CHAPTER II

CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL LEGACIES

The first British Governor of Mauritius, Robert Farquhar (1810-1823) created a 'Conseil de Communes' composed of 15 members chosen from big planters. It was a purely advisory board concerned with issues of planters' welfare. This kinds of Communes was set up in each of 8 districts of the island. However, in 1819 it was abolished by Captain Ralph Darling, who had temporarily replaced Farquhar.

In 1825, a 'Council of Government' was established by the next Governor Galbraith Lowry Cole (1823-1828). It consisted of four official members plus the Governor. These four were Chief of Armed Forces, Chief Justice, Collector of Custom and Colonial Secretary. A 'Comité Colonial' was separately established, in 1827, to keep in touch with the planters and their views on different issues of the day. It had seven members.


2. Farquhar was charged of arresting and banishing a subject who had gone to England for pleading his innocence. He was called to England to defend himself and Darling was an acting Governor (1819-1820) till his

3. Later this was named as Executive Council. In this Chief Justice was replaced by Procurer and the Collector of Custom by either Auditor General, the Treasurer or Finance Secretary, Later on a few official members were appointed as representative of people, Ibid, p.17.

4. Later it was increased to sixteen with two from each of the 8 districts. Only Whites could be nominated to the Council.
In view of a strong campaign by planters to get representation in the Council of Government its composition was altered in 1831. The new Council was to be composed of 15 members - seven officials, seven non-officials chosen by the Governor and the Governor himself. The un-official members were big planters and principal merchants. This Council deliberated and voted on all affairs of public concern. However, it too was a purely advisory body and the Governor was free to accept or reject any of its advice. Also the Secretary of State had the power to override its decision. This structure continued till 1885.

The constitutional amendment of 1885, for the first time, introduced provision for elected representatives in the 'Council of Government'. When John Pope-Hennessy came to Mauritius as Governor in 1882, he found an organised opposition of Whites and Coloured to the official move on land ownership. They also wanted popular representation in the Council based on election.\(^5\)

It consisted of the Governor, eight ex-officio members, ten elected and nine nominated members. At least one third of the nominated members (i.e. three) were non-officials and five were from government

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\(^5\) Lord Derby, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, had refused the recommendation of Hennessy for elected representations. However in the face of rebellious situation, he was forced to give in. See Adele Smith Simmons, *Modern Mauritius* (Bloomington, Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), p.21.
departments. This constitutional structure was maintained till 1947 with a minor change effected in 1933, which provided that of total nominated members at least two thirds were to be non-officials. For election the island was divided into nine districts which were to return one candidate each and Port Louis two members.

The franchise was very restricted. It was open only to the male British subjects with a minimum of three year residence in Mauritius, and owning property of minimum value of Rs. 3,000, or tenantship with a monthly rent of Rs.25, or a business paying a license fee of Rs.2,000. When elections were held in 1886 there were only 4,000 qualified voters. Even in 1909, voting population made less than 2 per cent of the adult population and nearly 25 per cent of the electorate consisted of civil servants.

The Constitution remained in force for sixty years. This was because it had confirmed to socio-economic powers. The Franco-Mauritians and the Creoles controlled economic and cultural affairs. This

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6 The official members were civil servants and head of different departments like Colonial Secretary, the Secretary of Finance, the Attorney General etc. The 'non-official' members were generally wealthy and influential elite of society. They held their office at the pleasure of the Governor. See D. Napal, Les Constitutions de l'Ile Maurice (Port Louis, Mauritius Print Company, 1962), p.96.

7 In effect the Council consisted of eleven official members and sixteen non-officials including six nominated members. Its normal life was five years which could be prorogued or dissolved any time at the discretion of the Governor.

constitution strengthened their hold by enabling them to remain in control. Moreover their mode of participation, through petitions and newspapers - also helped the continuity of the Constitution. When Indians emerged in economic, social and professional areas, this constitution had to be changed to accommodate them.

After a prolonged agitation by the Creoles and Indians a new constitution was introduced in February 1948. The Council of Governor was replaced by a Legislative Council, which consisted of three ex-officio members (the Colonial Secretary, the Procurer and Advocate General, and the Finance Secretary), twelve unofficial nominated members and nineteen elected from five constituencies. The Governor presided over the Council.9

The Legislative Council was to send four non-official members to the Executive Council.10 The right to vote was extended to all those who could speak, read and write simple sentences, and could sign name in any of the languages mentioned in the second schedule of the constitution.11 Any one who had served in the armed forces was also entitled to vote. Women and men were

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9 See, Napal, n.1, p.270.

10 Six members were to be returned from Plaines Wilhemes and Riviere Noire, four from Port Louis and three each from Moka-Flacq, Grand Port/Savanne and Riviere du Rempart.

11 The language recognised in 2nd schedule were: French, English, Hindustani, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Chinese and Patois Creole.
given franchise on the same criterion. In this system the elected Indo-Mauritian members were defeated by the nominated and ex-officio members of the Council. Under constant pressure from Indo-Mauritians for fuller political advancement and reforms, the constitution was again amended in 1958. The Legislative Council now consisted of a Speaker as President, three ex-officio members, forty elected members and not more than 12 nominated members.

Universal adult franchise was introduced. Forty single member constituencies were carved to return one member each to the Legislative Council. The 'best loser' system was introduced under which a maximum of 8 seats were to be given to those who narrowly lost the election. A Public Service Commission was established for appointment and promotion of civil servants. Judiciary was also made independent from the Executive.

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12 Indo-Mauritian leaders, including Ramgoolam, were opposed to women franchise as very few Indo-Mauritian women were qualified to vote according to the literacy criterion. But Franco-Mauritians insisted on women franchise. For detail regarding Ramgoolam's stand, see "Female Suffrage" in Selected Speeches of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam by K. Hazareesingh (Hong Kong, Macmillan, 1979), p.44.

13 The Colonial office was ready for political advancement by giving universal adult suffrage. But it was clubbed with an electoral system based on proportional representation with a single transferable vote. The Mauritius Labour Party (MLP) refused to participate in government and withdrew from the government. It resulted into the "London Agreement" of 1957. It established Ministerial system of government and universal adult franchise based on the reports of Trustram Eve Commission. K. Hazareesingh- History of Indians in Mauritius. (Macmillan, 1975)

14 Besides these changes a Public Service Commission of civil servants and Judiciary was also made independent from the Executive.
The next two steps in constitutional advancement were in the Executive area. In the first stage (1st January 1962) the leader of the party in power got the title of 'Chief Minister'. The Governor was required to consult him concerning nomination and removal of ministers, allocation of portfolios and the opening, extension and dissolution of parliament. In the second step, after the election of October 1963, Legislative Council became Legislative Assembly. Now the Chief Minister became the Premier and the Executive became 'Council of Ministers'.

The next round of talks for constitutional advancement was held in September 1965 in London. There were serious differences among political parties on the future electoral system and on the issue of independence. However, the Secretary of State, Anthony Greenwood, decided for independence "after a period of six months full internal self government, if a resolution for this was passed by a simple majority of the new assembly".

15 Though the leader of the majority party was to form the government but it was not to be a purely majority party government. It was to include representatives and elements of other parties who did not refuse to join the government and were ready to accept the principle of collective responsibility. The Colonial Secretary who now became Chief Secretary was to be ex-officio Home Minister. See, British Broadcasting Corporation Reports on Mauritius Constitutional Review Conference 1961, 29 July 1961, also Constitutional Development in Mauritius, Sessional Paper No.5 of 1961; and Mauritius Constitutional Review Conference Papers, 1961 Minutes of the 4th Plenary Session, 5 July 1961.


17 Ibid., p.21.
An electoral commission was to decide the new electoral system, based on the Banwell Electoral Commission report. The existing constituencies were merged to have twenty constituencies. Each was to return three candidates and the island of Rodrigue two candidates. Five 'corrective seats' were to be allotted on basis of a complicated process to the best loosers of both ethnic and political minorities.

This was opposed by the Indo-Mauritians. John Stonehouse, Parliamentary Under-Secretary came from London to settle the issue. He replaced "corrective system" by 8 best looser seats. It recognised the existence of four communities, three of Asian origins - Hindus, Muslims and Chinese - and the fourth the General population. It included all other who were not of Asian origin. These best eight loosers seats were allotted by a complicated process to the best loosers of the under represented community in such a way that the electoral verdict in favour of majority party was not changed by allocation of these seats.


19 It was laid down that any party which secured 25 per cent of votes must get 25 per cent of seats. If it does not then it must be given enough seats to make it minimum 25 per cent of total strength. This could give new parliament an undermined number of seats. Besides this an additional five seats were to be allotted to the under represented communities from the best loosers.

On the 12th of March, 1968, Mauritius became a sovereign democratic state. This final Constitution, drawn up under British rule, became the supreme law of Mauritius.21

New Constitution

The fundamental rights and freedom of all individuals are safeguarded; private property, freedom of expression and association were protected. Freedom of movement and protection from discrimination on the basis of race, colour, caste, creed or sex are also part of the constitution. The rights of citizenship were detailed and the office of Governor-General was established. Parliament was to consist of Her Majesty, 62 elected under the 'first past the post' system and eight nominated under the 'best loser' system.22 The offices of Speaker and Deputy Speaker were established. Parliament could alter the Constitution by passing necessary bill provided that the Act received support from no less than three-quarters of all members of the Assembly. The official language of the Assembly is English, but members could also address the chair in French.

