

DISASTER RESEARCH CENTER  
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43201

Working Paper #39

THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT:  
A STUDY OF THE 30TH OF MAY MOVEMENT IN CURACAO

By

William A. Anderson  
Department of Sociology  
Arizona State University

Russell R. Dynes  
Department of Sociology  
Disaster Research Center  
The Ohio State University

Support for the research on which this paper is based was provided by  
the Mershon Center, The Ohio State University, and Arizona State University.

9/71

## THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

### A STUDY OF THE 30th OF MAY MOVEMENT IN CURACAO

There is considerable variation among social movements in the degree to which they are organized and integrated. Usually, however, integration and coordination are problematic for social movements as they tend to be marked by considerable dissensus. As Killian has noted: "Many movements are comprised of diverse segments, each with its own structure, loosely united only by their allegiance to the central, explicit values and by the tendency of outsiders to view them as parts of a single whole."<sup>1</sup> In many cases, there is no overall formal organization or structure which welds such diverse elements together. In fact, the interaction between the various components of a social movement is often characterized by conflict.

There are points in the life history of some social movements, however, when the disintegrative tendencies are cancelled out, or are temporarily neutralized. Such periods are characterized by a growing consensus among the various components of a movement regarding such matters as goals and tactics, and a heightened sense of in-group consciousness. Under these circumstances, greater coordination and integration may emerge among the diverse segments of a movement, thus enabling it to have a profound affect upon its environment. In this paper, we will present a case study of a movement, more specifically the labor movement in Curacao, Netherlands Antilles, which underwent such a transformation beginning in May, 1969, hence the designation of this transformation as the "May Movement." Prior to this period, the labor movement in Curacao was highly fragmented, lacking the basis for sustained coordinated action. Among other things, the dissensus within the movement involved ideological and political considerations. The transformation of the labor

movement assumed several forms, the most dramatic being a riot during which there was loss of life and many injuries, and millions of dollars in property damage. In the discussion to follow, we will describe and offer an explanation for the various forms the transformation of the labor movement took beginning in May, 1969. Also, we will more briefly consider some of the consequences that the transformation of the labor movement had for its environment.<sup>2</sup>

Background: Social, Political, and Economic  
Patterns and Strain in Curacao

Curacao, with a population of over 141,000, is located some 35 miles from the coast of Venezuela.<sup>3</sup> It is the largest and most populous island of the Netherlands Antilles, which also includes Aruba, Bonaire, St. Maarten, Saba and St. Eustatuis. Willemstad, the capital of the Netherlands Antilles, which has a population of over 65,000 is located in Curacao. The Netherlands Antilles is a part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, along with Surinam, another former Dutch colony. The central government of the Antilles, headed by a prime minister, is considered autonomous in local matters; however, the kingdom government handles such important matters as foreign affairs and national defense for both the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam.<sup>4</sup>

To many Antillians, the semi-independent status of the country, which was worked out in 1954<sup>5</sup>, is a satisfactory one. For example, many point out that it would be extremely costly for a country the size of the Netherlands Antilles to handle its own foreign affairs and national defense and that such a burden would even threaten its survival. Another argument used to support the existing relationship between the Antilles and the Netherlands is that it gives the former access to world trade markets that would otherwise be closed to it. However sound such arguments seem to many, if not most, Antillians, they do not satisfy some groups who see in the limited autonomy of the country a

continuation of its colonial status. The call for independence has come from such groups, particularly in recent times when nationalistic anti-colonial movements have emerged throughout the world, and when independent movements have even been successful in other areas of the Caribbean, for example, in Jamaica and Trinidad. This pressure for change in the political status of the Antilles exerted by some groups in the society was one of the underlying strains which led to the May Movement.

Cultural, racial, and economic strains also mark the Netherlands Antilles, and these too had an influence on the mobilization and transformation of labor during the May Movement. Some elements, for example, saw continued cultural as well as political domination by the Dutch in the Kingdom government arrangement. To them, this meant that Antillians would continue to measure themselves by Dutch values and be destined to perceive themselves as failures, rather than developing and accepting an Antillian culture and identity which would lead to self respect, thus destroying the legacy of slavery and years of colonialism in the islands. Some Antillians, for example, resented the fact that Dutch was the official language of instruction in schools rather than Papiamentu, the native language, and that many Dutchmen while living in the Antilles never attempted to learn Papiamentu.

Turning to racial and economic strain, even though legal forms of discrimination have been removed in the Antilles, non-whites, who make up the bulk of the population, have been underrepresented in the skilled trades and professions. Thus most unskilled workers, the poor, and members of trade unions in Curacao have in common the fact that they are black. Furthermore, the disadvantages of the non-white population has been exacerbated by unfavorable changes in the economic situation in Curacao. Like many other areas of the Caribbean, Curacao is experiencing a serious decline in the need for unskilled workers due to the

increasing mechanization of its industry, while at the same time its population has been rapidly increasing.<sup>6</sup> In this century, the economic life of Curacao has been dominated by the Royal Dutch Shell Company which operates a huge oil refinery on the island. As a result of automation, the company had reduced the number of its employees from a peak of 11,000 in 1952 to about 4,000 in 1969. In an effort to attract new investors to the islands who could create new jobs, the central government has pursued a policy of wage stabilization.<sup>7</sup> However, some groups have been highly critical of this effort, interpreting it as a means of furthering the interests of Dutch and other capitalists, to whom high government officials were said to be closely allied for reasons of class and race, rather than as an attempt to help unemployed workers who are mostly non-white. To further exacerbate matters, tourism has been one of the major industries the government has attempted to develop. And some labor leaders have attempted to mobilize workers by calling to their attention differences between their own standard of living as the result of low wages and that of the increasingly visible and free-spending tourists who are mainly from the United States.

