1957–67) of internal self-government under the M.L.P. leading to independence are reviewed in a special edition of *Inforama* (Port-Louis), 1967, 'Dix Années de réalisations'. The positions of the P.M.S.D. and the M.L.P. on the issue of independence were brought out clearly in a debate between Gaëtan Duval and K. Jagatsingh in *L'Express* (Port-Louis), 31 December 1966.

<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, stated that although he himself had been prepared to advocate integration, 'we are told there is not the slightest chance of this country being integrated with Great Britain... Great Britain has no time for us. It is painful for me to

Mauritius was a most unlikely part of the British Empire to be made part of the United Kingdom: apart from an absence of any 'kith and kin' there, the creole élite had made many of the British administrators feel alien in their own Crown Colony. The island, moreover, had problems of over-population and unemployment which the P.M.S.D. proposed to solve by emigration, the very opposite of the British policy of restricting the growing influx of coloured people. The price of sugar was also at an all-time low, and London did not relish the prospect of having to subsidise Mauritius.<sup>1</sup> Besides, formal colonial attachments, of any kind, were no longer suited to the contemporary world. Having begun to make the necessary internal arrangements for the creation of a neo-colonial régime, Britain was anxious to get out,<sup>2</sup> but characteristically 'played the Mauritians along' in order to maintain a central interest in the area.

From the early 1960s onwards an Anglo-American team of experts had been surveying the small islands in the Indian Ocean for a suitable site for one or more military bases. A decision was taken to build an airport with a runway capable of handling the largest civilian and military aircraft on Mahe, the main island of the Seychelles, which would also promote long-distance international tourism in order to reduce the local recurrent burden on the British Treasury.<sup>3</sup> The military part of the airport project was later abandoned when the United States insisted that Mahe was much too heavily populated to serve as a secure and effective oceanic base, especially as even a small but unfriendly government could disrupt plans and raise problems at the United Nations. The search continued, and at one point Aldabra was considered, but this raised an outcry by the world's scientific community on account of its rare fauna. Farquhar and Desroches suited the British who wanted more easily to monitor sanctions against shipping to Rhodesia via Portuguese Mozambique, but these islands were too far to the west for the Americans.

Finally, the planners settled on Diego Garcia in the Chagos archipelago

stand in this House and say so, because I am a loyal citizen of the British Empire. I owe my fidelity and loyalty to this great Empire, even if it has not discharged its duties towards the common people of this country'. *Mauritius Legislative Council Debates*, 13 June 1967, cols. 791-2.

<sup>1</sup> *The Times* (London), 23 January 1968. Also J. de Saint-Jorre, 'An Impoverished Independence', in *Round Table* (London), April 1968, pp. 217-19.

<sup>2</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* (London), 1 February 1965.

<sup>3</sup> A preliminary survey had been made in 1958, and in 1961 a joint report established the basis for the necessary decisions to be taken whereby the United States was to finance half of the £10 million project. Later, in 1965, when Mahe had been abandoned, three of the small island groups of the Seychelles were detached and joined to the Chagos to form B.I.O.T., the British arguing that this was the 'price' the Seychelles had agreed to pay for the airport. *Seychelles Bulletin* (Mahe), 19 March 1976.

where a splendid atoll, capable of being transformed into a safe haven for a large fleet of surface ships and submarines, was most conveniently located in the middle of the Indian Ocean.<sup>1</sup> There were two problems, however: the Chagos belonged to Mauritius, and they were inhabited. The British Government initially considered buying the islands and treating them almost as ships of the Royal Navy, but abandoned the idea for financial and legal reasons.<sup>2</sup> Instead it was decided to amputate the archipelago as part of the independence deal for Mauritius, and to establish, five years after United Nations Resolution 1514, a new colony, the so-called British Indian Ocean Territories ( B.I.O.T.).<sup>3</sup>

The strategy of the British delegation at the Lancaster House Conference of 1965 was to lead the Mauritians to think that London was willing to consider seriously the option of integration/association proposed by the P.M.S.D. as an alternative to independence, and would be prepared to test opinion through a referendum as requested by the creole party.<sup>4</sup> The M.L.P. felt that were it to raise difficulties about the detachment of the Chagos islands, or to insist on too high a price for them, the British Government might lean to the side of the P.M.S.D. and grant its request for a referendum.<sup>5</sup> Since opinion in Mauritius showed signs of favouring association there was a real risk, from the M.L.P. point of view, of losing the prize of independence at the last moment, and this was a gamble that the Indian leaders were not prepared to take. So for the relatively small sum of £3 million, once and for all,<sup>6</sup> the M.L.P. agreed not to object to either the amputation of the islands or to their depopulation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The three island groups of Farquhar, Desroches, and Aldabra, amputated from the Seychelles at the same time as the Chagos were detached from Mauritius, were returned to the sovereignty of Mahe as part of an agreement designed to boost the image of Jimmy Mancham, the British-groomed President, and to make him accept independence. The United States was involved because of their military tracking station on Mahe, and because of their insistence that these islands should not be made available to other powers for military purposes. *The People* (Mahe), 27 March 1974, and *Le Monde* (Paris), 25–28 May 1976. <sup>2</sup> *The Observer* (London), 1 August 1965.

<sup>3</sup> An indication of how strongly the British Government felt about setting up this base is given by the fact that it went ahead in spite of repeated objections from several Commonwealth countries. See *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 17 January, 27 April, 19 and 20 November 1965 for India's objections, and *Dawn* (Karachi), 20 March and 29 May 1965, for Pakistan. Two U.N. resolutions also expressed deep concern over the project; *The Times*, 17 July 1965, and *Le Monde*, 28 November 1965. <sup>4</sup> *The Times*, 6 and 22 October 1965. <sup>5</sup> *The Guardian*, 6 and 8 October 1965.

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 13 November and 7 December 1965. Answering a parliamentary question about Diego Garcia on 14 December 1965, M. G. Forget, then the second most important member of the Government, said 'In discussions of this kind, which affect British arrangements for the defence of the region in which Mauritius is situated, there could, in the Government's view, be no question of insisting on a minimum amount of compensation'; *Mauritius Legislative Assembly*, col. 1774.

<sup>7</sup> The Diego Garcia question has resurfaced in Mauritian and international politics from time to time. During 1980, with the help of an expert from the British Ministry of Defence, the map showing the territories forming part of Mauritius was redrawn, leaving out the Chagos archipelago. An opposition amendment in the Legislative Assembly to include the islands was

The British Government then proceeded to deport to Mauritius, without their consent, the 1,400 inhabitants of the Chagos who had been there for several generations, and thereafter secured a rebate of some \$14 million on Polaris missiles bought from the United States. In 1972 the British gave a further £650,000 to the Government of Mauritius,<sup>1</sup> while the Americans, at a cost of over \$175 million, transformed Diego Garcia into their principal military base in the Indian Ocean. The very long runway of 4,000 metres can handle the giant B52s as well as a squadron of P3C observation planes, and this enables the United States to do without a carrier force permanently in the Indian Ocean. Storage facilities for Polaris and Posidon on the atoll enable nuclear submarines to double their stay in the area, and the communications station increases the target accuracy of their missiles. There is no doubt that these British/Mauritian/American arrangements have caused Diego Garcia to become the 'Okinawa and Malta' of the Indian Ocean,<sup>2</sup> thereby quickening an arms race and the further militarisation of this part of the world, much to the detriment and dislike of the inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

rejected, the Minister for Foreign Affairs arguing that 'Diego is legally British. There is no getting away from it. This is a fact that cannot be denied. No amount of red ink can make it become blue. In any case, I am not in a hurry to see the Americans go'. *Le Mauricien*, 27 June 1980.

However, with mounting pressure inside the M.L.P., as well as from the O.A.U. – where a motion by Madagascar demanding that Chagos be returned to Mauritius was carried unanimously at the Freetown Summit on 4 July 1980 – Ramgoolam went to see the British Prime Minister. But all he got from London was a vague promise that the islands would be returned to Mauritius 'when they are no longer needed for defence purposes'. *Ibid.* 13 June and 8 July 1980, and *L'Express*, 17 July 1980.