21 The Independence Order included the constitution which is the current constitution of Mauritius. The electoral system remained same and became a part of the constitution of Mauritius

22 A Electoral Boundaries Commission was established consisting of a chairman and between 2 to 4 members appointed by the Governor-General acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister when the latter had consulted with the leader of the opposition.
The Prime Minister is appointed by the Governor-General who is representative of the Queen. The Cabinet as the real seat of executive power, consists of Prime Minister and 20 other ministers. It advises the Governor-General, and is collectively responsible to the parliament for any advice given to the Governor-General.

Under the Constitution, the Supreme Court can hear and determine any civil or criminal case under any law other than a disciplinary law. The Supreme Court has also the power to interpret the constitution and the constitutionality of any legislation brought to its attention. The judges of the Supreme Court include Chief Justice, Senior Puisine Judge and such number of Puisine Judges as may be prescribed by parliament. The Governor-General, in consultation with the Prime Minister, appoints the Chief Justice. The office of Ombudsman was also established. The constitution also provides for three important commissions - the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, the Public Service Commission and the Police Service Commission. These commissions oversee appointment of government officials.

Local Self Government

The urban local self government evolved over a century. The first municipality of Mauritius of the town of Port Louis was set up in 1850.23 A unique

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feature of this municipality was that it consisted of elected members. Franchise was linked to property qualifications which changed from time to time. In 1889 a board of commissioners for Curepipe and in 1895 for Beau Bassin, Rose Hill and Quatre Bornes was established. The board of these town consisted of 6 Commissioners appointed by the Governor. Similar attempts were made for rural areas as well. In 1853 an Ordinance "for constitution and establishment of District Councils in several country districts of Mauritius for purpose of enabling the inhabitants thereof to regulate certain matters and things of local nature" was issued. New councilors were elected for each District Council with powers to manage its local affairs.

24 In 1963 all its "elected members resigned when the government decided to extend the boundary of its territory by including many nearby villages. Its area had gone six times.

25 Initially persons having property worth 300 pounds or paying an annual rental of 30 pounds or paying annual licence duty of not less than 20 pounds were qualified for franchise. However after Swinden Committee recommendation property qualification became one of the many criteria for franchise.


27 It was to consist of Legislative Council member for the district, Director of Public Work, Medical Officer of the area and between 3 to 7 members nominated by the Governor. However no district took initiative to form the Council. The project was dropped. Another attempt with more government involvement was made by Ordinance no. 9 of 1901 established District boards known as branch road boards. It consisted of government ex-officio members and nominated members. Its work was related to improvement of basic amenities especially footpaths and road of each area. In 1919 it was given power to levy tax as well. But the system did not work. It was abolished in 1939.

A landmark in evolution of local self government was the report J.B. Swinden Commission. In 1943 because of civic disturbances several labourers lost their lives. J.B.Swinden came to investigate the incident in 1945. His report suggested that the electoral system for the Legislative Assembly, with minor changes should be applied to the township of Port Louis. For other towns, Swinden suggested semi elected bodies with ultimate target of wholly elected authorities. Following the Swinden report elected element was introduced in Town Councils.²⁸

For self government in rural areas and District Councils were established in 1951. The three District Councils; Pamplemousses-Riviere du Rempart, Moka-Flacq and Grand Port-Savanne were divided into 5 divisions, and each division returned 3 elected members to its respective District Council.²⁹ In addition to 15

²⁸ By Local Government Ordinance 1962 each Town Council was having 12 elected and four nominated members. Later a Town Council of Vacoas/Phoenix was also created. In 1968 all Town Councils became municipality. They were now divided into wards. The next year the target of wholly elected bodies was achieved. All Council members were now elected. But their autonomy was curtailed by a legislation of 1974, when the Minister of Local Government was empowered to suspend any local authority and to appoint in its place an administrative commission. ²⁹

The electoral system for local bodies - both urban and rural had evolved from a number of reports since Swinden submitted his report. They are (1) Reports of Select Committee appointed to examine J.B. Swinden's report on local government in Mauritius, 1947, (2) R.O. Ramage Committee on financial relations between central and local authorities, 1953 (3) Bryan Keith Lucas Report on conduct of Local government elections in 1956 and (4) C.W.S. Seed Report on finance and accounting of municipality and Town Council - 1958 (two reports). They covered many aspects of local bodies including elections.

On the recommendation of the Keith Lucas report, 1956 the power to hold election was transferred from local bodies to electoral commissioner. In 1968 the Electoral Supervisory Commission was established. Besides the conducting elections for Legislative Assembly this was vested with responsibility to conduct the elections of local bodies as well.
elected members the District Council consisted of 3 members nominated by the Minister. The three elected members of the District Council were sent by Village Council under each division from among themselves. District and Village Councils meet quarterly as urban local authorities. Every Council has four committees. The Minister of Local Government has excessive powers in affairs of these Councils, which are heavily dependent on grant from the Minister. Unlike the urban authorities they can not borrow.

POLITICS IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The early political movement in Mauritius was started by the White planters of French origins. These planters were demanding a say in the functioning of government of Mauritius. The leader of planters, Andrien d’Epinay, vigorously campaigned for a representative body which enjoyed certain power in the governing of Mauritius. As a result, in 1832 the ‘Council of Government’ was formed

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30 (a) Finance and Establishment Committee, (b) Public Health Committee, (c) Works Committee and (d) Committee of Whole Councils.

31 Even the election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman by the District Councilors and their salary had to be approved by the Minister.

32 The other source of finance include entertainment tax, advertisement fee and burial fee. Collection from these sources are negligible.

33 On paper they have power to impose house tax but because of non-commercial nature of property it is not imposed.
which besides officials made a provision for non-official members nominated by the Governor.

The first direct confrontation between colonial administration and the plantocracy took place over the issue of the abolition of slavery. This was precipitated by the appointment of John Jeremie, a committed abolitionist as procurer general. Despite use of threat, the White planters were able to send Jeremie back to London. But finally slavery was abolished.

The second difference between colonial administration and the planters originated over matters relating to Indian immigration and treatment of Indians.

The big influx of Indian labourers and their bad working condition generated controversies. The first person who took up the cause of the Indian labourers was Adolf de Plevitz. He vigorously opposed the system of 'double cut' and the most hated 'pass system'. In the former case a labourer had to lose two days wage for one days absence at work. The latter provided the police a legal pretext for extracting money from Indians. Plevitz drafted a

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34 When I. Jeremie arrived life had come to a standstill in Mauritius. Mauritian rebels refused to work and the judges who were to install Jeremie failed to appear. See A.R. Mannick, Mauritius: Development of a Plural Society (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1979) pp.43-44, also Simmons, n.5, p.20.

35 Adolf de Plevitz was a Prussian soldier married to daughter of a French family. He had come to Mauritius in 1859. He was a planter himself and was managing 200 acres of his father-in-laws estate also. He had a keen interest in the welfare of Indian labourers. Indians looked up on him as protector and whenever they had any serious cause for complaint they went to him for help. For detail see Lorretta de Plevitz, Restless Energy: A biography of Adolf de Plevitz (Moka; MGI, 1987).
petition of their demands, highlighting their repression, secured 9,410 signatures and sent it to the Governor, the Queen and to the Colonial Government in India.\textsuperscript{36} He was physically assaulted and publicly ridiculed by White planters for acting against the interest of his own community. But the protests led by Plevitz led to the appointment of a Royal Commission in 1872. Besides other things, the Commission also suggested for constitutional advancement, though Indians were not the target for inclusion in such advancement.\textsuperscript{37}

By the turn of the century leaders of Indian and coloured origin entered the political scene in an organised way. Mahatma Gandhi, on his way back to India from South Africa, visited Mauritius in 1901. He was there for a fortnight. He advised Indians to educate their children and to organise themselves

\textsuperscript{36} For details of his involvement and suffering in this issue see, Hazareesingh, n.l3, pp. 43-46. Also his biography by Loretta de Plevitz, n.35,

\textsuperscript{37} British response to demands for political advancement had been varying to some extent, according to natures of different Governors. However, all of them did take care to protect the British interests. They were mindful of the British public opinion and the presence of an active anti-slavery group at London. Governor, Pope Hennessy (1883-1889) was in favour of reforms. For his enthusiasm of reform he was sharply criticised by conservative group went to England to convince the British government that Pope Hennessy was not loyal. As a result the British government suspended him. However, men from reformist group also went to England to canvas in favour of Pope Hennessy. An enquiry was ordered and the Governor was acquitted of all charges and reinstated. He even nominate an Indian to the Council of Government. Planters took it as a step towards countering their supremacy. Misreading the future, the Governor Pope Hennessy assured planters that "Indians were not politically minded, they were too sensible to be politicians and neither they nor the Chinese would ever cause any trouble". See James Pope Hennessy, \textit{Verandah: a biography of Sir John Pope Hennessy} (Allen and Unwin, 1964), p.238.
against legal and political discrimination.\(^{38}\) He sent Manilal Doctor in 1907 for helping Indians in Mauritius.\(^ {39}\) Meanwhile Creoles were the first Mauritian group who gave serious and organised challenge to the dominant position of Franco.\(^ {40}\) The 'Action Libérale' led by Eugene Laurent.\(^ {41}\) demanded participation of non-Whites in the government. Manilal Doctor urged the Indians to side with Action Libérale.\(^ {42}\) Indians and Coloured


\(^{39}\) Manilal Doctor came from Gujrat. He was a lawyer by profession. He founded the paper Hindustani. Manilal Doctor’s mission was to prepare, mobilise and organise the neglected Indo-Mauritian community for its proportional and justified share in the affairs of their country of adoption. See, D. Napal, Manilal Maganlall Doctor (Port Louis: Neo Press Service, 1963).