These, then, were some of the underlying strains in Curacao and the Netherlands Antilles prior to the emergence of the May Movement in 1969. We turn now to a consideration of some of the main features of the labor movement in Curacao just prior to its transformation.

#### The Labor Movement: Fragmentation and Dissensus

The labor movement in Curacao has a history of fragmentation and unevenness. On the island there are large unions with well trained leaders, but also many small ones with leaders who have received little formal training in union management. Furthermore, although unions within the same confederations have generally cooperated with one another, the over-all pattern has been one of

disunity, competition, and conflict. This pattern stems from a number of factors, the foremost being ideological differences based in part on international affiliations and identification; differing political allegiances and styles; and personal antagonisms between various union leaders.

As would be expected given its former colonial status, labor organization in Holland served as the model for the labor movement in the Antilles. In Holland, there are three basic groups of trade unions: Protestant, Catholic, and Free or Socialist. Roughly corresponding types can be found in the Antilles and are referred to as Independent, Catholic and Free unions. The three groups of unions in Holland often work with their counterparts in the Antilles, providing them with financial aid and advice. Prior to the May Movement, there was considerable conflict between the three groups of unions in Curacao based in part on these varying international affiliations.

Of the three types of labor unions in Curacao, the Free unions had the largest membership, and were the best organized and most influential. Several Free unions formed the largest confederation in Curacao, the General Conference of Trade Unions (A.V.V.C.), which had a membership of around 12,000. One of the major unions affiliated with the A.V.V.C. was the Petroleum Workers Federation of Curacao (P.W.F.C.) founded in 1955 by petroleum workers at Royal Dutch Shell out of concern for the increasing automation at the company. Because of its location at Shell, the heart of industry in Curacao, the P.W.F.C. has played a major role in the labor movement. The labor agreements it has made with Shell, for example, have often become the standard used by other unions in their negotiations with management. Prior to the May Movement, relations with Shell were considered good by the leaders of the P.W.F.C. As was generally true of other A.V.V.C. affiliated unions, the leaders of the petroleum union took a gradualistic approach to negotiations and relations with management, and for this

they were often criticized by the more radical unions and even sometimes by their own rank-and-file. The leaders of the petroleum union, as well as the leaders in other A.V.V.C. linked unions, were also criticized by radical union leaders for being generally sympathetic to the Democratic Party, the party in power in the central government. The man who held the position of prime minister at the time of the May Movement had assisted in the formation of the petroleum union. Thus, the more radical unions saw the petroleum union and its fellow unions in the A.V.V.C. as part of the opposition and allied with what they referred to as colonial forces. However, in spite of this criticism, unlike trade unions in many developing societies, the Free unions in Curacao did not directly involve themselves in politics or engage in "political unionism."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, most trade unions in Curacao followed the pattern of the Free unions by not becoming directly involved in political activity.

The Curacao Federation of Workers (C.F.W.) is another Free union which bears mentioning at this point. It is a general union representing workers from a wide variety of businesses and industries in Curacao. Included in its membership are construction workers employed by the Werkspoor Caribbean Company, known locally as WESCAR, one of several companies under contract to do work for the Shell Company. It was a labor dispute between the C.F.W. and WESCAR which led to the crisis that precipitated the May Movement.

In contrast to the tendency of most groups in the labor movement in Curacao to be moderate and non-political, as best exemplified by the Free unions we have mentioned, was a smaller number of groups with radical leaders. Such groups differed from the more moderate unions in that they: (1) had different international affiliations and/or allegiances, (2) had more militant and aggressive styles, and (3) saw the economic goals of the labor movement inexorably bound to political action.

Some of the more radical unions in Curacao were in the Catholic or Christian trade movement. The Curacao Christian Confederation of Trade Unions (C.C.V.) was the Catholic trade unions' equivalent to the Free trade union movement's A.V.V.C. The C.C.V. was affiliated with the Latin American Confederation of Christian Trade Unionists (C.L.A.S.C.) movement, a radical Latin American labor movement.<sup>9</sup> Indicative of its political role, the C.C.V., under the direction of the C.L.A.S.C. movement, has attempted to provide financial assistance for guerrillas working for the overthrow of the government in Haiti. Such direct political activity by the C.C.V. created a great deal of concern among the more moderate unions in Curacao who felt that the labor movement should focus exclusively on economic activity and not directly enter the political sphere.

Another important radical union was the General Dock Workers Union (A.H.U.), an Independent union. The leadership of this union espoused a revolutionary ideology and opposed the existing government and leading industrial groups on the grounds that they represented the colonial interests of Holland, and that they erected barriers against the full participation of blacks in the economic and political life of the Antilles. The leaders of the dock workers union were often given to flamboyant speech making, and wore the khaki dress associated with Cuban revolutionaries. Because of their personal styles, the leaders of the dock workers had a large following among laborers, even though the actual membership of their union was small.