When the Minister of Foreign Affairs returned from Freetown and London, he tried to put this 'polite refusal' (so described by another Minister) in as favourable a light as possible for the Government by going back on what he had said the previous month, and by offering the following interpretation: 'Diego belongs to Mauritius; there is no disagreement about that... L'Île est a l'île Maurice; l'usufruit est a la Grande-Bretagne'. *Le Mauricien*, 10 July 1980. But he was contradicted by the Prime Minister who, according to *L'Express*, 17 July 1980, stated on his return that 'Great Britain has sovereignty on Diego'.

<sup>1</sup> According to *Le Mauricien*, 22 January 1980, the British Government has been trying through a private lawyer to persuade the deported islanders, now well organised and politicised, but mainly unemployed in Mauritius, to drop all claims to their 'homeland' in exchange for a further payment of £1.2 million.

<sup>2</sup> The overthrow of the Shah's régime and the Gulf war between Iran and Iraq has further enhanced the strategic importance of Diego Garcia: the eight helicopters which attempted to rescue the American hostages in Iran were based there, and more recently the stockpile of equipment and arms for the newly created United States Rapid Deployment Force. See *Le Point* (Paris), 12 June 1980, p. 88, and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1980.

<sup>3</sup> The following sources have been used for the Diego Garcia question and the rôle of Mauritius: *The Times*, 8 and 9 November 1965, *The Guardian*, 10 September 1975, *The New York Times*, 22 September 1973, *The Sunday Times*, 21 September 1975, *The Hindu*, 20 November 1965, *Le Monde*, 13 March 1976, and the local press in Mauritius during this period. Also interviews at the 1965 Constitutional Conference with several of the Mauritian delegates and their Constitutional Adviser, Professor S. A. De Smith, as well as Government Ministers in Mauritius and the Seychelles.

Gaëtan Duval, the leader of the P.M.S.D., published his version of what happened in *Une Certaine idée de l'île Maurice* (Port-Louis, 1976), and Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam gave an interview

Having secured the Chagos archipelago from the M.L.P. the British then turned down the P.M.S.D. request for a referendum on association by deciding that 'it was right for Mauritius to become independent and take her place among the sovereign nations of the world'.<sup>1</sup> Britain would make a defence agreement with Mauritius on independence in order to look after the island's external and internal security,<sup>2</sup> and a number of key officials would remain, including the head of the civil service, the security advisers to the Prime Minister, and the commander of the special mobile force. Thus Britain would continue to nurse the fledgling state through the early years of independence. But however important this continuing British presence, it could only buttress not perpetuate the colonial society, since this was more a function of the existing internal economic, social, and political structures, themselves weakened by excessive external dependency.

London having made these decisions had to do all it could to ensure that the M.L.P. stayed in power in Mauritius. The scheduled general election was delayed as long as possible in the hope that opinion would swing back towards the pro-independence parties.<sup>3</sup> Provisions for communal representation were written into the electoral system principally to satisfy an avowed communalist ally of the M.L.P.,<sup>4</sup> the Muslim Committee of Action. Following British advice, the M.L.P. merged with

on the Diego Garcia question to *Le Monde*, 13 March 1976. For a wealth of information on life in the Chagos, see R. Scott, *Limouria: the lesser dependencies of Mauritius* (London, 1961). This ex-colonial Governor of Mauritius shows the weakness of the official British argument – once the Diego Garcia removals had been reported – that the islanders were only temporary resident employees of a Seychelles copra company.

<sup>1</sup> *Mauritius Constitutional Conference, 1965. Report by the Chairman Mr A. Greenwood* (London, 1965), Cmnd. 2797, p. 77: 'the main effect of the referendum would be to prolong the current uncertainty and political controversy in a way which could only harden and deepen communal divisions and rivalries... and would not be in the best interests of Mauritius'. See also *The Times*, 25 September 1965.

<sup>2</sup> *Agreement on Mutual Defence and Assistance* (London, 1968). Cmnd. 3629, p. 2. The Agreement was to continue in force for six years, but the British decided not to renew it much to the chagrin of the Mauritian Prime Minister who had always been very keen to tie the island to British strategic development in the region. Ramgoolam had already given a guarantee back in 1961 that 'an independent Mauritius would not follow a neutralist policy which would remove it from areas of British strategic defence', O.F.N.S., 26 June 1961. *Exchange of Letters for the Provision of Assistance or Advice in Connection with Staffing, Administration and Training of the Police Forces of Mauritius*, Treaty Series No. 3 (Port-Louis, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 26 April 1967, and *Financial Times* (London), 4 August 1967.

<sup>4</sup> The report of the Electoral Commission led by G. H. Banwell was badly received by the Prime Minister, mainly because it made little allowance for ethnic representation; *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 7 June 1966. In fact, Ramgoolam was keeping his part of the bargain for the support he had received from C.A.M. at the Lancaster House Conference. Whereupon John Stonehouse was dispatched to Mauritius, where he supported changes that satisfied the M.L.P. and its ally, but the price paid has been to entrench communalism in the constitution of independent Mauritius. See *Report of the Banwell Commission* (London, 1966), Cmnd. 362, and *The Mauritius Independence Order, 1968* (London, 1968).

the C.A.M. and the Independent Forward Block, a pro-independence party which had been in the forefront of the Indian struggle, supported by sections of the sugar proletariat, to fight the elections as a single organisation against the P.M.S.D.<sup>1</sup> Even so the results were close: with a heavy poll, the independence coalition obtained 54 per cent of the votes cast, against 44 per cent for the P.M.S.D. But the electoral system and party alliances translated this into 23 seats for the creole-dominated P.M.S.D., only one seat less than the 24 for the M.L.P., although C.A.M. and I.F.B. secured a further 15 seats. The P.M.S.D. won all the urban constituencies, while the M.L.P. got most of its support from the rural areas.

Independence was not a day of universal rejoicing in Mauritius. British soldiers patrolled the streets, and British warships stood by outside, while the Union Jack was lowered to mark symbolically the end of colonial rule, but at midday instead of the traditional midnight through fear of violence.<sup>2</sup> As the P.M.S.D. controlled the towns and boycotted the ceremonies, the flag of the new state was not flown in the urban areas.<sup>3</sup> The coloured middle class sulked for a time, and a few even emigrated to Australia; the poor black creoles and a number of Muslims vented their frustration in a short but murderous bout of communal violence in the capital, Port-Louis, just before independence.<sup>4</sup>

But the plantocracy soon realised that independence had not after all changed much in the colonial society. The new holders of political power were as keen as the British had been to foster the interests of the sugar industry, not least because of the growing revenue needed by the Government. The Indo-Mauritian middle class, with its own sugar interests, has proved to be as staunch a defender of private property as its creole counterpart. The cordial partnership between the so-called 'private and public sectors' has been strengthened and, indeed, politically sealed when the M.L.P. discarded its erstwhile ally of the

<sup>1</sup> According to *The Sunday Telegraph* (London), 10 March 1968, the British Labour Party loaned 'a chubby bearded gentleman' to the M.L.P. to help organise the election campaign, namely Donald Ford.

<sup>2</sup> The Queen was to have been represented at the ceremony by Princess Alexandra, but her visit was cancelled for fear of further disturbances. Actually there was no violence then, although tension was high; *New York Times*, 13 March 1968.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 16 March 1968. In fact it was several months before the new flag was flown widely in Mauritius, and only after a year in Rodrigues.