\(^{40}\) The coloured middle class had thrown up articulate elites which had slowly grown in size and importance. They began asserting themselves in legal, medical and the civil services. They were demanding equal privileges like Whites to assume political power over the rest of the population..

\(^{41}\) Eugene Laurent was mayor of Port Louis for nine terms. In addition to this he had been also elected for Council from Port Louis in 1906, 1911 and 1916. Earlier he was member of Sir William Newton’s Conservative Party (also known as Parti de l’Ordre) since it started its reform movement in 1884. He broke away with this party in 1906 and formed an opposition of Council of government in 1906. See A. Mulloo, Our Struggle (Delhi: Vision Books, 1982), pp.22-23.

\(^{42}\) He eulogised the political movements of India. He was preaching the importance of education and the eternal values of the Indian culture. Personally, he ended with a very sad, lonely and frustrated private life. See, Hugh Tinker, "Odd Man Out: The Loneliness of the Indian Colonial Politician - The Career of Manilal Doctor", Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, January 1974, pp.226-43.
without trading on communal feelings, stirred the whole country. For the first time political leaders went to villages and organised meetings in local markets. The impact of the political awakening of non-Whites was felt everywhere. News papers played a very effective in this moment. In the early 20th century sugar production suffered very badly because of a disease called Sura. Planters requested the British government for loan to meet the crisis. The Secretary of State, however, wanted a Royal Commission to visit Mauritius before granting loan. This was being opposed by planters grouped under Parti de L’Ordre. Action Liberale and Manilal supported the appointment of Royal Commission.

43 "Such meetings were not purely political; they were more often than not disrupted by the villagers buying vegetables as well as by hecklers from the Port Louis, and, viewed with some excitement as one of the few forms of entertainment on the island, were often seen as an excuse for outing". Simmons, n.s, p.26.

44 By this time island had 10 daily newspapers. All were obsessed with politics and were widely partisan. Only seditious writings were risky enough to invite charges of libel. As a result the newspapers carried bitter and direct writings. The Chairman of the Royal Commission which came in 1909, Sir Frank Swettenham made some very interesting comments about politics and obsession of Mauritian newspapers. See Sir Frank Swettenham, Also and Perhaps (London: 1912), p.158.

45 Parti de L’Ordre objective was to counter the rising political activities of the ‘Action Liberale’ and Manilal Doctor. They were totally opposed to visit of Royal Commission because the previous Royal Commission in 1872 had indicted and criticised the planters for their ill treatment of Indian labourers. Its leader Henery Leclezio (1840-1929) opposed all reforms demanded by ‘democrats’. Leclezio said, "No, we are not, we are afraid, we shall never be ripe for free institutions, nor do we believe that we are fit for them". See M.N. Varma, The Making of Mauritius (Quatre Bornes, 1977), p.108.
Finally the Royal Commission of Enquiry came in 1909.\textsuperscript{46} but its report achieved little. Hostilities between the opposing parties increased. In the general election of 1911 the planters won though the Action Libérale won the Port Louis seats. Unable to get their share at poll, which was difficult in restricted electoral rights, the creole used the means of violence. Riots broke out after the rumour that Eugene Laurent had been injured during poll. Rioting and looting continued throughout the night. The office of \textit{Le Radical}, White's newspaper was sacked. Crowds continued to attack the offices and houses of reputed White planters on the next day also. This riot was severe in Port Louis. Finally garrison troops had to be called to quell the riot. However violence was confined to Port Louis and Curepipe. Though property was damaged and many were injured, no one was killed. Indians kept aloof.

The riot left some important questions unanswered viz, "why did the riots occur? What would have happened had

\textsuperscript{46} The Royal Commission had following relevant comments to make about Indo-Mauritians and their political situation "No council can legitimately claim to speak authoritatively for Mauritius as a whole which does not contain a substantial proportion of members who represent that hitherto unrepresented community of Asiatic descent which plays such an important part in the life of the colony and comprises more than two-thirds of the population.... For about three-quarters of a century it has been found possible for the Colonial Government to regard the Indian as a stranger among a people of European civilisation - a stranger who must indeed be protected from imposition and ill-treatment and secured in the exercise of his legal rights, but who has no real claim to a voice in the ordering of the affairs of the colony...." See, \textit{Report of Mauritius Royal Commission 1909} (London: 1910), Col.5185, p.51.
Indians taken sides? and more importantly would they occur again?"\(^{47}\)

The organisation of Action Liberale, agitations by Manilal Doctor and the impact of Royal Commission were all pushed to the background when the World War started. The Action Liberale was never heard of after the World War I. A new movement started known as the Retrocession Movement. Taking clue from the principle of self-determination, Dr. Maurice Cure' and Raoul Rivet jointly launched a movement for return of Mauritius to France. They referred to cultural, religious and linguistic similarities as basis for their demand.\(^ {48}\) The population of Indians had no place in such logic as they had very little in common with the French. But even White planters were not in support of the move for opposite reasons.\(^ {49}\) They came out in favour of remaining under Britain. They repeated the same argument with more intensity and without success against independence in 1960s. However, neither the French

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\(^{47}\) This was the first communal riot in island. The subsequent communal riots were also broke out for political reasons only. For details on this riot see, Simmons, n.5, p.29.

\(^{48}\) Under French rule in the contiguous Island of Réunion there was universal adult suffrage as a result Creoles had major say in power. Creoles from Réunion had served as deputies in French Assembly. Though equal before law in Mauritius they were not equal to Franco Mauritians when it came to share power. In Mauritius they were 'British Subject' in Réunion they would have been 'citizen'.

\(^{49}\) Many Franco-Mauritians would have supported it "if a transfer to French flag did not connote the Republic system of government, universal suffrage, and the consequent preponderance of the coloured influence in the colony". See, Bell to Thomas, Public Record Office (London), C.O.882/11, No.148, 28 February 1924, p.4.
unanimously opposed it nor were the Creoles undivided in their support.\textsuperscript{50} Indian sided with the anti-retrocessionist Franco-Mauritians. At the general election of 1921 all the pro-retrocessionist candidates were defeated and this movement faded away for ever.\textsuperscript{51} On the other hand in the next general election (1926) for the first time two Indo-Mauritians - Dhunputh Lallah and Raj Coomar Gujhadhur - won by defeating the Franco-Mauritians.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{The Labour Party}

Many sections of Mauritian population were not satisfied constitutional provisions despite the minor changes that were introduced in 1833.\textsuperscript{53} On 3rd February 1936, Dr. Maurice Cure, a Creole leader who had suffered successive

\textsuperscript{50} Retrocession was the main issue in the general election of 1921. There were a handful of White supporters. But except a few French politicians, the leader of Parti de L'Ordre who denounced the British rule, they were neither prominent nor leading figures of this movement. Similarly all Creole elites were not retrocessionists. The leadership of old Action Liberale got split on the issue. Eugene Laurent was against it. However, mainly it remained a coloured people dominated movement.

\textsuperscript{51} The movement was significant for two reasons. Firstly it demonstrated the need of a sound political organisation for Creoles, which later led to foundation of Mauritius Labour Party and secondly it provided political training and experience to three political leaders - Maurice Cure, Edgar Laurent and Raul Rivet who dominated island Politics for the next 30 years.

\textsuperscript{52} Both were large land owners. It had taken many years for Indians to get elected into government. It signified the ascendancy of Indo-Mauritian in economic life because the franchise was still limited with property and salary qualifications.

\textsuperscript{53} Now the number of non-official nominated member was doubled from what it was originally in 1885 Constitution.
defeat in general elections, founded Mauritian Labour Party (MLP) based on the model of British Labour Party "to assure the representation of Workers in Mauritius". He stood for laboring classes to get their right, and working conditions as recommended by International Labour Convention. The MLP was the first systematically organised political party. It was broad based and national in outlook, representing all interest, classes, and ethnic groups except the White capitalist class. It was supported by Pandit Sahadeo Rama, a follower of Gandhi, who served as link between Party and Indo-Mauritian and between Party and Indian National Congress. Cure' was also supported by Emmanuel Anquetil, the father of trade union movement in Mauritius.