Also involved in the labor movement in Curacao was a group of young radical intellectuals and school teachers who upon returning to the island after receiving university training in Holland called for sweeping social, economic, and political changes. The young radicals formed the Vito movement, named after their labor-oriented newspaper. This group exhorted workers to seek political and cultural changes in the society as well as economic goals. Like the leaders



of the dock workers union, the recognized leader of the Vito movement and publisher of its radical paper, an ex-teacher, was a prominent charismatic figure in the labor movement.

Finally, personal antagonisms between leaders in the various unions furthered the fragmentation within the labor movement. For example, some labor leaders were in competition to organize the same industry and such competition often took on the character of personal feuds. And because of its small size, it may have been more difficult to minimize personal hostilities in Curacao through such normally effective techniques as avoidance.

In summary, prior to the May Movement, the labor movement in Curacao was highly fragmented and largely non-political, except for a small number of radical groups. However, part of the basis for more unified action existed in the strain many workers commonly felt, yet traditionally did not articulate, and the presence of charismatic figures in the dock workers union and Vito movement around whom workers could coalesce for political action.

#### The May Movement

The transformation of the labor movement was triggered by a labor crisis in May, 1969. This transformation involved increasing solidarity and consensus within the labor movement,<sup>10</sup> and increasing politicization. Factors both internal and external to the labor movement were responsible for these changes. During its transformation period, which we have labeled the May Movement, the labor movement went through four phases or sub-movements: an economic strike sub-movement, a proto-political sub-movement, a political strike sub-movement, and finally a political party sub-movement. The May Movement began with a very definite economic focus and gradually evolved into a mechanism for political

as well as economic change. We will begin our discussion of the May Movement by considering its first phase, i.e., the economic strike sub-movement, and then proceed to discuss the more political phases in the order of their appearance.

#### Emergence of the May Movement Economic Consensus

The dramatic change in the labor movement in Curacao began during a period of labor unrest throughout the Antilles in May, 1969. The first phase of this change involved an unusual show of solidarity by several unions in support of another union that went on strike for specific and limited economic objectives, and for this reason we have labeled this phase of the May Movement as the economic strike sub-movement. During this initial phase, labor leaders mobilized workers around "bread and butter" issues. Since most unions in Curacao did not traditionally become directly involved in politics and the fragmentation within the labor movement was due in part to the presence of groups and leaders with competing political styles and orientations, it seems highly unlikely that the May Movement could have initially crystallized around a political rather than an economic issue. On the other hand, a common position held even among the fragmented labor groups was that workers deserved higher wages. This common denominator, in contrast to the disagreement over the role of politics in reaching the goals of the labor movement, facilitated the emergence of the consensus among labor groups that support was due a sister union striking for higher wages.

#### Economic strike sub-movement

The labor dispute which eventually led to the mobilization of much of the labor movement involved the Curacao Federation of Labor (C.F.W.) and WESCAR,

a contractor for the Shell Company. The dispute centered around two key issues. At WESCAR, non-Antillian workers-- such as those from other Caribbean islands and the Netherlands-- were paid more than Antillian workers as compensation for working outside their own countries. Also, WESCAR employees received less pay than those at Shell for doing the same work. Thus, the dispute between WESCAR and the C.F.W. included demands by the union that Antillian employees doing the same work receive pay equal to non-Antillians, and that WESCAR employees engaged in the same work as those at Shell also receive equal pay.

On May 6, 1969, some 400 WESCAR employees went on strike. This strike ended on May 8 with the two parties agreeing to negotiate for a new labor contract with the assistance of a government mediator. During the brief strike, Antillian workers were joined by non-Antillian workers at WESCAR. Also, the C.F.W. received verbal and written support and encouragement from other unions in Curacao. Such expressions were forerunners of the increased solidarity to come. The negotiations between the C.F.W. and WESCAR, which lasted for nearly three weeks, ended without a new agreement being concluded, and on May 27, the C.F.W. went on strike a second time.

On May 28, during the lunch hour, a number of Shell employees and employees of other companies under contract with Shell demonstrated at Post V, the main gate of the Shell refinery, in support of the WESCAR strike. The next morning, May 29, about 300 persons working for contractors at Shell sites went on a peaceful sympathy strike at Post V. On the same day, the C.F.W. received notice from the board of WESCAR that it considered the strike illegal and that all employees had to start back to work the next day or be discharged. That afternoon about 30 or 40 strikers, including several union leaders, marched to Fort Amsterdam, the seat of the Antillian government. There they held a demonstration and their spokesmen were heard by a mediator from the Social and Economic Affairs

Department. One of the concerns of the strikers was that the government itself was interested in keeping wages low in order to attract foreign investors. Such issues were to become more salient in the political sub-movement phases of the May Movement.

At 7:30 p.m. on May 29, a meeting was held by the Petroleum Workers Federation of Curacao (P.W.F.C.) at Casa Sindical, the headquarters and meeting place for several of the Free labor unions. Also in attendance at this meeting were strikers from WESCAR. The meeting was called to determine the position the P.W.F.C. would assume in the labor crisis. The P.W.F.C. had never in the past made common cause with the employees of companies doing work under contract for Shell which the C.F.W. represented. However, the position that the P.W.F.C. took in the labor dispute would be crucial in that it was the largest union in the oil industry in Curacao, and its labor contract with Shell, which made its members the highest paid workers in the industry, served as the basis for the expectations of the strikers.

