

## **59 Years of TT Independence:**

### **WE CYAR STAND UP ON ONE FOOT**

It was perhaps fortuitous that the Prime Minister chose the occasion of the sod turning ceremony for a construction project for the building of a Panyard for the Desperados steel orchestra to remark on the issue of diversification.

Projecting that this space had the potential to become a steelpan entertainment centre to provide tourists with the experience of the steelpan culture of the Trinidad and Tobago, the diversification question seemed fitting.

This occasion coming just days before the celebration of the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence must have made the topic even more compelling for the leader of the Government.

### **THE DIVERSIFICATION DILEMMA**

Independence in 1962 marked the transition from Crown Colony status to responsibility of the people of this country for its future and for its nation-building project.

The colonial tragedy was that the colonial possessions of the imperial power served to provide the raw materials for the industrial transformation of the metropolitan countries of the empire-builders.

Chattel slaves captured and brought across the middle passage provided unpaid labour for the mainly agricultural cash crop economies in the islands of the Caribbean, the valuable feedstock for the burgeoning factory production in England, France and other headquarters of empire.

Each colony was organised under the plantation system, the sole purpose of which was to specialise in the production of primary commodities for export as inputs for the manufacturing establishments of the increasingly wealthy capitalists in the metropole.

Each island was restricted to a single or very small number of ‘cash crops’ decided as most efficient for production by the plantations using super-exploited slave labour.

This was the era of the monocrop economy of each colony for the maximum economic benefit of the colonial power. The transition of labour sources from slavery to indentureship beyond Emancipation and the Haitian Revolution made no real change to the plantation economy and its purpose.

As Lloyd Best put it, “*The legacy of institutions, structures and behaviour patterns of the plantation system are so deeply entrenched that adjustment tends to take place as an adaptation within the bounds of the established framework*” (Best 1968, p. 32)<sup>1</sup>.

Despite all the expectations created with declarations of ‘Massa Day Done’ by Eric Williams and other, despite the notions of economic transformation and industrialisation by invitation touted by Sir Arthur Lewis and others, the fundamentals of the monocrop plantation economy persisted beyond Independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Best, Lloyd. 1968. Outlines of a Model of the Pure Plantation Economy. *Social and Economic Studies* 17 (3): 283–323.

## THE NEW MONOCROP SYSTEM

This strategy that was supposed to create “new industries (as) an essential part of a programme for agricultural development” and “as a complement to it”, as Lewis argued, failed to produce a diversified economic base.

The multinational corporations on which the Government here was relying, were lured by tax holidays and pioneer industry concession failed to create the levels of employment anticipated.

The incentives and concessions left the state without sufficient resources to sustain economic development. The oil industry which had major expansion due to the British military modernization and expansion in both World Wars became the main factor in the country’s GDP and exports (up to 80% of foreign exchange earnings by 1960-61).

Sugar and cocoa exports dominated the agriculture sector and by 1960 the Tate & Lyle monopoly was complete in the sugar industry.

Tobago was consigned to be the tourist isle as designated by the colonial power since the 1930’s. Tourism development was also based on offering tax concessions and incentives. The Hotel Development Corporation was set up for hotel development in Tobago in 1957.

As a diversification strategy, the invitation exercise, did not achieve the level of a balanced economic development.

Between 1956 and 1973, there were three five-year development plans, the second and third both spoke of the need to ‘change the structure of the economy’ and to ‘diversify the economy by strengthening sectors other than petroleum’.

On Independence Day 1974, Dr Williams spoke of ‘*new industries based on petroleum*’ and ‘*diversification of products which we formerly exported*<sup>2</sup>’. More petroleum products remains petroleum dependency.

The emergence of the gas sector and gas-based plants at Point Lisas heralded a change in the form of the hydrocarbon monocrop but did not bring about a diversification of the economy.

The heavy reliance on oil and gas did not prevent the repeated cycles of boom and bust as the economic fortunes were dictated by the price fluctuations in the world hydrocarbon economy.