Dr. Maurice Cure, educated in England was an activist of British Labour Party. He contested for general election on issue of retrocession in 1921, but was defeated. He lost in 1926 and 1931 elections as well. Finally he won in a by election in 1934 defeating a white planter. He earned a reputation of a radical and trouble maker in the Council. He lost the general election of 1926 again. His bluntness and radical postures ensured his defeat. But then soon he launched Mauritius Labour Party, in February 1926 in a meeting at Champ de Mars.

Unlike the previous political associations which were ad hoc groups (groupement) it had an elected executive which met regularly. It kept book and records and charged membership fees. It had an ideology and program. Though its representative character and number of follower may not be impressive, it made the first attempt to mobilise workers and labourers, who had so far not asserted us any organised way to demand their share in governance of the colony.

He had met Mahatma Gandhi in 1925 and gone to India in 1938 and 1940 to argue the case of the MLP before Indian National Congress (INC). But the INC never gave any significant help. See Simmons: n.5, p.61.
Cure’s campaign led to general strikes and riots in 1937 in which four workers were shot dead and 10 injured by an Indian owned estate manager in Flacq. The brother of Rajcoomar Gujudhur, the Council member, was alleged to be responsible for the shooting. This marked the end of political leadership of Indian estate owners.\textsuperscript{57} An Inquiry Commission headed by Advocate and Procurer General was set up to go into the whole affairs.\textsuperscript{58} Based on the recommendation of this commission a Labour Ordinance of 1938 was passed. Accordingly the Governor set up a new Department of Labour for welfare of workers and passed legislations on minimum wages. The Mauritian government took credit by immediately implementing many of the demands of MLP. The Governor started an official campaign what he called ‘education of the people’ in their newly acquired labour rights.

Cure’ had also set up Societe de Bienfaisance des Travailleurs’ de L’ile Maurice’ (Society for the benefits of the workers of Mauritius).\textsuperscript{59} Severe house arrest restrictions were imposed on Cure’. Constant harassment by the government, weakened the interests

\textsuperscript{57} Gujadhur family which was owning the biggest sugar estate, after the firing of 1937 became an out-caste, politically ostracised family. With decline in its political and social importance, it had suffered worst than White planters.

\textsuperscript{58} C.A. Hooper, \textit{Reports on the Commission of Enquiry into Unrest on Sugar Estates in Mauritius} (Port Louis: 1938).

\textsuperscript{59} This Society also became controversial and an enquiry was conducted into its affairs. See C.A. Hooper, Report on the Enquiry into and conduct of the Societe des Bienfaisance des Travailleurs de l’ile Maurice (Port Louis: 1938).
of Dr. Cure’ in the struggle and in 1941 he gave the leadership of MLP to Anquetil. In 1946 he joined the Executive Council as a nominated member. He sided with the conservatives in the government on the question of constitutional reforms in 1947.

Cure’s struggle had given birth to prototype of trade unions. His associate, Anquetil founded the Engineer and Technical Workers Union (ETWU). Encouraged by Anquetil, an Indo-Mauritian Harryparsad Ramnarain organised the agricultural labourers.

When Anquetil died in 1947, Guy Rozment became the head of Labour Party as well as ETWU. The electoral base of the MLP changed during his time. He was making little distinction between party and ETWU. The base of ETWU was urban creole. Curé main supporters were agricultural labourers. Under Rozment few Indians were loyal to Labour Party. Its main supporters were Creole dockers and artisans who were committed to Rozment rather than to an ideology or organisation.

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60 Cure’s popularity declined as people were not ready to go with him so far. Disillusioned, he joined the government side. In 1945 he said “le publique se foutait de moi” quoted in Anand Mulloo, Our Struggle: 20th Century Mauritius (Vision Books, New Delhi, 1982), p.53.

61 Ibid., p.53.

62 Both were activist of Labour Party. Ramnarain had established North and Central Riviere de Rempart Industrial Association which was later renamed as Mauritius Agricultural Labour Association (MALA). It was rural based. There was intense rivalry between the two unions. All government attempts to persuade them to join hands were ineffective. Both were helped by Ken Baker, a trade union adviser who was sent from England in early 1945. For detail regarding trade union development during this period see, Kenneth Baker, Trade Unionism in Mauritius (Port Louis, J.E. Felix, Acting Government Printer, 1946). On specific role of Ramnarain see, Dayachand Napal, H. Ramnarain: Life and Struggle (Delhi: Natraj Prakashan, 1989), pp.48-56.
In 1940, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam entered the political scene. He had returned from England in 1935 after obtaining a degree in medicine. He started a newspaper to articulate the cause of workers and Indo-Mauritians. In 1940 itself he was nominated to the Legislative Council and was elected as Municipal Councilor from Port Louis as well.

Basudeo Bissoondoyal was another rising leader of the time. In 1939 he started satyagrah and civil disobedience movement opposing the laws that discriminated against Indians. He set up also a Seva Samiti - a band of Hindu volunteer - to give Indo-Mauritian confidence in themselves and in their culture and religion.

This paper was called Advance. Earlier Manilal Doctor had started The Hindustani. Gujar had started Mauritius Indian Times and The Mauritius Mitra. Dr. Cure’ had also started Le Peuple Mauricienne after he formed the Mauritius Labour Party. Le Mauricien was another newspaper, managed by Coloured people which emphasised French culture and values.

During the War period general elections were postponed but municipal elections were held regularly. The latter was serving as barometer of island politics. For Municipality election Ramgoolam formed a ‘group of five’ which consisted of himself, G.M.D. Atchia, A.R. Aboo Baker, A.R. Mohammed and P. Seeneevassen. opposed to group of five was a ‘group of ten’ headed by Dr. Edgar Laurent and Raoul Rivet. ‘Group of ten’ was new name of the Union Mauricienne founded in 1926 by Edgar Laurent.

Basudeo Bissoondoyal had studied in India with specialisation in Hindi and Indian philosophy. He had started a newspaper Zamana (1948-78). He was more of a missionary than a politician. See Abhimanyu Unnuth, Jan Andolan Ke Praneta (M.G.I. Moka, 1986).

He produced hundreds of future Hindi teachers and gave a religious colour to Hindi for making Hindus learn Hindi. His Swayam Sevaks (volunteers) went to people with the slogan "Padho Hindi Sabhi Hindu, Yaha Risiyo ki Dhasa hai" (Learn Hindi all you Hindus; It is the language of (Indian) sages); see, L.P. Ramyead, A Portrait of Professor Basudeo Bissoondoyal (Stanley: E.O.I., 1988), p.45.
organised a religious Yaj in 1943 it was attended by 60,000 Indians. His brother Sookdeo Bissoondoyal also entered politics during this time.\textsuperscript{67}

Rammnarain was also politically active at this time. In 1947 he started Fodder Campaign. He led a procession of 20,000 cow keepers with their cows to the governor’s residence.\textsuperscript{68} The governor was finally forced to authorise free access to fodder.

\textbf{INDIAN ASCENDANCY TO POWER (1947-1967)}

The period from 1947 to 1967 witnessed the emergence of many political groups and parties. This period saw the inauguration of a representative assembly and the extension of universal adult suffrage. An era of responsible and representative government began. However, amidst all these it was the acquisition of power by the Indo-Mauritians that marked a sharp break from the past. The liberalising effects of World War I, the return of the Labour Party in Britain and the independence of

\textsuperscript{67} Sookdeo Bissoondoyal was brother of Basudeo Bissoondoyal. He was more in politics and less in social work. He was the founding member of Independent Forward Block, (IFB). For life and work see R. Jeetah, \textit{Sookdeo Bissoondoyal: Life and Time} (Port Louis, G. Gangaram: 1980), Also his biography by his son Uttam Bissoondoyal, \textit{Promises to keep} (Delhi: Wiley Easton, 1990).

\textsuperscript{68} So far the cow keeper had no right to collect fodder from crown or private land. Women were persecuted for stealing fodder. Before this Rammanarain had gone for hunger strike in 1943 against the police firing when three persons were killed while agitating for higher wage and better working condition. See Abhimanyu Unnuth, \textit{From Cane Field to Parliament: A Profile of H. Rammanarain} (Delhi: Natraj Prakashan, 1989), pp.62-71.
India created a favourable external environment for the political and constitutional advancement of Mauritius. Internally the Labour Party, the Socio-cultural movement of Bissoondoyal, and the agitations and activities of trade unions pressed for a more representative government. In the socio-economic life Indians had come a long way. They possessed 47 per cent of the cultivated land. Most of the tea and tobacco estates belonged to them. They controlled import and export and were represented in all liberal professions and the civil services. What it lacked was political representation which would have reflected its socio-economic importance in the country. And that has been always denied to the community. Agreeing to the need of political change Governor Mackenzie proposed an increase in elected members with property and educational qualifications for franchise. He established two consultative committees representing all shades of political and ethnic

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69 Independence of India had boosted the morale of the leaders of the Indo-Mauritians who were in touch with Indian National Congress, See, n.56.


71 In 1901, only two per cent of the island doctors and one per cent of its lawyers were Indians; By 1944, the percentage had risen to 14 and 15 per cent respectively. See Simmons, n.5, p.104.