The leaders of the P.W.F.C. came under considerable pressure to show their solidarity with the growing strike movement by calling a strike of Shell. This pressure emanated from several sources. First, by the time of this meeting several other groups of workers had united behind the strikers either by going out on strike themselves or by giving support to them in public announcements and in statements issued to government officials. For example, the latter was done by the large General Conference of Trade Unions (A.V.V.C.) to which the P.W.F.C. was affiliated. Also, the radical segment of labor exerted pressure upon the P.W.F.C. to show solidarity with the strikers. Finally, there was strong sentiment among the rank-and-file of the P.W.F.C. to support the other strikers by going out on strike against Shell. This sympathy of the rank-and-file for the cause of the C.F.W. strikers can be traced in part to the efforts of radicals who went among the workers during the crisis calling for united

action against their common foe, the business community. Given these pressures, the leaders of the P.W.F.C. felt that they had no choice but to call for a strike. They believed that to do otherwise would cost them the control of the union. Significantly then, the moderate leaders of the all important petroleum workers union who generally preferred negotiation and accommodation to more militant tactics were effectively neutralized at least in part by the actions of more radical labor leaders. Thus at the meeting, it was decided to call a 24-hour sympathy strike of all Shell employees. The decision to strike was made at about 8:30 p.m. and was to take effect at 11:30 that same evening. After the meeting, a large portion of the gathering, estimated to be around 1,000, left by cars for the various gates of the Shell refinery to inform workers who would be reporting to work on late shifts about the union's decision to strike. Many of the workers on the job at Shell left immediately upon hearing the decision to strike. Shell began to call in supervisory personnel to take over operations and some of them were harassed by strikers at the gates.

While a portion of the gathering from the union meeting had gone to the Shell gates, the number of persons remaining in front of the union hall grew again and the crowd started harassing passers by and stopping cars. Particular attention seemed to be given to cars which contained or were suspected of containing "European Dutchmen" (i.e., Dutchmen who had recently come from Holland in contrast to persons of Dutch ancestry born in the Antilles).

Around midnight, about 1,000 men were gathered at Post V. There harassment of supervisory Shell personnel occurred, especially European Dutchmen, and some temporary road barriers were destroyed. The crowd, however, began to dissolve about 2:30 a.m. and the rest of the night was relatively quiet. Yet the conflict that occurred at the entrance to the Shell refinery, and that

which had occurred earlier in front of the union headquarters, were forerunners of things to come in the second phase of the May Movement.

The first phase of the May Movement, then, involved primarily strike activity on the part of workers directed at economic conditions. Other kinds of strains were also reflected in the early actions of some of the workers, however. For example, racial and political discontent was expressed by the occasional harassment of whites identified as European Dutchmen, and claims made that the government might be directly responsible for the crisis by pursuing the policy of encouraging industry to keep salaries low. Nevertheless, for most of the workers the expression of political or racial discontent did not occur until sometime later.

#### Elaboration of the May Movement: Politicization

On the morning of May 30, more unions announced that they had gone on strike in support of the C.F.W. Starting around 7:00 a.m. the number of strikers and other persons at Post V grew rapidly, and by 7:30 it was estimated that between three and four thousand men had gathered there. Union leaders began making speeches to the gathering. The head of the C.F.W. appealed to the strikers to keep politics out of the protest. However, the head of the radical dock workers union, a man known as Papa Godett who was a popular figure among workers in Curacao, began moving the issue in the direction of politics by criticizing the actions of the government during the crisis and calling for the strikers to march to Fort Amsterdam to overthrow it. Later, he was quoted as having said, "If we don't succeed without force, then we have to use force. I will lead, but if I get killed, then I want the struggle to continue.... But I will lead and I want you to follow me. The people is the government. The present government is no good and we will replace it."<sup>11</sup>

Up until the point when Papa Godett sounded the keynote for political action, the May Movement had essentially an economic orientation. At least this was the orientation preferred by the more moderate leaders in such unions as the C.F.W. and the P.W.F.C. However, certain variables, both background and immediate, converged making the politicization of the movement highly probable. The first has to do with the nature of the social structure of underdeveloped societies like Curacao. Since economic development is so important as well as precarious in underdeveloped societies, the government rather than business often establishes policies of direct concern to labor unions such as wages, hours, and employment practices. As a result, in many underdeveloped societies labor unions have to directly enter the political arena, i.e., engage in political unionism, if they are to make changes in their economic situation. Sufrin has noted for example, "In well developed economies, trade unions adjust and adapt to industrial and governmental organization. The same is true for developing societies, but the more significant type of adjustment and adaptation in the latter is to government because it is the more significant institution from the viewpoint of the interests of the trade unions."<sup>12</sup> The Antillian government had assumed a role that was somewhat typical in a developing society. For example, it pursued a policy of encouraging industries to stabilize wages in order to attract new investors. In such a context, when economic institutions or arrangements are not clearly differentiated from political ones, economic issues become political ones as well, and an initial economic social movement may evolve into a political movement. Thus Curacao was structurally conducive to the emergence of political as well as economic protest activity by labor unions.<sup>13</sup> The presence of leaders who could articulate political aspirations for the labor movement and had broad appeal among workers also facilitated the shift of the May protest from a primarily