<sup>4</sup> There had been a first wave of violence between creoles and Indians, the two main communal contestants over the independence issue in 1965, precipitated by the visit of A. Greenwood; *The Times*, 12 and 14 May 1965. What was strange about the violence of 1968 was that it was between creoles and Muslims, the two ethnic groups which had opposed independence, that it remained localised in a suburb of the capital, and that it occurred after the elections but before independence. Whatever the cause, one of the consequences was that the Muslims withdrew their support for a time for the P.M.S.D. *Ibid.* 22, 25, and 26 January 1968.

independence battle, the I.F.B., and joined with the P.M.S.D. to form a coalition government 'of national unity' which has lasted, on and off, to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH

Both parties during the battle over independence had been preoccupied by the need to secure markets for sugar. The P.M.S.D. proposal for integration with Britain had been largely motivated by fears that the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement – under which Mauritius got an assured market and guaranteed price, normally above the open-market level, for just over half (400,000 tons) of its yearly production of sugar – would come to an end if, and when, Britain became a member of the European Economic Community.<sup>2</sup> The advantage of the C.S. Agreement to Mauritius was that it sheltered the sugar industry from the worst fluctuations on the world market where, during the mid-1960s, a glut of sugar had brought prices down even below the cost of production.

After independence, Mauritius looked for reassurance in the direction of the European Common Market, where France – a large producer of sugar beet, and the European country perhaps most anxious to maintain its presence in the Third World – would have a major voice in deciding the fortunes of Mauritian sugar when Britain entered the Community. Paris had been a little anxious at first lest the new régime at independence for Mauritius should be hostile to the policy of *départementalisation* in Réunion. On the other hand, with the end of the British colonial era there would be more opportunities for the French presence to be reasserted in a receptive island.<sup>3</sup> Michel Debré, Deputy for Réunion, ex-Prime Minister of General de Gaulle and the most influential of the Gaullist 'barons', was only too willing to help the

<sup>1</sup> After the elections, Ramgoolam had extended 'Whole-hearted support and cooperation to the private sector... [I] trust that the rate of local and foreign investment will increase and that the private sector will make its full contribution towards a concentrated, national effort'; *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 22 August 1967.

<sup>2</sup> In the year before independence, Ramgoolam had introduced a motion in the Legislative Assembly designed to emphasise 'the vital necessity of protecting Mauritian sugar' in any negotiations for British entry into the E.E.C. Mauritius, he had stressed, 'will continue to grow as much sugar as possible. Sugar is our lifeblood... The C.S.A. is vital for us'. In the same debate the Prime Minister stated that he fully subscribed to the view of General de Gaulle that 'France should have a responsibility towards all the French-speaking countries of French culture [sic]'; indeed, stealing a leaf from the P.M.S.D., he added, 'because here is a country to which France has contributed so much, and I do not think France can now say that all of a sudden she had absolved herself from all her responsibilities'. *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 13 June 1967, p. 791.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Monde*, 10 August 1967.

formation of a coalition government between francophile representatives of sugar and the Labour Party in Mauritius, and its creation was celebrated with much more general rejoicing than had been witnessed at the time of independence.

France rapidly became one of the principal aid donors to Mauritius. Its Embassy, with a large cultural section, began to send advisers to a number of Ministries and technical specialists to the remotest villages. Radio and television programmes from Paris are now relayed by satellite and boosted to Mauritius by powerful stations in Réunion. France provides help to the schools and the University of Mauritius, while the number of scholarships has been significantly increased.<sup>1</sup> French artists, plays, and films for Réunion take in Mauritius in their tours. Ministers have been received in Paris on official occasions with the honours usually reserved for African Presidents.

Mauritius has been made a full member of several international French-speaking organisations.<sup>2</sup> Paris made an imaginative innovation by handling relations with Mauritius through the Department of Co-operation, thereby enabling the island to have the same advantages as former French colonies. With the advice and backing of Paris, Mauritius became a member first of the *Organisation commune africaine et malagache*,<sup>3</sup> and later in record time, with the support of the French-speaking African states, of the *États associés malagaches et africains*.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Mauritius became the first member of the Commonwealth to be associated with the E.E.C. before Britain joined the Common Market, and so benefited from loans on favourable terms from the

<sup>1</sup> French scholarship funds went up from 7 to 27 million francs in 1973. See R. Benezra, 'L'Île Maurice: sept ans d'indépendance', in *Afrique contemporaine* (Paris), 84, March 1976.

<sup>2</sup> When the *Association internationale des parlementaires de langue française* met in Mauritius in 1975 M Debré said: 'Le français en tant que culture n'appartient pas à la France; elle est une responsabilité commune'. Answering questions by the press, the French leader said that although Mauritius represented economic and political stability in the region she needed friends, and France was in the front rank of her friends; *L'Express*, 16 and 21 September 1975. Later that year, Mauritius was host to the 28 French-speaking members of the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique; *Le Monde*, 28 November 1975. Since then Ramgoolam has expressed the wish of seeing a Commonwealth à la française created; *Advance* (Mauritius), 26 April 1977.

<sup>3</sup> For Mauritius, membership of O.C.A.M. was part of the strategy of getting close to France and Europe bearing in mind the forthcoming British negotiations with the E.E.C. For France the aim was to get a new member at a time when O.C.A.M. was in bad health – shortly after the meeting of this French-sponsored organisation in Mauritius in May 1973, where only the faithful Senghor, Bongo, and Bokassa turned up, Madagascar withdrew, as well as Chad and Cameroun. The adhesion of Mauritius was particularly useful for France: since Réunion is treated as a part of the metropole, a clear distinction must be maintained between Africa and the islands of the Indian Ocean. Hence the 'M' in O.C.A.M., for if the islands are regarded, as they are by the Organisation of African Unity, as part of the continent, then the Réunion policy of France is challenged.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Express*, 1 June 1973.



European Development Bank, as well as drawing rights on the European Fund for Development. Under the Yaoundé II Convention, Mauritian products could enter the markets of the member states of the E.E.C. relatively free of tariffs.<sup>1</sup> Mauritian products, however, mean above all sugar, one of the products specifically excluded because of the Common Agricultural Policy of the E.E.C. In good years the Six were well able to produce all their sugar requirements, plus a small surplus for export, but when Britain entered the Common Market it was calculated that there would be a short-fall of around 1.3 million tons – more or less the same amount of cane that Britain usually imported from the less-developed countries under the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement. Since the European countries could expand their output of beet sugar there were pressures, notably from the French and Belgian farmers, to the effect that if Britain joined the E.E.C. she should be bound under the Common Agricultural Policy to buy European-produced sugar.<sup>2</sup> Mauritius had hoped and planned, however, that by being in O.C.A.M. and E.A.M.A. before the whole question of the *Associables* was raised, and above all by being on close terms with France, the island would get the maximum support for its sugar when Britain entered the E.E.C.<sup>3</sup>

In the event it was agreed, after some initial resistance, that Britain would continue to import the same quantity of sugar from those less-developed countries of the Commonwealth which became associated members of the E.E.C. under the Lomé Convention that replaced Yaoundé.<sup>4</sup> Mauritius has done particularly well out of the new agreement. It has an assured market at a high guaranteed price for 500 thousand tons – over one-third of the total African, Caribbean, and Pacific (A.C.P.) quota for the European Economic Community. The price has to be negotiated every year, but is normally well above the world market because it is linked to what is received by European producers in the E.E.C.<sup>5</sup>

Several factors helped to bring about this favourable agreement for Mauritius. The British Government fought hard on behalf of the small cane-sugar producers of the Commonwealth, not least because Britain benefited from cheap imports for so many years during the imperial connection that the local production of beet was not as high as it could

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Chasle, *L'Accord de Port-Louis: l'adhésion de Maurice à la Convention de Yaoundé II* (Port-Louis, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> *L'Express*, 26 July 1973.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 26 October 1971, 23 February and 8 July 1973, and 24 August and 3 September 1974.

<sup>4</sup> *Week-End* (Mauritius), 28 July 1974.