72 Hazareesingh, n.13, p.138.
opinions.\textsuperscript{73} The Indo-Mauritians were adamant on male adult universal suffrage, while Franco Mauritians were insisting that "universal adult suffrage might open the door to external interference in the affairs of the colony."\textsuperscript{74} Indo-Mauritians wanted to remove property and educational qualifications.\textsuperscript{75}

Though no agreement was reached in the Second Consultative Committee, its proceedings were important in two things. First, in face of the possibility of universal adult suffrage and the Indo-Mauritians coming to power, fears of other sections came into the open. Secondly, for the first time in the history of the island the representatives of all classes and communities sat together. "In an official forum, politeness forced each member to listen to others, to treat others with at least a minimum of respect, and to talk together about the future of Mauritius".\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} His revised proposal for Second Consultative Committee was also not acceptable to Indo-Mauritians. See, \textit{The Times} (London) 31st October 1946 and also \textit{Le Mauricien, Advance} and \textit{Le Cerneen} of 30th October 1946. The Governor had suggested 40 member Legislative Assembly - 19 elected, eight official and 13 nominated un-official members. No reserved seats. Five existing constituencies were to be maintained.

\textsuperscript{74} See Memorandum to Donald Mackenzie Kennedy from A. Gelli, R. Hein, A. Roffray, R. Rivet, E. Laurent, J. Koenig and A. Nairac, in, Minutes of Second Consultative Committee, 22 November 1946.

\textsuperscript{75} It was proposed that those who passed 6th standard certificate would be eligible. Ironically Ramgoolam was strongly opposing franchise to women whereas the conservative Whites were insisting for the same. Under the proposed property and educational qualifications very few Indian women could have qualified whereas the opposite was true in case of white inhabitants.

\textsuperscript{76} See Simmons, n.5, p.99.
Ultimately the Governor, after consulting the Secretary of State, decided to change the 1885 constitutions. Under the new constitution the Legislative Council was to consist of 3 ex-officio members (Colonial Secretary, Advocate General and Financial Secretary) 12 un-official nominated and 19 elected members from five electoral constituencies. Women were granted franchise. No property qualifications were prescribed. Any male or female who can speak and can read and write simple sentences and can sign his name in any one of the languages spoken in Mauritius could vote.

The constitution altered the alignment of forces in Mauritian politics. The Franco-Mauritians lost their political hold. They withdrew and concentrated on economic front. The Creoles and Franco Mauritians, looked on with disbelief and alarm. Both groups feared Indian domination in future. Meanwhile the number of registered voters increased by six times.

The general elections of August 1948 started intense political activity. Political parties became important. The Mauritius Labour Party selected both Hindu and Creole as candidates. Its programme

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77 6 members from Plaines Wilhems and Black River, 4 from Port Louis, 3 from Pamlemousses and Riviere du Rempart, 3 from Mokas/Placq and 5 from Grand Port/Savanne.

78 It consisted of English, French, Hindustani, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Chinese and Patois Creole. Besides any one who had served in the armed forces was also qualified to vote. For details see Report on the Colony of Mauritius 1947, pp.4-5

79 Before 1948 the number of qualified voters was 11844. But after the new franchise criteria in 1948 it increased to 71,806 of which 23 per cent were women. See Report on Colony of Mauritius 1948, p.2.
were more social than political.\textsuperscript{80} A few Franco-Mauritians contested but they were mostly new entrants in politics. S. Ramgoolam was not a candidate of Labour Party. He had entered into an informal alliance with a group of five professionals - all Indians but not from Bissoondoyal camp.\textsuperscript{81} Communalism was not conspicuous as it was to be in later years. Election was more a popularity contest with most of the 104 contesting individuals standing as independent candidates.

Ninety percent of the electorate turned out to vote over two days. In ethnic term, Hindus swept the poll by winning 11 of the 19 seats. They got nine seats in the rural and two in urban constituencies. Creoles were more successful in the urban areas. No Chinese stood for election, while no Muslim could win in the election though they did well in Port Louis where they had the highest concentration.

The final tally was 11 Hindus, 7 Coloured and 1 Franco Mauritian. Though Franco-Mauritians had lost the power Creoles were the most disappointed group. They found themselves helpless between the two strongly entrenched groups - Franco-Mauritians in economy and Indians in politics. Both placed their hope in the

\textsuperscript{80} Labour Party had announced a 20 point programme. It included provisions for social security, old age pensions, compulsory education, low cost housing, cooperative for small planters and nationalisation of some industries.

\textsuperscript{81} These were articulate western educated lawyers and doctors. In 1936 they had organised Indian Cultural Society. B. Bissoondoyal did not contest. He was more busy with getting Indo-Mauritians registered for election. But his brother, S. Bissoondoyal resigned from government job and contested.
Governor who had "reserved" and substantial nomination power. As no muslim was elected, they charged that voting was on communal lines. Their representatives who had opposed the proposal for "reserved seats" in the Consultative Committees now demanded communal representation in public meetings.

The Governor packed the Legislative Council with many conservative Whites and Creoles by utilising the power of nomination. All moves of Labour Party demanding universal adult suffrage was defeated in the Council by the combined strength of nominees, official members and the two elected conservatives - Jules Koenig and R.Rivet.

By this time a rudimentary bi-party system had developed. In the Legislative Council Labour party candidates and group of Ramgoolam sided on many issues during its first session. Slowly Ramgoolam drew closer to the Labour Party. Ramgoolam was in contact with the British Labour Party leaders while he was in England as student. Moreover the MLP was not against Hindus. Ramgoolam had shown cautious interest in the MLP in 1946 until he became the undisputed leader of Legislative Council. He then joined the MLP in 1950.

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82 See, the newspaper Advance, Le Cerneen and Le Mauricien of 19 August 1948.

83 A public meeting in September approved a petition to Creech-Jones asking for the provision of communal representation. It was apprehensive of its interest being ignored "by elected members belonging to another community with a different culture and different religion". See, the reprint of Memorandum in Moomtaz Emrith, Muslims in Mauritius (Goodland: 1967).
Ramgoolam thus emerged as the leader of Indo-Mauritians.\(^8^4\) When Rozement faded into background, Creoles who had supported him turned to Ramgoolam.\(^8^5\) Ramgoolam was alert to court Rozement and Creoles and turned MLP into a party of working class, lower class Creoles and Hindus.

The Franco-Mauritians and Colored elite were watching consolidation of MLP with alarm. They formed a counter group in December 1952, called the Ralliement Mauricien (RM). They knew that they could not attract Hindus. Jules Koenig emerged as the leader of RM. He was opposed to Ralliement developing as an organised political party. It was an informal group-based on programme to oppose Labour Party and universal adult suffrage. It had no membership list or fees. Its leadership was pro-plantocracy but its ethnic policy was anti-Indian.

Rich and wealthy Indians noticed it and despite the fact that their economic interest coincided with Ralliement Mauricien, they supported the party of Indians. The class factor receded to the background and communalism became more pronounced in politics.

\(^8^4\) Besides Ramgoolam's tactful but persistent pro-deprived stands and speeches in the Legislative Council and in *Advance*, the attempts of Franco-Mauritians to brand him as a communist (L'home de Kremlin)—all helped to emerge him as the leader of parliamentary Labour Party. *Le Cerneau* went on to suggest that ever since India's independence Indian 'expansionist' had considered Mauritius as an "advance base of Pan-Indianism on the flank of Africa". See *Le Cerneau*, 15th April 1951.

\(^8^5\) Ramgoolam was gifted with strategic foresight and ready to compromise and negotiate for "power game". Rozment himself very popular among young Creoles dockers and Indian labourers on the estates was not at ease with legislative procedures. Simmons, n.5, p.113.
The second general elections was held in 1953. The MLP campaigned for universal adult suffrage and cabinet system. The Ralliement Mauricien, however opposed both. Its leader Koenig, said that majority rule would "be the end of western civilization and Christian tolerance in Mauritius". Koenig wanted the election as a referendum on the unrealistic demands of MLP.

In the elections Labour Party got 13 seats and Ralliement Mauricien two gained by Jules Koenig and Md. Razack. For the first time a Muslim was elected. The Bissoondoyal group increased its seats from two to three. There were four independent members.

The legislature was packed again with White conservative nominee though MLP had received clear mandate from the people. The developments in British Guiana and Kenya partially induced such government step. Moreover the

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86 Le Cerneen, 12 April 1953.

87 6 Whites, 2 Britishers, 2 Muslims and 1 Sino-Mauritian were nominated to the Council.

88 The developments and decolonisation of these countries had significant and many times direct bearing on the decolonisation of Mauritius. In 1953 election of Guiana, Cheddi Jagan's Peoples Progressive Party got 18 Legislative Council seats (out of a total of 24) with 51 per cent of vote. The radical stands of Jagan led to the Governor of British Guiana cancel the constitution. It had alarmed the minority groups and civil servants in Mauritius. Both were sugar colonies and had multi-racial population. At both places Indians formed absolute majority. Reform in constitution or free hand to the single dominant party might lead to the similar situation. In Kenya the terror of Mau Mau was reaching its peak. For all these reasons the colonial government was progressing with caution.
Britain encouraged *Ralliement Mauricien* to evolve into a party, because as a loose group it was no match of organised and disciplined Labour Party.