economic to a political character. For example, prior to the labor crisis, radical leaders like Papa Godett and the head of the Vito movement had established themselves among workers in Curacao as important leaders who were prepared to lead them into political action. Yet the two variables mentioned thus far were only necessary and not sufficient conditions in the politicization of the May Movement because they were present in the society for a long time without generating significant political action on the part of labor. The final ingredient in the equation that led to the politicization of labor appears to have been its initial economic mobilization which brought together large numbers of workers. Once mobilized, the labor movement began to perceive a political role for itself that was generally unrecognized prior to the crisis. As long as labor was composed of isolated and competing factions, even with the existence of the background variables mentioned above, it did not engage in direct political activity. However, as a result of the sense of solidarity and power felt once they were mobilized at the beginning of the May Movement, the workers were encouraged to engage in collective political activity. This activity was fairly unstructured initially, but assumed a more organized character later. And as was the case in its confrontation with the business groups, the polarization between the labor movement and political authorities furthered the growth of solidarity within the former.

Finally, once the political protest activity of the May Movement was started, it was furthered at certain points by the actions of external groups. For example, in some cases this involved receiving support from similarly dissatisfied groups, and in others this entailed the nature of the response of social control authorities. We will now turn to a discussion of those phases of the May Movement whose objectives became increasingly political in nature.



### Proto-political sub-movement

The strike began to assume political significance as Papa Godett and other labor leaders called for a march on the government at Fort Amsterdam some miles away in downtown Willemstad. The gathering had grown to about 5,000 as it moved out toward the center of Willemstad led by Papa Godett and several other labor leaders in a jeep. However, the political objective of forcing the government to resign was never to be achieved by this particular group as it was later to break-up and engage in generally uncoordinated protest characteristic of proto-political social movements, i.e., movements that represent an early or initial form of political action.

Proto-political movements, or what some scholars have referred to as anomic movements,<sup>14</sup> occur among groups in a society that feels that the more traditional means for bringing about change are either closed to them or are no longer effective.<sup>15</sup> Segments of the labor movement in Curacao were dissatisfied with the response of the government to the plight of workers and were also discouraged by the prospects for changing the government's approach to the problem. It was within this context that the proto-political sub-movement phase of the May protest emerged.

As the crowd moved toward downtown Willemstad ostensibly to register its protest with the government, cars were pushed aside and turned over. Stores were looted and a large quantity of liquor was taken and consumed by some of the marchers along the way. Many youths also joined the march. It appears that the inability of the under-manned police to enforce its authority facilitated the escalation of the violence.<sup>16</sup> The first attempt to stop the march failed as the small number of police involved were soon surrounded and attempts were made to run them down with some of the cars in the march. The police made a second stand with about sixty men. The officer in charge talked to the labor leaders who were

leading the march. About this time, one of them, Papa Godett, was shot in the back when according to some observers he was attempting to talk to the crowd. The police reported that they were being heavily stoned and threatened by the marchers at the time. The confrontation escalated. A car was over-turned and burned and one of two fire engines that had been sent to support the police was set afire and pushed in the direction of the police lines. The man at the steering wheel, later identified as an employee of WESCAR, was shot and killed. The pitched battle continued; the police suffered injuries from thrown rocks and three police cars and another firetruck were damaged. A Red Cross ambulance sent into the area was also stoned.

When the union leader was shot, he was taken immediately to the hospital by the other union leaders who had been with him. Some of the marchers also followed to the hospital. During the next several hours, there were a number of rumors that he was dead. Because of the nature of his injury, he had to spend several hours in the operating room. Afterwards, several of the union leaders were allowed to see him to give them assurance that he was alive. With the shooting of the labor leader, and the absence of most of the other leaders who had accompanied him to the hospital, the bulk of the crowd of marchers quickly moved into the business district on what is locally referred to as the Punda side of the picturesque St. Anna's Bay which divides downtown Willemstad. The rioters broke up into smaller crowds moving down the narrow streets where retail stores were located breaking windows and looting. Some of them moved across the famous pontoon bridge which spans the bay to the other side, Otrabanda, where they looted shops. About noon, the first fire was set on the Otrabanda and the fire soon spread to other buildings in the area. Back on the Punda side of the bay a number of fires were set in stores which had been looted.

Security forces were bolstered in the downtown area and a curfew was enforced Friday night. The curfew stayed in effect over the weekend and the

exhausted local security forces of police, marines, and militia were supplemented on Sunday, June 1 by 300 Dutch Marines flown from the Netherlands. When the rioting ended, two persons had been killed, 79 reported injured, including 57 police officers, and the total dollar damage was in the multi-million dollar range.

At 4:30 p.m. on May 30, the head of the C.F.W. announced by radio that the union had reached a one year agreement with WESCAR and that the principle of equal wages for equal work on Shell sites had been accepted. He also announced that the strike at Shell by the P.W.F.C. was ended. Thus the agreement with WESCAR meant that the initial economic goal of the May Movement had been achieved. However, this did not mean that the end of the movement had been reached because the second phase, i.e., the proto-political sub-movement, had signaled political as well as economic discontent on the part of the workers in Curacao.

Such outbursts as the one that occurred in Curacao can be viewed as a primitive or rudimentary form of political activity. By themselves, because the demands they articulate are vague and concerted action limited, they do not directly achieve long-range goals. However, unplanned outbursts may evolve into more organized protest thus developing the capacity for recalling a government and making other changes.<sup>17</sup> Thus in Curacao several unions recognizing the political significance and potential of the outburst formed a coalition to state in specific terms that which was expressed in vague terms by the rioters, i.e., the need for political change. At this point, the May Movement entered a third phase -- a political strike sub-movement phase.