<sup>5</sup> The price was £260 per ton during 1975; *Mauritius Economic Review, 1971–1975* (Port-Louis, 1976), p. 45. During the financial year 1975–6, when £188 was being paid for the E.E.C. quota, the Mauritius sugar industry made a net profit of £20 million. *Financial Times*, 18 June 1976.

have been. One of the conditions of importing cane was that it should arrive as raw sugar in Britain, where the last and profitable stage of refining, as well as the packaging and distribution, was the virtual monopoly of Tate and Lyall. The refineries are located at the ports, and it would be costly to move and transform them to the beet-sugar areas. In addition, the British sugar interests in the islands of the West Indies, in Fiji, in Mauritius, and in Swaziland, meant that shipping and insurance interests were also involved. The French Government was motivated by its position in the Mascareignes not to heed fully the lobby of its beet producers. Finally, the world sugar context was favourable. The glut of sugar during the mid-1960s, when this fetched as little as £17 a ton, had turned to a shortage by 1969 largely due to a drought in the Soviet Union, and at one stage the price jumped to over £1,000 a ton. Therefore, by the time the agreement was reached when Britain entered the E.E.C., the A.C.P. producers could sell on the open market at very profitable prices.

In Mauritius the A.C.P. agreement, plus the high prices on the open market, amounted to a bonanza beyond the dreams of either the planters or the Government. The climate also helped because, notwithstanding a severe cyclone, the amount of rain and sun appeared in the right proportions to produce bumper crop after crop, and the output reached an all-time high. But, for the first time, there were other assets, because this boom coincided with large-scale investments in tourism and manufacturing for export.

It has often been stressed in the literature about the Third World that an important 'bottleneck' to development is the lack of capital.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Mauritius this shortage was not a symptom of underdevelopment, but rather of the distorted use of the surplus in the plantation economy, itself an aspect of the structure of the global colonial relations of which the island was part. Considerable profits would be made from sugar in the years of high prices, and the planters would accumulate capital. This would be ploughed back in the industry, so long as there was room for expansion; but with practically all the cultivable land of the island under sugar, there were no outlets for the surplus in Mauritius itself. The colonial structure of international specialisation discouraged the diversification of economic growth. As the demand for sugar was not dependent on the internal market, but on the world outside, it was not in the interests of the owners of this industry to raise wages. On the contrary, cheap labour cut down production costs, reduced imports,

<sup>1</sup> See J. E. Meade et al. *op. cit.* for the relevance of this model to Mauritius.

built up balance-of-payments surpluses, and contributed to the concentration of wealth in a few hands. Low wages, in turn, meant too small a market internally to be an incentive to diversify production away from sugar.

Without investment outlets in Mauritius, therefore, some of the profits made in the sugar industry were consumed in the form of imported sophisticated luxuries, while a good deal would be saved and invested abroad.<sup>1</sup> Mauritius thus exported capital to Britain and South Africa. It is important to stress that this took place in spite of the fact that Mauritius was atypical among sugar plantation economies in that, for historical reasons, most of the capital was locally owned. The planters never identified themselves with Britain; they lived and worked on the island, and considered themselves to be the original inhabitants. However, although Mauritius had a 'national bourgeoisie' which extracted and accumulated capital, it was structurally impossible for this small class to move outside the colonial framework.

An attempt was made after independence to reduce the capital drain by legislation, but new investment outlets in Mauritius reversed the trend by keeping profits in the island, and even bringing some back. In the euphoria of rocketing prices the Government agreed, in spite of grave unemployment, to allow the long-delayed further mechanisation of the sugar industry to go ahead to a limited extent. But of more significance was the availability of some completely new openings for capital investment, partly the result of the Government's policy,<sup>2</sup> but largely the outcome of new trends in the world capitalist economy, notably long-distance air transport, and the transnationalisation of capitalist production on a global scale.<sup>3</sup>

Tourism started timidly during the 1960s, but has now gathered strength with a growing number of Europeans fleeing the 'vulgar' places and the polluted Mediterranean, jetting in on overnight flights

<sup>1</sup> In the absence of exchange controls Mauritius was a net foreign investor throughout the 1950s; the long-term capital outflow amounted to 10 per cent of gross domestic capital formation. King, *op. cit.* p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the grave uncertainties caused by having such an open and dependent economy, Mauritius, like many other Third-World countries, has a government department that is responsible for planning long-term social and economic developments. The target of full employment by the end of the decade was set within the Government's *Development Strategy, 1971-1980* (Port-Louis), and the creation of more work was further emphasised during the economic boom by the *Travail pour tous* programme; *Mauritius Economic Review, 1971-1975* (Port-Louis, 1976). The 1976 five-year plan for 1975-80 aimed ambitiously to provide additional employment for 76,000, mostly in manufacturing industries and tourism, but the latest two-year plan for 1980-82 projects the more realistic figure of 22,600 new jobs. Interview with M. Ghururrum, Minister for Planning and Development, in *Week-End*, 10 August 1980, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> See the interesting collection of papers by scholars of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, edited by J. Villamil, *Transnational Capitalism and Development* (London, 1979).

from Paris, Frankfurt, or Milan in search of the 'unspoilt' tropical island. Mauritians – by themselves or in association with French, British, or South African associates – have financed and built luxury bungalow-style hotels, complete with 'native exotica' designed to attract and entertain a wide variety of visitors. Foreign aid in the form of soft loans or grants from Britain, France, the E.E.C., and other international bodies have helped, notably in the improvement of the infrastructure, but the bulk of the capital raised for tourism has been on commercial terms, most of it Mauritian-owned.<sup>1</sup> Tourism is the ideal form of parallel development for the sugar industry: there is plenty of labour, capital is not scarce, and the beaches do not compete for sugar land. Indeed, food-importing Mauritius now grows vegetables between the lines of sugar canes to supply the hotels with fresh food. The Government is particularly happy that the tourists bring in foreign currency, and the building of the associated facilities has provided employment.<sup>2</sup>

But the really spectacular development in Mauritius of recent years has been the new, and for a time outstandingly successful, Export Processing Zone (E.P.Z.).<sup>3</sup> It must be recalled that the Yaoundé Convention opened the doors of the European Common Market to a long list of manufactured goods from the A.C.P. countries. And if for most of the Associated States this has remained a rather theoretical opening, Mauritius has grasped the opportunity offered by the large rich markets to start manufacturing for export.<sup>4</sup> Mauritian capitalists in the past had been willing to take risks only in sugar, where they understood the market very well; but they have now joined foreign firms who possess the necessary 'know how' in order to produce a range of locally manufactured goods for sale in Europe.

The Government provides as many incentives as possible: infrastructure, sites and factory space at low rents, cheap energy and duty-free raw materials, banking facilities, 'tax holidays', repatriation of profits, a guarantee against nationalisation, and 'political stability'.<sup>5</sup> But the two biggest attractions are plentiful, literate, cheap, adaptable labour, and access to the markets of the E.E.C. So it is not surprising that firms from France, Germany, Britain, Hong Kong, Switzerland, South

<sup>1</sup> *Financial Times*, 18 June 1976.

<sup>2</sup> The number of tourists has risen by 28 per cent per annum since 1970 to reach 73,000 in 1974. The gross earnings from tourism increased more than four-fold during the same period, to reach Rs112 million in 1974. *Mauritius Economic Review, 1971-1975*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>3</sup> See the special number of the journal of the sugar industry, *Prosi* (Mauritius), 102, July 1977.

<sup>4</sup> R. Garron, 'Le Particularisme des rapports entre l'île Maurice et la C.E.E.', in *Annuaire des pays de l'océan Indien*, Vol. II, 1975 (Aix en Provence, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> *Industrial Investment in Mauritius* (Port-Louis, 1976).

Africa, among others, have set up factories in Mauritius that produce anything from a wide range of electronic apparatus to 'antique' furniture, toys, suitcases, and textiles. Indeed, Mauritius is now the biggest supplier of knitwear to France, and has a substantial part of the British market.<sup>1</sup> Indian interests have moved some of the finishing stages of their textile industry to Mauritius to get over the E.E.C. regulations about 'country of origin'.