The announcement by the Colonial Office that talks for the constitutional development would take place in summer 1955, forced *Ralliement* to turn into a party. In April 1955 it became *Parti Mauricien* with Koenig as President. The MLP saw it as officially sponsored party. But Ramgoolam was a born compromiser.

In 1955 the Colonial Secretary recommended universal adult suffrage and an electoral system of proportional representation with single transferable votes. The Council by combination of official, nominated and P.M. adopted the recommendation of the Secretary of State by 15 to fourteen votes. The MLP threatened to take the issue to public and decided to boycott the election for the

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89 Lord Minister, then Parliamentary Secretary of State on a visit to Mauritius in 1952 had explained to Koenig the need to convert *Ralliement* into a Party. He had further promised that once it was done *Ralliement* was to carry more weight in London. See Simmons, n.5, p.118.

90 In the recommendation MLP had got universal suffrage, majority rule. But it strongly opposed the proportional electoral system on many counts. Firstly it could weaken the party where each candidate sought first preference for himself and put party secondary. This could return diverse and small parties which could lead to deadlock in council and a weak government. It was complicated and difficult for illiterate voters to comprehend. And finally if it was so good why did not Britain adopt itself? See, *Parliament Debates* on 10 April 1956 and 11 May 1956. For details on proportional representation, see *Constitutional Development in Mauritius. Sessional Paper No.3 of 1956*
executive council. Realising the popular base of the MLP, the administration appointed an electoral commission led by Malcolm Trustrain-Eve to examine the proposal of both PM and the MLP and to suggest an electoral system replacing proportional representation.

The MLP wanted 40 single member constituencies. The PM wanted 11 three-member constituencies. But Razack Mohammed surprised everyone by asking for separate electoral roll and reserved seats. The colonial office accepted the Commission report which favoured the MLP and had consent of the CAM. Accordingly a forty single member constituencies were demarcated with one man one vote provision. A maximum of 6 seats were to be allotted under the 'best looser system'. The Legislative Council was to consist of one speaker as President, 3 ex-officio members, forty elected members and up to a maximum of 12 nominated members. Governor could veto any

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91 The MLP argued that a small constituencies would give minorities to return candidates from small pockets of their concentration - hence larger number. The PM wanted smaller constituency. By this it could restrict the return of Hindu candidates in and around urban areas from where it could win all seats.

92 Razack justified his deposition before the Commission by saying that a 'group of 20', selected by 400 urban and rural Muslims had formed a "Central Committee Action". This Committee wanted Muslims as "a separate important minority quite distinct from Indo-Mauritians". See, Regent of the Mauritians Electoral Boundary Commission, Sessional Paper I of 1958 (Port Louis, 1958).

93 When the colonial government told the leader of CAM, Razack, that in it was not going to encourage communalism or introduce communal roll - he finally yielded to the persuasion of the colonial office. Once two of the three political groups accepted it, the Governor imposed it without voting in Council.
legislation, dissolve the Legislative Council at his discretion and British Minister in charge of colony was authorised to disallow any legislation.

By 1959 many political parties came into existence. The Ralliement Mauricien changed had changed to Parti Mauricien. Muslims formed Comité d’Action Muselman (CAM) in 1958. A party based on rural Hindus Independent Forward Bloc (IFB) was formed by Sukdeo Bissoondoyal in April 1958. It was in direct opposition to the Labour Party - appealing to and basing itself on the same electorate which MLP had. It wanted the revival of Indian culture and values and advocated the interests of lower working class. It was close to low caste estate workers. The MLP had entered into an alliance with the CAM. The latter gave support to the MLP where it did not put up candidates. This proved extremely beneficial for Ramgoolam in the northern constituencies where Muslims voted for Labour Party. The Labour party backed CAM candidates in selected constituencies. The Independent Forward Bloc (IFB) on the other hand entered into informal understanding with Parti Mauricien.

The Labour Party won 23 seats, MCA 5, IFB 6, and PM 3.

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94 In 1953 election the leader of CAM, Mohammed Razack, had joined the group of Ralliement. But he soon discovered that he was being used by the latter. But both Labour and PM were seriously trying for an alliance with CAM. "Like a young woman playing off two suitors against each other, Mohammed made the most of whatever uncertainty he could generate". See Simmons, n.5, p.137.

95 A.R. Mannick, n.34, p.130.
Three independents were also elected. The CAM gained most from the alliances. Gaetan Duval, who later played a significant role in Mauritian politics, lost the election. However in his constituency a re-poll was ordered and he contested this time on the theme of the danger of Hindu hegemony and he won.

There were certain new developments in the 1959 election. For the first time caste became an important factor in Hindu votes. Bissoondoyal exploited the grievances of low caste agricultural labourers against high caste intellectuals led by Ramgoolam. This factor reduced Ramgoolam margin of victory and led to the defeat of the Labour candidate in Grand Baie. Later on the PM made successful attempts to woo low caste and non-Hindi speaking Indians. Secondly this election showed the beginning of party affiliations. The Hindus of Port Louis voted for Muslim candidates of the CAM, so did the Muslims of North for Hindu candidates of the MLP.

In 1961, a constitutional reform conference was held at London. Only established political parties participated in the conference. The Labour Party.

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96 The MLP had fielded 32 candidates, CAM 7, PM 7 and IFB 30. Out of 70 contesting independents sixty two lost their security deposits. The subsequent elections also the days of independent candidates was over. See Reports of the Colony of Mauritius, 1959, p.1.


98 Besides officially invited parties, the MLP, the PM, the CAM and the IFB, there were leaders of many smaller newly formed parties like Tangavel Narianen of Tamil United Party. Jean An Chuen representing the Chinese Community, Raymond Rault, the deposed president of the MLP. The latter was arguing about the communist connection of the MLP. All of these leaders were received by the Secretary of State but was not permitted to seat in the conference.
wanted independence whereas the Parti Mauricien was opposed to it and wanted integration with U.K.\(^99\) To appease Muslims, Koenig asked for separate communal roll. The CAM wanted minority safeguards but did not want to upset Labour by strongly opposing independence. The IFB was more concerned with holding elections soon and safeguarding individual liberty without major constitutional change.\(^100\) The MLP pressed for independence. The British government decided to grant independence. \(^{101}\) It was to be done under two phases and major constitutional changes were to be implemented after 1963 general elections.\(^{102}\)

\(^99\) Koenig said, "Only when various communities can transcend their communal loyalties and feel a higher allegiance to a Mauritian community, can Mauritius be able to face independence with no problem". See, *British Broadcasting Corporation Reports on Mauritius Constitutional Review Conference, 1961*, 29 June 1961.

\(^{100}\) The IFB wanted to hold next general election and was hoping to replace the MLP as majority party because the Labour Party had fared badly in all subsequent by-elections since 1959 general election. Ibid., 27 and 29 June 1961.

\(^{101}\) Ramgoolam was victorious. When he was not sure of his own party strength, election was not preponed as demanded. Many steps were taken for constitutional advancement. Further when Britain recognised only four political parties as main parties his chances of being returned increased. The informal alliance of 1959 between the IFB and the PM seemed to continued at the conference. Both supported separate electoral roll and charged that Britain had pre-decided to keep Labour in power. The CAM approved the proposed changes but complained that demand for separate electoral roll had "fallen on deaf ears". See, *Mauritius Constitutional Review Conference Papers, 1961* Minutes of the 4th Plenary Session (London) 5 July 1961.

\(^{102}\) For details, the see section on constitutional development.
1963 ELECTIONS: Unlike previous years, Ramgoolam faced the problem of 'accommodations' of different sections in ticket distribution. He had to accommodate minority groups like Tamil Chinese and low caste Hindus. Earlier they had not asked for their share in election. To counter charge of the IFB he had to drop high caste deputies to accommodate candidates from low castes. The alliance of the MLP and the CAM faced the IFB in rural areas and the PM in urban areas. However against the agreement of the CAM and the MLP; candidates of both contested in four constituencies. Despite the communal campaign of Duval, Ramgoolam emphasised issues and not communities. The Parti Mauricien openly launched a communal campaign. It called Hindus "Asiatic Invaders", barbarians to be beaten back. Its supporters disturbed election meetings of Labour Party and at places it precipitated riots. They spread terror and violence. The use of violence and the militant opposition of the Creoles coincided with the induction of

103 The government help in increasing wages, need to share economic hold of sugar barons etc. Under strong anti-Hindu campaign of Duval, Hindus were not going to vote for him, though by this he had been able to attract bulk of the Creoles who were till then with the Labour, to his side. Ramgoolam wanted to hold whatever Creole support that was there and not to embarrass Creole leader from his party. Against the MLP was the IFB and a front of the PM, the Tamil United Party and the Muslim United Party. The latter had come up because Mohammed and Anjam Dahal, the two leaders of the CAM were not getting along. Dahal was of the same opinion as the PM that independence was detrimental to Muslim interests. In 1960 he formed a separate Muslim United Party (also called Muslim Democratic League) and entered into an alliance with the PM.
Gaetan Duval in Mauritian politics.\textsuperscript{104} The IFB challenged Labour in the rural areas and left the PM to defeat it in the urban areas. It had nothing new but to charge the Labour with extravagant squandering government funds. It introduced Aneeroodh Jugnauth in this election.