#### Political strike sub-movement

During the height of the outburst on May 30, unsuccessful attempts were made by some moderate labor leaders who had not been in the march to arrange a meeting with the government to discuss the growing crisis. Finally, a meeting was held

by labor leaders from several of the unions in Curacao, both moderate and radical, during which it was decided to send an ultimatum to the government calling for its resignation and new elections, otherwise a general strike would be declared.<sup>13</sup> This ultimatum was signed by the union leaders and sent by messenger to the government around 8:00 p.m. About 9:00 p.m. the unions' ultimatum was also delivered over the radio by the head of the C.F.W. and the secretary-general of the dock workers union. This later resulted in the latter's arrest, but pressure from the unions led to his subsequent release. In accounting for their unprecedented actions, the unions declared that they were convinced that the government's social and economic policies had failed and that the rights of the workers had not advanced along with the development of the country. As a result, they reasoned, the workers had become frustrated and this frustration resulted in the outburst. Thus the new consensus among the labor unions was that significant change could occur only through political action. This emerging ideology clearly marked a break from the traditional stance taken by most trade unions in Curacao.

At 2:00 p.m. on May 31, the union held another meeting and this time representatives from several unions from Aruba, the second most populous island in the Antilles, were in attendance. Also present were representatives from the chamber of commerce. The latter were invited to the meeting to essentially serve as the channel of communication between the unions and the government. The utilization of such a go-between further demonstrated the isolation the unions felt from the government.

At this important meeting, the Aruban unions indicated their support of the call for the government's resignation that had been made the day before. Then a joint statement was issued by the two groups of unions declaring that a general strike would be called in both Curacao and Aruba if the government did not agree

to step down within 48 hours. Thus with this joint action, the boundaries of the May Movement were extended beyond Curacao and at the same time its power was enhanced. Finally, the union leaders explained to the chamber of commerce representatives why a general strike was going to be called so that they could relay the mood and position of the unions to government officials. The chamber of commerce representatives agreed to talk to the government to determine if it would resign as demanded by the coalition of unions or make other concessions that might end the crisis.

On June 1, the unions again met with the chamber of commerce representatives which brought the government's reply that it was willing to talk only after there was complete order in Curacao, and before that it would do nothing. The next action taken by the union coalition was to request that they be allowed to come before parliament which was to meet the following day, June 2. That night the unions received word from the president of parliament that their request was approved and so they decided to postpone the general strike until they saw what the consequences of their meeting with parliament would be. The next day the unions met with parliament and reiterated their lack of confidence in the government and again called for its resignation. On the following day, June 3, parliament voted to dissolve the government and to set new elections for September 5, 1970. Thereafter the prime minister resigned and an interim government was set up with a new prime minister to carry out routine governmental activities and to arrange for the September elections. Thus there was no need for the unions to put into effect the general strike plans they had drawn up during their several days of meetings which included the disruption of such essentials of electricity and water services.

In sum, the political or general strike sub-movement, which grew out of the proto-political sub-movement phase of the May Movement, marked the first time in

the Antilles that a coalition had been formed by the various segments of labor who were more accustomed to conflict and competition than cooperation. In the political strike phase, the unions organized the protest of the rioters and articulated it in specific political terms which led to the recall of the government. However, this third phase of the May Movement was to give way to another one, the political party sub-movement.

#### Political party sub-movement

Even more structure and conscious emphasis upon long-range political goals developed in the May Movement when it served as the basis for the formation of a new labor party. With the formation of the party, a political ideology had to be formulated, candidates selected, and a campaign organized. As has often been true in other developing societies, those persons whose experiences had provided them with considerable political concern joined in the effort to make the May Movement a truly organized political form. This included radical union leaders as well as intellectuals in the Vito movement who had returned to Curacao after studying in Dutch universities. As Oppenheimer has noted, the latter have historically played leading roles in the transformation of movements from proto-political to organized political enterprises such as independence movements.<sup>19</sup>

The new political party, called the May 30th Labor and Liberation Front, was formed in June. Forming the cadre of this political party were three men who had played key roles in earlier phases of the May Movement: Papa Godett and Amador Nita of the dock workers union, and Stanley Brown, publisher of the radical Vito paper. These men had a large following among the laborers in Curacao before the May Movement, and their actions during it only served to enhance their appeal. All three men had been arrested as a result of their activity during the crisis, and Brown, who was sentenced to jail for a term of

several months on a charge of agitation, was in confinement during the party's election campaign. In addition to being arrested like the other two leaders, Godett was wounded during the outburst on May 30. These three men had high visibility, then, and became symbols of the May protest.

Godett, Nita and Brown headed the list of candidates offered by the Liberation Front for the special September 5 elections. The campaign message of the new party was similar to the one that had been stated in vague terms by the rioters. It was anti-Dutch, emphasized the need for black pride and a positive Antillian identity, and called for the establishment of a government which would be responsive to the needs of the laboring class rather than to what was referred to as a business and colonial elite. Finally, it called on the workers to turn away from the established parties and join in the effort to develop a mass-based labor party.