All the raw materials for the E.P.Z. industries are imported, mainly in the form of semi-finished goods. These may require one, two, or more stages of processing, but can then be re-exported as 'Made in Mauritius'. The 'raw' materials may start out in Australia, be processed in Hong Kong or Calcutta, 'finished' in Mauritius, and end up in the Galeries Lafayette in Paris or Littlewoods in Manchester. Mauritius with its cheap labour is one small part of a quasi-global organisation of production and distribution.

The economic climate in Mauritius has been transformed in a very short time by high sugar prices, tourism, and the Export Processing Zone. As the gloom and depression of the early 1960s gave way to boom conditions and mounting optimism,<sup>2</sup> the main beneficiaries of growth were, without doubt, the Mauritian capitalists. The owners of the sugar industry felt less exposed politically as a result of the diversification and internationalisation of their interests than on the eve of independence.<sup>3</sup> The Government not only forewent taxes from the E.P.Z. and, for a time, from tourism, but used the extra revenue from sugar during the boom years to subsidise foreign and Mauritian capital by the provision of below-cost facilities in order to encourage the diversification of investments.

Nevertheless, Mauritius remains principally, if no longer altogether, dependent on sugar,<sup>4</sup> while the various capital developments have not reduced the external orientation of the economy, because tourism and the E.P.Z. are even more subject to international fluctuations, as highlighted by the post-boom recession. From 1976 onwards the price of sugar on the world market once again fell below the cost of

<sup>1</sup> *Financial Times*, 18 July 1976.

<sup>2</sup> The G.N.P. increased by 250 per cent between 1967 and 1975 at current factor costs, and when corrected for inflation this left an annual growth rate of over 11 per cent. The gross domestic fixed-capital formation increased from £13 million in 1970 to £70 million in 1974. Minister of Finance, Budget Speech, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Financial Times*, 18 June 1976, up to 22 per cent of the capital invested by the sugar industry has gone into tourism and manufacturing. The 1971-5 plan envisaged that some Rs400 million would be available from external sources; in fact, receipts from abroad totalled only Rs143 million, while local sources provided Rs603 million. Budget Speech, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Boisson, 'Les Comptes de l'économie de Maurice', in *Annuaire des pays de l'océan Indien*, Vol. 1, 1974 (Aix en Provence, 1976). See also *Financial Times*, 18 June 1976.

production, and the E.E.C. figure was accordingly renegotiated downwards.<sup>1</sup> One European country after another has complained that cheap imports from Mauritius have affected employment at home. However, although wages are still pitifully low by western standards, their rise during the boom years has reduced the principal attraction of Mauritius. The number of new firms entering the E.P.Z. had already started to decline by the end of 1975, while some established enterprises are seeking governmental help in order to survive.<sup>2</sup>

The rise in oil prices has severely affected Mauritius because of the increased cost not only of local energy, but also of air fares, and hence a reduction in long-distance tourism. Expectations had risen steadily during the early 1970s, so that the level of public spending and imports cannot easily be reduced, even although exports have flagged. Add to this the growing imported inflation in an economy as open as that of Mauritius, and it became inevitable that something had 'to give': foreign-exchange reserves melted from Rs 1,100 million in 1975 to a bare Rs89 million – less than enough for two weeks imports – in August 1979. The Government had then to secure an emergency soft loan of Rs730 million from the International Monetary Fund in exchange for a drastic 30 per cent devaluation, cuts in public expenditure and food subsidies, curbs on wages and prices, a rise in the bank rate, and a ceiling on bank lending.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, development has mitigated but not solved the main problem, namely unemployment, nor has it brought about 'political stability'.

#### DEMOCRACY IN AN OVERPOPULATED DEPENDENT SOCIETY

With the end of Indian immigration the population of Mauritius had stabilised around the 400,000 mark,<sup>4</sup> but after World War II there was a sudden, dramatic 'explosion', caused mainly by a rise in the number

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the guaranteed base price there is a fluctuating 'monetary compensation' which reflects the relationship of sterling to the E.E.C. unit of account. Thus, while Mauritius received an average of £226 a tonne for its E.E.C. quota in 1978, the next year there was no premium above the basic £198.38; since the producers estimated that their 1979 costs were no less than £200 a tonne, even the most efficient could only earn 'a derisory return on capital', according to the *Financial Times*, Special Report on Mauritius, 6 December 1979. The price of sugar on the world market went up again during the 1980 harvest, but unfortunately, due to a severe cyclone, Mauritius did not gain all the expected benefits because it was unable to fulfil its E.E.C. quota.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 8 March 1978.

<sup>3</sup> *Financial Times*, 6 December 1979. The I.M.F. loan conditions have been eased recently, and a number of western states, led by France, have formed a consortium to provide Mauritius with 2,000 million Rupees, 'to pull us out of the hole we are in', according to the Minister of Finance, who linked this planned rescue with the Diego Garcia base and the pro-western policy of Mauritius. *Le Mauricien*, 10 July 1980.

<sup>4</sup> H. C. Brookfield, 'Population Distribution in Mauritius', in *Journal of Tropical Geography* (Singapore), Vol. 1959, p. 4.

of births associated with the post-war boom in sugar prices, as well as a decline in the death rate by the rapid elimination of malaria. Indeed, by the time of independence, Mauritius had become one of the most densely populated agricultural countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> The rate of growth, however, has fallen off during the 1970s, almost as dramatically as it went up in the 1950s. Education, rising standards of living, and birth control, have all helped, but even so the total population will continue to increase in the years ahead because of its very young age-structure.

Over 50 per cent of all Mauritians are below the age of 24, and this means that every year some 9,000 new job-seekers enter the labour market; for most, the chance of ever finding work is bleak. In the sugar industry, the employment situation has gone full circle: the insatiable demand for labour in the nineteenth century caused the massive immigration of Indians, but now with all the available agricultural land under cultivation the industry cannot provide jobs for the growing population. Indeed, more sugar could only be squeezed out of the small land surface of Mauritius by shedding labour and increasing mechanisation. Further centralisation of milling, the installation of sugar silos at the port for bulk shipment to Europe, the reduction of the length of the crop season through mechanised cutting and loading of the canes, would all increase efficiency. The large estates produce considerably more sugar per acre than the 'small planters'. This is in part due to the poorer quality of land farmed, but the main reason is that the large millers/planters follow a different economic rationale. Because milling involves a great deal of fixed and relatively little variable capital, it is in the interests of the owners to do everything possible by way of fertilisers, irrigation, and machines, in order to produce a large quantity of canes, since losses in planting through over-capitalisation are more than made up when the mills work at full capacity.

By way of contrast, the 'small planters' produce less cane per acre because they do not put so much capital in their fields, and so from the point of view of the sugar industry as a whole they should really

<sup>1</sup> See R. M. Titmuss and B. Abel-Smith, *Social Policies and Population Growth in Mauritius* (London, 1961), for a thorough study of the population problems of the island. The number of inhabitants has risen as follows: 1846, 158,462; 1861, 310,050; 1901, 371,023; 1944, 419,185; 1952, 501,415; 1962, 681,619; 1972, 826,199; 1979, 910,000 estimated. Sources: Central Statistical Office, *Bi-Annual Digest of Statistics* (Port-Louis), 1969, *Facts about Mauritius* (Port-Louis), 1976, and *Financial Times*, 6 December 1979. The population rate of growth reached a peak of 3.1 per cent in 1962, but in the 1970s this dropped: to 1.94 by 1972, and to only 1.44 per cent by 1977, a low figure by Third-World standards. *The Times*, 8 March 1978.

disappear.<sup>1</sup> But here again, as with mechanisation, there has been a real conflict between the demands of employment and the quantity of output. There was no question of reducing the production of sugar on which, together with the price obtained, real income per head depended. With universal suffrage it was difficult not to give high priority to employment. The Government has done a great deal for the 'small planters': mechanisation has been retarded, and part of the increased revenue of the boom years has been used to provide 'relief work' under the *Travail pour tous* programme. For a time, the creation of extra jobs was given a boost by the development of the infrastructure, by the construction of more Export Processing Zone facilities, and by the building of hotels and restaurants. More permanent employment, however, especially for the tourist and E.P.Z. industries, has been largely female labour. Women are paid substantially less than men, and they tend to be less unionised and militant.