The election was held on 21st October 1963. Compared to 1959 the voters turnover was less.\textsuperscript{105} The Labour Party and CAM together won 23 seats (CAM 4), \textit{Parti Mauricien} 8 seats, IFB 7 seats and two seats went to independents. The MLP and the CAM got around 40 percent of votes, the IFB 16 percent the PM 20 percent and others 20 percent. Ethnically three of the eight \textit{parti Mauricien} members were Whites and the remaining five Coloured. The Labour Party also had five Creoles. In voting, the Muslims sided with \textit{Parti Mauricien}, some Creoles sided with Labour but they formed a small minority of Creole population. Urban Tamils sided with \textit{Parti Mauricien}. In the Legislative Council for the first time, the general population was over represented as compared to its percentage in the total population of island.\textsuperscript{106}

After the election the Legislative Council became

\textsuperscript{104} A. Mulloo, \textit{Our Struggle: 20th Century Mauritius} (New Delhi, Vision Books, 1982), p.103. Though it was not only Duval who used thugs, 'the protection gang' but Mohammed and H. Walter of Labour Party was also using their services, See. Simmons, n.5, p.153

\textsuperscript{105} It was 91.3 percent in 1959 whereas in 1963 it was 84.3 Percent of registered voters.

\textsuperscript{106} It consisted of fourteen members of General population (including 3 from the MLP).
Legislative Assembly. the Parti Mauriciene became an effective opposition in the Assembly. All political parties went to U.K. for negotiation and on 28 Feb 1964 a coalition government was formed.\textsuperscript{107} It included six ministers from Labour, 3 from PM, two from IFB, two from CAM and one was reserved for an independent.

The leadership of Duval had communalised politics. When new Legislative Council passed a resolution of the Labour Party asking for the full self-government, the PM organised violent protest, undressed women in sari, threw stones on passer by and broke the window panes of Assembly building. For the municipal election which was held on December 15, 1963 it again launched a communal campaign and after its victory it organised amass meeting where open communal speeches were made.\textsuperscript{108}

Yet there was no response from Hindu community until the All Mauritius Congress (AMC) was formed in December 1964. It was in response to Creole communalism. Its founders, Devendranath Varma and Premachand Dabee were disgruntled persons.\textsuperscript{109} The AMC wanted 52 per cent jobs reserved for Hindus. Though

\textsuperscript{107}As promised in 1961 Constitutional Conference of 1961, an all party government was to be formed. But Duval’s anti-Hindu utterance made it difficult. John Shaw Rennie who was earlier in Mauritius as Deputy Colonial Secretary between 1951-55 had replaced Governor Deverell in 1961. He failed in evolving a consensus on coalition.

\textsuperscript{108}See, Mulloo, n.104, pp.105-6.

\textsuperscript{109}P. Dabee had been dropped from the Labour list as candidate in 1963 election. Varma was town clerk in Vacoas but he was fired following the PM victory in Vacoas town Council in April 1964. He had been replaced by a Creole.
high castes, both tried to attract low caste Hindus by attacking a high caste party. Their first target was Duval, second Ramgoolam.

With the activity of these two groups social relations were increasingly charged with communal feelings. When the Secretary of State, Anthony Greenwood visited Mauritius in April 1965, Duval gathered 50,000 of his supporters— all wearing blue shirts and waving Union Jack for association with U.K. "It was probably with the Congress sanction that Hindu youths began looting the Chinese shops in late April in retaliation for Chinese supports at Parti Mauricien demonstration."110

Political violence was no more a rarity in politics— be it elections, meetings, processions or demonstrations. When the Labour Party organised a counter demonstration on May 1, someone from a Parti Mauricien bus threw a big stone through window killing a Hindu boy. Rumors spread. Houses of Ramgoolam and another Labour leader Satcam Boolell were stoned. The Police remained ineffective.111 Both Duval and the Congress were losing control over their muscle men. Situation became more tense after 1st May. Fighting broke out at Trois Boutiques.112 It continued for

110 Simmons, n.5, p.161.

111 The composition of police force in 1964 was as follows - Hindus 427, Muslims 6, General Population 754 and Chinese 40.

112 It was found that the Parti Mauricien agents were circulating regularly in the region of Trois Boutiques, the area of highest tension, supposedly to keep Duval informed as what was going on. But this aggravated the fear. Fire crackers were set off to mobilise Hindus. A Franco-Mauritian was dragged out of his van and killed. A police patrol was shot dead. Creoles retaliated and rioting continued. See, Contribuibil Poliicoo Report on the Disturbances at Trois Boutiques (Mauritius Archive).
over 48 hours. Armed Hindus and Creoles clashed, people talked of a civil war. But this did not engulf the whole island and geographically it remained confined. The Governor declared an emergency and British troops were called from Aden to defuse the tension. Labour and PM blamed one another. Others blamed newspapers and the passivity of police.

After a six-day visit to Mauritius, Greenwood invited all political groups to London "to reach an agreement on the status, timing of accession to it, whether such accession should be preceded by consultation with the people and, if so, in what form" Each political group had prepared its memorandum carefully. The Constitutional Conference started on 7 September 1965. There were 28 delegates from Mauritius. Though Colonial office was in no mood for 'association', for bargaining reason Greenwood ruled out that U.K. had an advance and predecided plan for imposition.

In its memorandum the Labour Party stated that "delay (in independence would) only encourage further appeal to communal prejudices". It asked for

113 The MLP blamed Duval as his men were roaming at place and time of high tension, provoking the villagers. Duval blamed Congress for it communal preaching and stirring the Hindus.

114 Advance, 12 April 1965.

115 Greenwood did not consider it proper "that the British Government although it has ultimate constitutional responsibilities, should attempt to lay down in advance constitutional solution for highly developed communities many thousands of miles away". See Mauritius Constitutional Conference Papers 1965. Records of the first held in the Music Room, Lancaster House, 7 September 1965.
20 three-members constituencies returning 60 members based on universal franchise. It also demanded a provision for limited additional representation through the best looser system to ensure adequate representation of minorities without upsetting the party position obtained after election. It was opposed to separate communal rolls. It wanted the same relations between judiciary and executive as in Britain except that it wanted provision for Ombudsman and a strictly enforceable chapter on Fundamental rights.116

The Parti-Mauricien opposed independence. It was was for "association" on the argument that association would ensure a market for sugar at good price. Besides, Britain could guarantee safeguard for minorities. It also suggested that internal security, defense and external affairs could be placed in charge of U.K.; a list exclusively for the Mauritian government and a common list where both had jurisdiction. The Mauritian government was to be elected on a party list system. In London Mauritius was to be represented by one non-voting member in the House of Commons or two in the House of Lords.117 It was strongly opposed to decide the issue of 'final status' by a new General Assembly elected on this


117 Mauritius Constitutional Conference Papers, 1965, Memorandum of the Parti Mauricien.
issue. It wanted a referendum to decide this.\textsuperscript{118}

Referring to geographical spread of Muslims the CAM pointed out that, "it was difficult for Muslims to get by their own votes alone representation proportional to their strength in total electorates". It, therefore, wanted a quota system where Muslims should be given 11 out of 60 Assembly seats.\textsuperscript{119}

The IFB asked for independence but differed from Labour on the electoral system. It asked for seven four-member and six three-member constituencies. It agreed with Labour on 'best looser' corrective system.\textsuperscript{120}

The Chinese representative, Jean Ah-Chuen (independent) said that the Chinese would feel much safer if Britain remained responsible for internal security and external affairs. But it did not take open stand either on independence or association. But its argument for close economic ties with Britain, was more in line with the PM.\textsuperscript{121} To reach a possible agreement the colonial office met privately with each party. It started from reaching

\textsuperscript{118} "The question of Mauritius future status is of such fundamental importance to all our people that it must be resolved by a system of consultation which focuses public attention on this issue alone". Ibid.

\textsuperscript{119} Mauritius Constitution Conference Papers, 1965, Memorandum of the Muslims Committee of Action.

\textsuperscript{120} Mauritius Constitutional Conference Papers, 1965, Proposals of Independence Forward block.

agreement on issues of lesser significance. On electoral system all were non flexible. R. Mohammed conceded that if reserved seats and separate electoral roll was guaranteed, he was ready to support independence. Labour and PM had agreed to combine forty member constituencies into 20 multimember constituencies. Against the rigid stand which all parties were taking, Ramgoolam was ready to extend support to communal rolls provision to buy crucial support of CAM. But Greenwood firmly opposed it on the ground that colonial office was opposed to development of communal politics and that once such a system was introduced it was very difficult to abolish it later. Each community kept on arguing its fear and aspiration in a possible future political system. Ramgoolam though strongly countered the PM arguments, he was unable to

122 "Nevertheless as a move towards reaching agreement the Labour Party was prepared to concede that there should be separate electoral rolls for the Muslims and the Chinese communities only, and then they would make this concession in the context of the independence and preferably for two or three elections". Bissoondoyal, n. 67, p.230.


