INTRODUCTION



For more than three hundred years, Dominicans have lived to conditions of poverty, economic exploitation, of social oppression. The system and structures on which these conditions are based have not changed over all that long period.

Beginning with slavery, all the land of the country was possessed by a small minority of White Europeans who compelled the overwhelming majority – the Black Africans to work for them as slaves. These Africans were forbidden to own any land.

In 1834, the system of chattel Slavery was abolished and in its place was instituted the system of wage labour which differed from the system of slavery only in fact that in some places the exslaves were «paid» for their labour which in theory they could sell to any buyer – but fundamentally the system remained in that the land was still owned by the estate owners and the landless slaves had to depend on selling their labour for survival.

But the estates eventually became so unprofitable and the estate owners so poor that they could not afford to employ all the ex-slaves who started a great struggle to acquire pieces of land of their own to make themselves somewhat independent of the landlords.

For more than 150 years this struggle of the Dominican labourer to possess land of his own continued until today where many families possess small portions ; but the old system is still there – the big estate owners still have most of the land for themselves – and what is more the best land, while the great majority of people between them have less than what a handful of what the big shots have and what is more they have lands on hilly slopes in the heights where it is almost impossible to make a decent living.

The big land lords were supported by the colonial power of Great Britain which in 1863 abolished the old representative government which the whites had hitherto enjoyed and forced on the population the Crown Policy system by which the people were deprived of any say in running the affairs of the country and could not question the powers of the landlords and the merchants who controlled the town. The system was so arranged that virtually all the money made in Dominica made its way to England with the «maitre Bitacyons» and the merchants acting as middle men.

The people first agitated for the vote to have a say in their affairs, and in 1951 the British had to give way and allow the masses to vote. Thus came Adult Suffrage and one man one vote at the age of 21. The intention of the British to have the »Gros Bourg» associate with them to govern the country and the first political party to win elections was controlled by the same «maitre bitacyons» and merchants. In 1955 they found a champion in Frank Baron and D.U.P.P. But the «Gros Bourgs» were too greedy they used government power to make their class rich and powerful and oppressed the poor.

Twenty years ago, in 1961, the people of Dominica, elected a Labour Party Government because the Poor Man wanted an end to conditions of ignorance and misery they had experienced under