But the sugar industry must continue to shed labour and become increasingly mechanised to remain competitive on a world scale.<sup>2</sup> Although the economic boom of the 1970s enabled the employment target of the first five-year plan to be exceeded by creating more than 52,900 jobs,<sup>3</sup> the 1975–8 plan fell far short of the original figure of 76,000.<sup>4</sup> So the worries of the Government with regard to unemployment, although alleviated for a time, have returned with even more pressing urgency, especially as this is particularly explosive from a political point of view.<sup>5</sup>

We have touched upon the increased socio-economic importance of the indentured labourers through the acquisition of land. The 30,000 'small planters' of sugar cane today are a residual legacy of that early upward movement of Indians in Mauritius. Although their survival is threatened by the changing shape of the sugar industry, they form an

<sup>1</sup> Brookfield, 'Problems of Monoculture and Diversification in a Sugar Island', loc. cit. pp. 32–3.

<sup>2</sup> *Financial Times*, 6 December 1979. According to *Week-End*, 29 June 1980, the sugar silos for bulk loading have finally been installed, and these have cut down the cost of transporting the crop to Europe since the ships are now turned around very much faster. But from the point of view of employment and the class struggle, the *avant-garde* of the Mauritius working class has been weakened, since large numbers of dockers, always the spearhead of the organised labour movement, have been made redundant. The financial compensation for redundancy was a small price which the bourgeoisie paid not too reluctantly for weakening this strategically located element of proletarian power. See Port-Louis Harbour and Dock Workers Union, *Bord de la mer* (Port-Louis, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> *Mauritius Economic Review, 1971–1975*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Financial Times*, 6 December 1979. The latest and more modest target – as indicated on p. 92, fn. 2, above – is to create 22,600 new jobs during 1980–2.

<sup>5</sup> See the pessimistic analysis of Robin Cohen in *Manpower and Unemployment Research* (Montreal), April 1978, reproduced in *Le Mauricien*, 9 August 1978.



essential variable in the political equation, and the parties cannot afford to ignore them.<sup>1</sup> The political ascendancy of the Indians has been based not only on land ownership, but also on two other interlinked factors: European-type education and the right to vote. Land ownership provided an economic base for some Indians to finance the education of their sons for government jobs and the professions, all the more keenly sought after because the top posts in the sugar industry were in the hands of the creoles and so out of reach for the descendants of the indentured labourers. In fact, not many succeed in joining the public service, while those who proceed to higher studies in Europe and enter the professions are fewer still. But some do, and this is sufficient to keep alive for many the myth that education is the best way of getting out of the sugar fields into a prestigious job in town.

The drive for education in colonial Mauritius was reinforced by the qualifications to vote: property and/or a salary so high as effectively to bar most Mauritians. Then, when these were removed after the war, a literacy criterion was kept,<sup>2</sup> and this led the M.L.P. to put priority on schools at the same time as pressing for electoral reform.<sup>3</sup> The result is that primary education is now free and available to all Mauritians. The Government also provides limited secondary education of the British grammar-school type, but such is the demand at this level that a large number of private fee-paying institutions flourish, offering instruction of varying standards that lead to the Cambridge Senior School Certificate or the G.C.E. Failure rates are very high; but so great is the parental wish to give their children a chance to move out of the sugar fields that they are not deterred, and would go to great lengths, saving and depriving themselves to finance their sons through 'College'.

For many Mauritians, this type of education does, indeed, mean escaping from sugar, but only to fall into more or less permanent unemployment. The number of governmental jobs, even on the inflated scale they have reached in Mauritius, just cannot cope with the ever-increasing number of semi-educated youths who enter the labour market every year looking for the type of office work they feel their 'education' has qualified them for. Some of these unemployed 'graduates' give private tuition, or even open new 'Colleges' which pro-

<sup>1</sup> V. Nababsing and R. Virahsawmy, 'The Characteristics of the Small Planter Class in a Small Plantation Economy', Conference at the University of Mauritius, August 1976.

<sup>2</sup> See *Revision of the Constitution of Mauritius, 1947*, Cmnd. 7228.

<sup>3</sup> For political developments in Mauritius in the post-war period, see J. C. Leblanc, *La Vie constitutionnelle et politique de l'Île Maurice de 1945 à 1958* (Madagascar, 1968), M. N. Varma, *The Struggle of Dr Ramgoolam* (Port-Louis, 1976), and *Le Souffle de la libération, quarante ans de travailisme* (Port-Louis, 1976).

duce yet more 'G.C.E. failed'. Thus the education system feeds on itself, superimposed upon and ill-adapted to the plantation economy.<sup>1</sup> The frustrated, semi-educated young Mauritians became very active politically and flocked to the *Mouvement militant mauricien*.<sup>2</sup>

The M.M.M. started shortly after independence as a radical movement of young people. Aably led by a white creole, Paul Berenger, fresh from 'the events' of 1968 in Paris, it rapidly built up its strength on the mass disenchantment that followed independence and the formation of the coalition government. Standing on a frankly non-ethnic class platform, and advocating land reforms, the nationalisation of the sugar industry, direct democracy, a new system of education, and the upgrading of the creole language, the M.M.M. drew crowds of several thousands at its open-air meetings.<sup>3</sup> The formation of the coalition government had already led to the amendment of the constitution, and to the postponement of general elections. But in the one bye-election held – before they too were suspended<sup>4</sup> – the M.M.M. won a landslide victory in the constituency of the Prime Minister himself.<sup>5</sup>

The M.M.M. had been very successful at organising trade unions in the key sectors of sugar, transport, and docks. A stoppage at the docks in December 1971 escalated into a general strike. After some initial hesitations and consultations with the British, the Government declared a state of emergency, imprisoned the leaders of the M.M.M., confiscated its press, and outlawed its trade unions. There was no uprising by the population at large,<sup>6</sup> and when the economy took a turn for the better a year later, the M.M.M. leaders were released, albeit forbidden to hold meetings or to leave the country.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, prison and repression generally had brought to a head clashes of personality and political orientation, with the result that the movement divided into a minority of 'radicals', and a majority of 'moderates' who were

<sup>1</sup> The conclusions reached by B. Benedict, 'Education without Opportunity', in *Human Relations* (New York), 11, 1958, remain valid today. If anything, the greater availability of post-secondary education now compounds the problem: unemployed university graduates compete with school-leavers for white-collar posts. Recently the Government has taken over the financing of the 'Colleges' but without changing the structure of the system, and there are signs that it will not be able to go on footing the bill after the I.M.F.-imposed restrictions.

<sup>2</sup> In 1975 the 'College' students marched on the capital and disturbances broke out when they were confronted by the Minister of Education accompanied by the Security Adviser and the Riot Unit of the Police. See *Week-End*, 25 May 1975 and 1 June 1976. More recently the students at the University staged a sit-in, and kidnapped the Vice-Chancellor in protest about their bleak prospects for employment. *Ibid.* 15 April 1979.