Due in part to the influence of Brown, the Liberation Front received the backing of many radical teachers and intellectuals. Some made speeches in behalf of the party during the campaign and made financial contributions. Support also came from a dissident group that had broken away from the third largest party in Curacao, the Union Reformista Antillano, because it was felt that the party was pursuing policies that were too moderate. Finally, efforts were made to organize support for the Liberation Front by some persons not because they favored its political program but because they saw an opportunity to end the fifteen year reign of the Democratic Party and thereby create a fluid political situation which they might later be able to use for their own advantage. Such external support re-inforced the continued movement of the May protest in a political direction.

For a new party, the Liberation Front achieved unprecedented success when the elections were held on September 5. It won 3 out of 22 seats in parliament.

Godett, Nita and Brown occupied these seats and continued to serve as visible symbols of the May Movement by their unorthodox styles and rhetoric. It also turned out that the cooperation of the new party was needed to form a new coalition government and as a result the Liberation Front was given two ministerial posts.

The formation of the political party was an attempt to routinize the consensus which emerged among the ranks of labor during the crisis that significant change could be realized only to the extent that it directly entered the political arena. Over-all, this development follows the pattern of most developing nations, with the possible exception that in Curacao it occurred in a very short time span.

#### Conclusion

We have described and explained the transformation of the labor movement in Curacao during the period we have labeled the May Movement. In this final section, we will discuss some of the more general implications of our findings. That is, we will indicate some of the positions, concepts, and propositions in the field of social movements and collective behavior this case study illustrates or supports.

#### Internal and External Variables

First, this study underscores the necessity for considering both endogenous and exogenous variables in attempting to account for social movement change and transformation. An incomplete picture, at best, would have been obtained of how and why the labor movement in Curacao was transformed had the focus of this study been on the movement's internal character and processes at the exclusion of its structural setting, and vice-versa. As others have suggested, then, we have found in this study that conditions both internal and external to a social



movement determine the nature of its development and transformation.<sup>20</sup>

### Internal Conflict

It was noted at the beginning of this paper that the labor movement in Curacao had for a long period been characterized by fragmentation and internal conflict. There is a tendency to define such conflict as maladaptive for a social movement. However, our study supports the position taken by Gerlach and Hines that conflict in a movement is often adaptive. They note, for example:

When the success of movements is reported as having occurred "because of" rather than "in spite of" organizational fission and lack of cohesion, we have come to understand the nature of movement dynamics much more clearly. Organizational unity is functional in a steady-state social institution designed to maintain social stability and the status quo. Segmentation and "internecine dogfighting" are functional in a social institution designed for rapid growth and the implementation of social change.<sup>21</sup>

The labor movement in Curacao was jolted from its position of accommodation with long-established political realities in the society and transformed into an instrument for social change in part because of the presence of competing groups. Had it not been for the presence of the more radical labor leaders, the moderate labor leaders might have been able to guide the labor movement through the crisis without significant change occurring within the movement itself, as well as the larger society. The moderate leaders of the important P.W.F.C. were goaded into a more militant course of action, i.e., into supporting the strike during the early phase of the May Movement, by the radical leaders. Further, the P.W.F.C. leaders supported the May Movement out of concern for losing the control of their union to the more radical leaders since many of their members were clamoring for action. Our findings on this matter provide support for Zald and Ash's proposition that: "Goal and tactic transformation of a MO [movement organization] is directly tied to the ebb and flow of sentiments within a social movement. The inter-organizational competition for support leads

to a transformation of goals and tactics."<sup>22</sup> The May Movement was the first time that the P.W.F.C. had engaged in militant strike activity with other unions in Curacao. This marked a clear shift in tactics for the organization. Finally, the presence of the radical leaders in the labor movement was directly related to the eventual political orientation that the May Movement took. Had it not been for these leaders, labor's innovative political role might never have materialized. The internal conflict within the labor movement, then, was in part responsible for its large-scale mobilization for action during the May Movement and transformation into an important political instrument.

#### Structural Setting

There is a broader issue of concern to students interested in the development and transformation of social movements other than whether their goals are economic, political, or otherwise. This is the question of what determines the degree of change they seek. Smelser, for example, distinguishes between norm-oriented and value-oriented movements. Norm-oriented movements are those which call for only normative or reformative changes in a society, while value-oriented movements are those which demand more sweeping or revolutionary changes involving the very values of a society.<sup>23</sup> And according to Smelser, particular structural settings facilitate the formation of either norm-oriented or value-oriented movements.

Despite the use of the term "revolution" by many of the participants in the May protest in Curacao, it was never transformed into a revolutionary movement. It began as and retained the character of a norm-oriented movement. This can be in part attributed to the nature of the social setting in which the May protest emerged, or more specifically to aspects of the social control situation. Thus our findings support Smelser's general proposition that the operation of social

control is a major determinant of the form a social movement will assume. Smelser suggests that two social control factors facilitate the development of a norm-oriented movement and help it to retain this character during its existence: (1) a high degree of institutional differentiation,<sup>24</sup> and (2) general encouragement of norm-oriented activities by political authorities and the opening of channels for the expression of grievances and achievement of normative changes.<sup>25</sup> Regarding the first point, Smelser suggests that in the absence of a high degree of institutional differentiation there is a tendency for demands initially made by a movement for limited and normative changes to generalize into demands for broader and more revolutionary kinds of changes. He notes, for example:

In a society with a fusion between religious and political authority -- many medieval societies could serve as examples -- protest against specific normative arrangements inevitably tend to generalize into heresies. Under such conditions the mechanisms for insulating specific demands from challenges to legitimacy itself are not highly developed.<sup>26</sup>