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<sup>2</sup> See p 51-52, **Project INDEPENDENCE: After 56 years** by Clyde Weatherhead 2019, [Project Independence: After 56 Years: Weatherhead, Clyde, Weatherhead, Clyde: 9781094638041: Amazon.com: Books](#)

## BALANCED DEVELOPMENT NEEDED

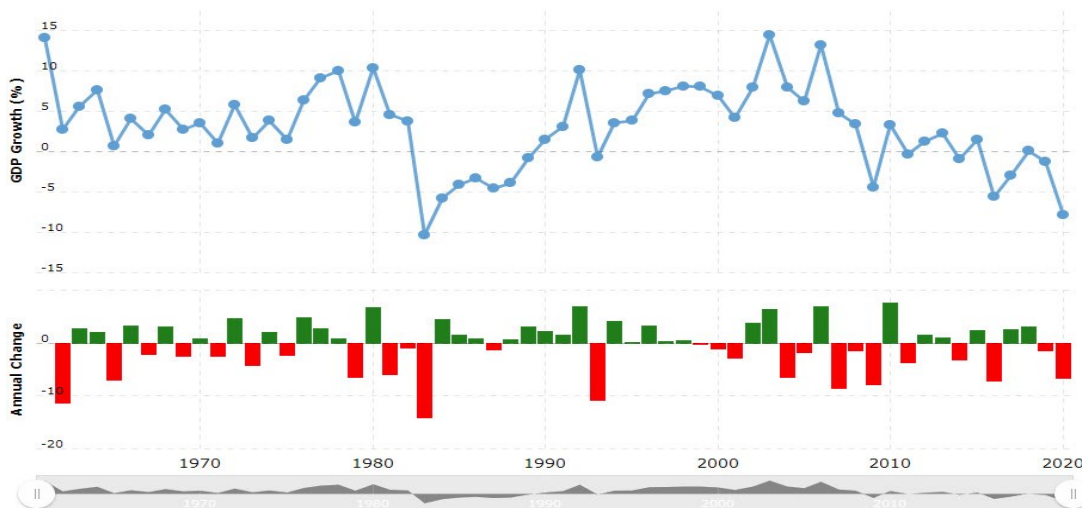


Figure 1- GDP Changes 1961 – 2021 Data Source World Bank

Looking over the vista of the 59 years of Independence as captured in the figure above the roller coaster ride of GDP growth and the state of the economy is stark.

Over the course of the Independence years, neither sustained economic growth nor balanced economic development have been achieved despite the repetitive chanting of the diversification mantra.

It was most unfortunate, that the Prime Minister used his diversification discourse to berate “Trinidadians” for halting efforts at diversification in the last two decades, while once again calling on people to stop talking about diversification and start acting on it.

Back in the early years of Independence, Pegasus, the people’s organisation created in 1962 presented this view on the issue of the economy:

“We believe that our economic organisation should allow for the maximum utilisation of our human and material resources and should be capable of promoting the general welfare of the citizens and at the same time maintain the dignity of man.”<sup>3</sup>.

Just as we cannot stand on one foot, the economy which should be the solid base on which our nation-building project and independence must be erected, also cannot stand on one foot.

Without a balanced economic development, with contribution from all sectors with the aim of promoting the general welfare of all citizens, Independence and the nation-building project will be in jeopardy and remain within the bounds of the established framework of the plantation economy.

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<sup>3</sup> See **Pegasus and the Making of Project Independence** by Clyde Weatherhead, 2020, [Amazon.com: Pegasus and the Making of Project Independence eBook : Weatherhead, Clyde: Kindle Store](https://www.amazon.com/Pegasus-and-the-Making-of-Project-Independence-eBook/dp/B08L3L3L3L)

## *Clyde Weatherhead*

A Citizen Fighting for the  
Nation-building Project  
Based on the National Purpose

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