<sup>3</sup> M.M.M., *Pour un île Maurice possible* (Pourt-Louis, 1970). <sup>4</sup> *L'Express*, 19 October 1972.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 21 September 1970. The electoral system of Mauritius, one of the most complex in the world, provides for three-member constituencies.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 16 and 18 November 1971; also 9–10, 13, 15–16, 18, 20–22, and 26 December 1971.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 23 December 1972 and 12 January 1973.

prepared, under certain conditions, to work with the M.L.P. but not with the P.M.S.D.<sup>1</sup>

The M.L.P. included a number of 'hard liners' close to the P.M.S.D. who were in favour of rapid economic growth based on high profits and a docile labour force. They were opposed by those who argued that this policy cut the M.L.P. off from its mass support in the sugar fields and drove the E.P.Z. workers into the arms of the M.M.M., making it impossible to hold elections. The M.L.P. was held together mainly by the ageing Prime Minister, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, a master of the politics of accommodation in order to keep himself in power. A francophone statesman with his *petites* and *grandes entrées* at the Elysée, Ramgoolam makes quite sure of always being welcome at No. 10 Downing Street as well; as the man of Diego Garcia he never misses an occasion to speak up against the militarisation of the Indian Ocean;<sup>2</sup> equally at home in Nairobi and New Delhi, Ramgoolam has been President of the O.A.U. without allowing that to affect the sale of Mauritian tea to South Africa, or the arrival of tourists and investments from the Republic of *apartheid*.<sup>3</sup> If he allows Soviet fishing boats to change their crews in Port-Louis, he also accepts Peking's help with the building of the airport to bring more tourists from the West.<sup>4</sup> Having used the leaders of the I.F.B. to gain independence, Ramgoolam turned them out, drew the P.M.S.D. into his administration, took away the support of the sugar industry for that party, encouraged some of its leaders to join the M.L.P., then broke the coalition, clearing the way for a *rapprochement* with the M.M.M.<sup>5</sup> But the price for a coalition of the 'left' without elections was judged to be too high.<sup>6</sup> So Ramgoolam decided, in 1976, that with the economic boom drawing to an end, if he was going to have an election it was then or never.

The record of the Government was, to some extent, an electoral asset. The M.L.P. had made improvements in the education and health of the masses, notably in the rural areas. Subsidies were provided on basic foods to cushion the effect of inflation on the poor. There were small

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. 19 and 24 April 1973, and 6 May 1973.

<sup>2</sup> The U.N. General Assembly declared the Indian Ocean as a Peace Zone in December 1971, and set up a Special Committee of 15 member-states, including Mauritius, 12 months later. According to *Le Mauricien*, 8 July 1980, Ramgoolam talks of Diego Garcia as a 'fortress of peace' in London and as a 'threat to peace' in New Delhi.

<sup>3</sup> The 13th Summit of the O.A.U. in Mauritius in 1976 provided an opportunity for Ramgoolam to show his virtuosity in the diplomacy of Africa, notably with regard to the South African connection. *L'Express*, 26 June 1976, *Le Militant* (Mauritius), 30 June 1976, *The Nation* (Nairobi), 3 July 1976, and *Le Mauricien*, 6 July 1976.

<sup>4</sup> *Le Mauricien*, 5 February 1974. See *Week-End*, 6 September 1980, for the recent 'successful visit' to Mauritius by Ji Penfei, one of China's Vice-Prime Ministers.

<sup>5</sup> *L'Express*, 15 January 1974.

<sup>6</sup> *Week-End*, 28 July 1974, and *L'Express*, 28 April 1975.

family-allowances and old-age pensions. The tax system was favourable to the 'small planters', and generally to rural inhabitants. Village development programmes and *Travail pour tous* had provided relief employment. However, the fact that the régime had been in office for a long time – both before and after independence – and that there were rumours of corruption and incompetence, were not in its favour. The lack of organisation of the M.L.P., its ageing leadership, and its loss of contact with the masses were grave handicaps. The amendments of the constitution, muzzling the press, banning political meetings, and not holding elections for a decade were graver still.

But the fundamental problem was that the M.L.P. had inherited the British rôle in office: it was objectively the partner of the sugar barons. Ousting the P.M.S.D. from the Government at the right time, and pointing to it as the tool of the capitalists, could camouflage, to some extent, this electorally unholy alliance. In addition, the P.M.S.D. was discredited through its association with bungled attempts to assassinate the leaders of the M.M.M.<sup>1</sup> Accusing '*ban blancs la*' in the *baïtkas* for all the ills of the Indians was a well-tryed method of electorally tapping the historical anti-white grudge, and glossing over the rôle of the Indian bourgeoisie; and this time the use of ethnic and religious institutions to mobilise support for the M.L.P. was even more in evidence.<sup>2</sup> The difficulty now, however, was that the M.M.M. was active everywhere: well organised, making full use of the educated youths in the villages, it drove home its class message to the rural electorate. The M.L.P. was criticised relentlessly for its class 'treason', for its strike-breaking, its repression of the workers, above all for collaborating with the exploiters. The M.M.M. also attacked the foreign policy of the M.L.P., notably for the loss of Diego Garcia, the links with South Africa, and generally the pro-imperialist position of the Government.

The results of the elections held on 20 December 1976 enables some interesting comparisons to be made with those which preceded independence in 1967, as well as an assessment of the direction of political change during a period marked by rapid economic growth. Once again there was a heavy poll, with over 90 per cent of the electorate turning out to vote, and this time there was no violence. Calmly, and with a discipline which could be envied by some 'older

<sup>1</sup> *L'Express*, 26 and 29 November 1971, and 27 August 1972.

<sup>2</sup> For the rôle of the Seva Shiveir, see *ibid.* 16 January 1976. For communal and caste considerations, see *ibid.* 5 September 1976. S. Bhuckory, *Profile of the Hindu Community* (Port-Louis, 1972), and P. Ramsurrun, *Anyu Samaj Brings Independence* (Port-Louis, 1970), give interesting insights and supplement Benedict, *op. cit.* on the rôle of the Hindu religion in Mauritius.

democracies', the people of Mauritius exercised their arbitration through the ballot box, and removed all but 11 of the 62 members of the Legislative Assembly who were seeking to be re-elected – only four Ministers retained their seats.<sup>1</sup>

The M.M.M. won the contest, as had been expected, gaining 39 per cent of the votes, and becoming the largest party in the new Assembly, with 30 out of the 62 seats, including the capital, Port-Louis, where it had its largest support. The M.L.P. came second with 25 seats, and although it gained 38 per cent of the votes, this was not much ahead on its 1967 score in spite of 15,000 new voters. Ramgoolam was clearly not being backed by young Mauritians, even in the rural areas, thereby reflecting the inability of the M.L.P. to fulfil the rising expectations of the newly-educated, despite an emphasis on schooling. The great loser was the P.M.S.D. which won only 7 seats – 16 less than in 1967 – and polled less than half the number of votes it had then, in spite of the increased electorate. The P.M.S.D. retained its two seats for Rodrigues where the population, long neglected by Port-Louis, had voted unanimously against independence as part of Mauritius in 1967.<sup>2</sup> The Roman Catholic islanders do not identify with what they see as a Hindu-dominated Mauritius, and have retained their support for Duval who recently threatened to lead Rodrigues to secede if a 'Communist' government is elected in Mauritius.<sup>3</sup>

In ethnic terms it would seem that the P.M.S.D. has been replaced by the M.M.M. as the party of the minorities: the important difference is that whereas the core base of the P.M.S.D. was the white and coloured middle-class creoles of the inland towns of Plaines-Wilhems, it is the Muslims and blacks of the capital that back the M.M.M.<sup>4</sup> The M.L.P. just kept the solid support of rural Hindus, but improved its position among the urban middle class of all ethnic categories, and if this trend continues it might displace the P.M.S.D. altogether as the party of 'the haves' in the towns. There are thus signs of a regrouping of the electorate of Mauritius along class rather than ethnic lines – the one

<sup>1</sup> Under the Mauritian constitution, with the communal considerations introduced by the amended Banwell electoral system, eight 'corrective' seats are allocated after the election results are known: this time four seats went to the M.L.P. and four to the M.M.M. opposition. It was thus possible for the Government to reintroduce some of the defeated Ministers back into the House. For a short background to this system, see S. A. De Smith, *Mauritius: constitutionalism in a plural society*, reprinted from the *Modern Law Review* (London), November 1968.