In Curacao, there appeared to have been less differentiation between the political and economic spheres than in more developed societies. This structural feature was one of the reasons why the May protest broadened to include political as well as economic demands. However, perhaps from the standpoint of social control, a more important form of institutional differentiation did exist in Curacao which appears to have been involved in preventing the May Movement from becoming a value-oriented movement. That is, in Curacao, there was a clear separation between the government in power and the system of government. Thus, in order to change the former, which constituted normative change, the latter did not have to be changed or threatened, which would have constituted radical change. When the coalition of unions went before parliament and demanded that the government resign, they were attacking the policies of the

government in power rather than the legitimacy of the system of government itself. That government officials also saw and accepted this distinction was indicated by the fact that they resigned. Thus this differentiation prevented the need for labor to seek a modification in the basis for the legitimacy of the political system itself in order to change the government's economic policies.

Finally, Smelser's proposition that the opening of channels for the expression of grievances and the achievement of normative change will encourage a norm-oriented movement to remain as such is also supported by the findings of this study. For example, after the government in Curacao was toppled and a special election was set for September 5, the interim government permitted the formation of the May 30th Labor and Liberation Front and recognized it as a legitimate political party. This was the case in spite of the role the founders of the new party had played during the crisis and the charges that had been brought against them. The response by the government had the affect of providing the radical leaders the opportunity to use more traditional or legitimate means for bringing about desired change in the society. Thus the protestors were not forced to work outside the established system or underground in a revolutionary or insurrectionary movement. Indeed, some of the supporters of the new party wanted to work outside the government. However, those who preferred working within the system won out because the party was given the opportunity to do so by the government. Furthermore, after the September elections, the new government became more open to contacts with labor leaders in an effort to reduce the latter's sense of isolation and powerlessness. As Smelser suggests would be the case, such responses by political authorities facilitated the non-revolutionary character of the May Movement.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Lewis Killian, "Social Movements," in R.E.L. Faris (ed.) Handbook of Modern Sociology (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), p. 440.
2. The data for this study were collected by the authors on three field trips to Curacao in 1969, 1970, and 1971. The primary source of data were tape-recorded interviews conducted with key persons in labor, government, and business. Written materials, including newspapers, reports by a government appointed riot commission, and other documents, were also collected and analyzed and used as supplementary data.
3. Netherlands Antilles 1969 Statistical Yearbook (Willemstad: Bureau of Statistics, 1970).
4. Harold Mitchell, Contemporary Politics and Economics in the Caribbean (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1968), p. 272.
5. Ibid., p. 271.
6. Investment Factors: Netherlands Antilles (Willemstad: Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 1965), p. 22.
7. Ibid., p. 24.
8. For a comprehensive discussion of political unionism in developing societies see: Bruce H. Miller, The Political Role of Labor in Developing Countries (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1963).
9. Paul E. Sigmund (ed.), The Ideologies of the Developing Nations (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967), p. 405.
10. Among others, Coser has noted that one of the consequences of external conflict for a group may be increasing internal solidarity. Lewis A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (New York: The Free Press, 1962).
11. Amigoe di Curacao, May 31, 1969, p. 1.
12. Sidney C. Sufrin, Unions in Emerging Societies: Frustration and Politics (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1964), p. 24.
13. Structural conduciveness refers to the permissiveness in a given social structural setting of the development of a particular type of collective action. Neil J. Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 15.
14. Lucian W. Pye, "The Politics of Southeast Asia," in Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman (eds.) The Politics of the Developing Areas (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 116.
15. Martin Oppenheimer, The Urban Guerilla (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 36.

16. For a discussion of the role of social control as it relates to the escalation of violence see Smelser, op.cit., especially pp. 261-269.
17. Joseph R. Gusfield, "The Study of Social Movements," in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 14 (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 447.
18. Blanksten has noted that the political or general strike has been used with frequent success in underdeveloped countries in Latin America. He writes, for example, "Since the 1930's the general strike has come to be a movement of growing importance in Latin America. Having more of an organizational base than the anomic movements discussed here, the general strike usually rests on labor unions and associations of university students, frequently acting in coalition. The general strike is especially important in Central America, where it has been a major factor in the overthrow of governments, particularly in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras." George I. Blanksten, "The Politics of Latin America," in Almond and Coleman, op. cit., p. 498.
19. Oppenheimer writes, for example: "Members of the subordinate culture suffering various kinds of strain move away; they go abroad to a university . . . . Everywhere they come into contact with new ideas, frequently revolutionary ideas. They return home to infuse a proto-revolutionary movement with modern political, nationalist, revolutionary ideas." Oppenheimer, op. cit., p. 39.
20. For examples of students who have recognized the importance of both internal and external forces in the transformation of social movements see: Mayer Zald and Roberta Ash, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay, and Change," Social Forces 44:327-341, and Harold A. Nelson, "Leadership and Change in an Evolutionary Movement: An Analysis of Change in the Leadership Structure of the Southern Civil Rights Movement," Social Forces 49 (March 1971): 353-371.
21. Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1970) p.64.
22. Zald and Ash, op. cit., p. 333.
23. Smelser, op. cit., p. 272.
24. Ibid., p. 280.
25. Ibid., p. 307.
26. Ibid., p. 280.