<sup>2</sup> One of the P.M.S.D. deputies for Rodrigues made a formal request to the British Government that the island should be allowed to secede after 1967, but this was turned down in London with little delay. *The Times*, 13 January 1968.

<sup>3</sup> *Week-End*, 24 August 1980.

<sup>4</sup> The middle-class Mauritians who work in Port-Louis commute every day to the residential towns inland and higher up the plateau, leaving proletarian workers and small shop-keepers as the electorate of the capital.

overtly communal party, the C.A.M., did not succeed in 1976 in getting a single candidate elected, although ethnic considerations still play an important part in electoral politics.

The result of the 1976 elections made the question of alliances even more problematic than previously. Although the M.M.M. was in a position of strength in both the Legislative Assembly as well as in the country,<sup>1</sup> it did not have the overall majority of seats that would have entitled it to form the new government. So some kind of coalition was necessary, with the initiative being taken again by Ramgoolam, because although the M.M.M. had moved away considerably from its initial radical position,<sup>2</sup> it was still not acceptable to powerful internal and external interests, which feared that its demands would not be to their liking.<sup>3</sup> Inevitably, the M.L.P. turned once again to the P.M.S.D. as a junior but necessary partner in order to form a new government, initially with the slim majority of two seats. This enabled Ramgoolam to continue as Prime Minister, and to declare in his first broadcast to the nation afterwards: 'The majority of the electorate have voted against abrupt and radical change', and no doubt to the joy of all neo-colonisers, continued: 'Mauritius will continue to give all encouragement and facilities to overseas and local investment'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A measure of the new balance of forces in the country may be gained from the following developments: when an M.M.M.-supported strike paralysed the port and transport in 1979, the Government chose to negotiate (rather than call out the troops as in 1971), and when several M.M.M.-affiliated trade unionists went on a hunger strike in 1980, the Government was persuaded to agree with their demands. See *Week-End*, 19 and 26 August 1979, and 28 September 1980.

<sup>2</sup> The *Programme gouvernemental du MMM* (Port-Louis, 1973) included the nationalisation of only 3 (out of 21) of the sugar factories with their land, to be run by an autonomous authority comprising representatives of management, the workers, and the government; the nationalisation of the docks, insurance, and transport; greater stress on co-operatives and diversification of the economy. Since then the programme has been revised to take into account even more the 'realities' of Mauritius.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 1977. The 'moderate' leadership of the M.M.M. aims to win power through the ballot box by making a strong bid to win over the middle classes, and to reassure both the local plantocracy and the western powers. The kind of socialism the M.M.M. leaders want to create is pluralistic, *autogestionnaire*, and democratic. They go beyond 'social democracy' in their search for more direct participation at the grass roots in local politics, as well as in the firms and factories, but make a complete break with totalitarian socialism of the Soviet type. If nationalisation has to be imposed from the top, argues Paul Béranger, then there will be none. Frequently quoting Michel Rocard, another 'veteran' of May 1968, and a would-be socialist candidate for the French Presidency, the leader of the M.M.M. calls for the 'utmost rigour in confronting economic realities which unfortunately cannot bend to the wishes and the dreams of revolutionaries'. *Le Nouveau militant* (Port-Louis), 30 July 1980.

<sup>4</sup> The weak parliamentary position of the Government is made the more unstable by continued infighting over the succession to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam who was born at the turn of the century. The two most likely candidates are Sir Satcan Bolell, Minister of Agriculture, a high-caste Hindu of the majority 'Calcutta' group – reputed, for the time being, to be acceptable to the P.M.S.D. and sugar interests – and Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo, Minister of Finance, a Hindu of the minority 'Madras' group, albeit reputed to be 'too soft' towards the M.M.M. The M.L.P.'s problems have been compounded by the dismissal of two Ministers for alleged corruption, and

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

Mauritius has always been dependent. Entirely created by colonialism, dependence was built into the whole being of Mauritius as an integral part of its economic, social, and political structures. But the island was not undeveloped because capitalism found virgin soil in Mauritius and flourished. The colonial rulers worked in symbiosis with the sugar economy and society. Although political power rested ultimately on British force, it was not as if this rule was experienced negatively by all the inhabitants. The owners of the sugar industry, creoles as well as Indians, the big merchants, the politicians 'working the system': they dominated and exploited other Mauritians more directly and thoroughly than Britain ever did. It would be an oversimplification to say that they were merely 'agents' of the colonial power, because in a very real sense the opposite was true: they used the military, administrative, and ideological power of Britain to maintain their dominant position in Mauritius, and to extract the surplus produced by the slaves, the indentured labourers, and the sugar proletariat.

Independence was not the outcome of a national liberation struggle. This does not mean that the bourgeoisie was incapable of playing a national rôle, but rather that their interests were inextricably tied to the larger colonial system. It was Britain which decolonised Mauritius, and in doing so brought to power the fraction of the bourgeoisie that was willing to perpetuate the existing internal and international economic arrangements, and had the best chance of getting sufficient support from the grass-roots to last. This latter factor was crucial, because political authority in the ex-colonial situation was programmed to rest on the consent of the governed. Would the leaders of an independent Mauritius be able to continue their partnership with the bourgeois fraction dominating the economy, and succeed in retaining the electoral support of the exploited masses?

So far the Government of Mauritius has not significantly changed the basic socio-economic structures it inherited from colonialism, while

the defection of two or three backbenchers who have formed a new party.

One way out for Ramgoolam personally would be to make Mauritius a Republic with himself as President, and the necessary constitutional changes have been talked about on and off – see, for example, *Week-End*, 13 and 29 July, 12 August, and 25 November 1979. But since the consensus within and between the parties in Mauritius would be for the figure-head Indian-type of President, the power struggle inside the M.L.P. for the all-important post of Prime Minister would not thereby be resolved. In any case, Ramgoolam has recently said that he will stay on 'till my last breath'; *Le Mauricien*, 25 April 1980. And the M.M.M. has expressed the wish to see Ramgoolam remaining in power until the next general election; *Week-End*, 22 June 1980.

retaining – if heavily circumscribed at times – the essential features of a representative democratic régime. The economic growth that followed independence has undoubtedly helped; and so too, paradoxically, have ethnic politics, although detrimental to nationalism. An authoritarian régime resting on an alliance of Indian political rule and creole economic power would alienate the support of the Indian masses; and conversely, a coup by the creole bourgeoisie would be doomed in the teeth of Indian opposition. Independence and the rapid rise of the M.M.M. have brought back the element of class into Mauritian politics, and to the extent that class conflicts become salient features of the contemporary scene, national ideology will become the integrative factor supporting the régime, and ethnic considerations will be eroded. The leaders of a future M.M.M. government would have to operate within the same structural constraints. Younger, better organised, and closer to the masses, they would certainly be more willing, and probably more successful, in reforming the system. However, short of external intervention, radical changes are unlikely.<sup>1</sup>

What is the sense of dependence today? and can Mauritius be different? Mauritius now has its own state: it is no longer directly dependent on a colonial power. The island, however, remains dependent on Europe, and beyond the E.E.C., on the transnational capitalist system. Does dependence then mean that the vast majority of the inhabitants are exploited by a minority of Mauritians who are themselves part and parcel of world-wide capitalism? In any case, there is little that Mauritius can do about the contemporary international economic order. The option of non-dependence, if this means a closed economy, is totally unrealistic; it is doubtful, indeed, if the island would then be able to feed its population, let alone grow economically. With an open economy, Mauritius is inevitably dependent. Within that dependence there is growth, and since independence in 1968 the island has shown a limited yet real capacity to adjust to changes and opportunities in the capitalist world.

<sup>1</sup> In a recent interview Paul Béranger, the leader of the M.M.M., said: 'There can be no doubt that Great Britain, France, the United States, will try to help the present régime. . . we are not going to bear a grudge for that, but we must ask them to know where to draw the line. . . in their meddling in Mauritius internal politics'. *Le Mauricien*, 29 July 1980.