124 Commenting on the PM proposals it said that giving the power of external affairs and internal security in the hands of Britain meant "pure colonialism". The MLP asserted that "the proposal (of the PM) spell dependence on the United Kingdom and a position of inferiority (for Mauritius)". Further, countering the economic arguments it said that even after Britain entry into common market a special negotiation was required on behalf of Mauritius even if Mauritius remained a colony. It argued that the proposal that "sovereignty of Britain over Mauritius should be entrenched into constitution" was against the principle which United Nations had forwarded for colonial territories. See, Mauritius Constitutional Conference Papers, 1965. Comments by Mauritius Labour Party on the paper by Parti Mauricien on Association.
put a majority front for Independence.
The colonial office was playing it cool. It knew that Ramgoolam not only representing the biggest political party (with 42 per cent votes) but was also in line with the policies of ruling British Labour Party. Ramgoolam wanted independence soon. He was also opposed to referendum on the issue because if in referendum he got 40 per cent votes only as he had in the last election, independence was going to be delayed. The PM was strongly opposed to both independence and general election. The colonial office presented itself in the beginning as if it could play only a mediatory role and was opposed to taking sides or impose its rational decision.

Why did colonial office stay neutral to Ramgoolam when he needed its help most? The reason came to be known not before November 1965. Britain wanted Ramgoolam to sell Diego Garcia for setting up a 'communication' centre, refuelling station and an air strip for the USA. There could not have been a better time to negotiate a deal with ambitious Ramgoolam. The deal was settled. 125

A Parti Mauricien was as much discouraged as the MLP before the deal. The occasional utterances of British officials and British press in favour of independence made them aware of the ultimate step the

125 At the end of Constitutional Conference Ramgoolam agreed to sale Diego Garcia to U.K. for 3 million pounds. The bill was to be paid by U.S.A. with an understanding that a part of the amount was to be used for 1,200 inhabitants known as Illois. For the agreement see, Financial Times (London), 11 November 1965.
colonial office might take. They boycotted the final session and returned.

In the concluding session Greenwood stated "It was right that Mauritius should be independent and take her place among the sovereign nation of the world". On dispute over referendum he said that referendum would "prolong the current uncertainly and political controversy in a way which would only harden and deepen communal divisions and rivalries". On electoral system a commission was appointed to make recommendations within the terms of reference. The outline was a detail of the MLP proposal on the issue with only minor omission and commissions. The constitution of Mauritius, which U.K. was to give to Mauritius as a gift along with independence, proposed many provisions for safeguarding individual liberty, fundamental rights, office of Ombudsman, Civil Service Commissions, etc. Amendment to these

126 The Guardian (London) wrote, "The arguments against independence of the PM, logical and impressive though they may be, are the arguments of a minority against the fact of politics". Quoted in Mulloo, n. 104, p.109.


128 Ibid., p.21.

129 The guideline besides other provisions suggested multimembers constituencies, a common electoral roll, provisions for discouraging small parties, reliable constituencies for minorities, representation from the island of Rodrigue etc. Based on the commission report a general election was to be held and Mauritius was to be declared independence if the new Assembly could pass a resolution to this effect by a simple majority. See, Ibid. p. 21.
provisions required a two-third majority in the Assembly. This Conference was of lasting significance. It was the last conference where all ethnic groups and the main political parties expressed their views on independence. Mauritius. For minorities the constitution was to act as protector from "peril of Hindu majority". With no colonial authority to intervene they called for such constitutional protection. Secondly the final shape of political system ensured the return of Ramgoolam to power at the time of independence. The British government ensured this to obtain its own part of bargain. But in longer time it implied much more. As Ramgoolam's support base rested on Hindu majority, the proposed electoral system also ensured the control of Hindus in post independent politics.\textsuperscript{130}

Back from the Conference, the MLP was confident about its future. \textsuperscript{131} Parti Mauricien was disgruntled and felt betrayed.\textsuperscript{132} Koenig was depressed. Duval, young

\textsuperscript{130} Had Britain not been extra favourable to Ramgoolam, there were compelling internal pretext to decolonise Mauritius on the British Giana model. In Giana the same percentage of East Indian community, as Hindus in Mauritius, was repeatedly returning Cheddi Jagan to power. But as he incurred the displeasure of the Britain, he as well as his support base- the East Indian community- was pushed out of power for ever by amending the constitution and electoral system.

\textsuperscript{131} Banwell Electoral Commission which had come to decide electoral and boundary provision gave what Ramgoolam had proposed in London but a simple modification in 'best looser' system by the Commission had enraged the MLP. Its non compromising attitude and subsequent compliance of Britain - all was on strength of that tacit understanding.

\textsuperscript{132} Greenwood arguments, at least on issue of referendum was weak and no one had been able to nullify the case of referendum convincingly.
and energetic, planned to make a last ditch attempt to win the election.

The secret agreement between MLP and the colonial office on Diego Garcia leaked out in November 1965. This came handy to the PM. On 12 November its ministers (3 in all) resigned on this issue from the coalition government. PM launched its campaign to mobilise people against independence. But it also knew that as a communal party representing less than 30 per cent of population, it could not gain majority on its own. Duval organised a vast rally on December 5, 1965. Franco-Mauritians who had been apathetic to political meetings turned out in large numbers wearing blue shirt (colour of the PM). The "Anglo-Saxon robbers" were denounced for their collusion and snatching Diego Garcia at throw-away price.

What looked paradoxical was the anti-British diatribe and yet a forceful demand for association with Britain. But more perplexing to the general public was the complete U-turn of Duval. From the slogan of 'Hindu Peril', he opened his arms to Hindus. The new slogan was 'Hindu mon frere' (Hindus, my brother). Any one in his party found to be communal in behaviour was to be punished. Communalism, for him, was out. He also approached Tamils, low caste Hindus, Muslims and any Indian group or individual for association or collaboration.

Duval's about turn was not futile. Divisions within the Hindu community got an outlet. Some low caste

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133 It was leaked in Financial Times (London), 11 November 1965.
134 Le Mauricien, 6 December 1965.
Hindus formed Peoples Socialist Party and allied
themselves with the PMSD. A number of prominent Muslims
from the CAM resigned, accusing R. Mohammed of siding with
Hindus and sided with the PMSD. The IFB and the All Hindu
Congress entered into an understanding to fight the next
general election together.

Political-ethnic alignments were changing dramatically and
to the detriment of the MLP. Duval seemed to have
outmaneuvered Ramgoolam who made an alliance with IFB,
the Hindu Congress and the CAM. He had to make major
concessions in allotment of seats to win the elections.135

Before the election process began, the Banwell Commission
came and suggested an electoral system very much on line
of demands made by Ramgoolam in Constitutional Conference
of 1965.136 In addition to the 'best looser' system it
provided a 'corrective' system for underrepresented
parties also. This was strongly opposed by the Labour
alliance and they took the issue to the public.137

135 Mulloo, Our Struggle, n.104, p.114.
136 The details are given in earlier section on 'constitutional
development.'
137 Confident of its strength at home and in Britain, the MLP was not
ready for any compromise. In Assembly Ramgoolam rejected it and
called it a "diabolical system... a Machiavellian in ovation ... a
great political crime and political rape of democracy". A non-
compromising Ramgoolam forced John Stonehouse, Assistant
Parliamentary Secretary in Britain to come and replace it by '8
best looser' system. It was corrective of under representation of
community alone without disturbing the party position from general
election. See, Report of Banwell Commission on the Electoral System
with Dispatches from Secretary of State, Sessional Paper no.5 of
1965. Also Sessional Paper no.8 of 1966, n.16.
The next general election under the new electoral system, was held in August 1967.\textsuperscript{139} It was held in the presence of a group of Commonwealth observers. There was massive turnout. By noon 65 per cent votes were cast. The final result was 39 to 23 in favour of the MLP-IFB-CAM alliance grouped under the name Independence Party. The PM which had never got more than more than 19 per cent of popular votes got 43.1 per cent of votes. The vote for PMSD was a vote against independence, a unique record in the third world. And this vote was not only of general population which formed less than 30 per cent of population. It also included vote of Muslims, Chinese and some Hindus. The island was tense. How would the PMSD react? Would it accept the electoral verdict or resort to extralegal means? Ramgoolam however, went ahead with his move for independence. On 22nd August 1967 Legislative Assembly passed a motion asking for independence. The PMSD staged a walk out shortly before the vote and it was passed unanimously. All blocs to independence were cleared. Ramgoolam was installed for 5 years in power.

The issue of independence and process of 1967 election had generated enough heat and tension. Besides unemployment and rising prices had added to the frustration of the public. All these resulted into

\textsuperscript{138} This electoral system without any change became a permanent feature of Mauritian constitution. All subsequent general elections were held under the same electoral system.

\textsuperscript{139} The general election of 1967 and the repercussion of Banwell Commission report on this all had been dealt in detail along with other subsequent general elections in Chapter VI.
riots - both secular and communal. The first was when in October 67 ten-thousand dismissed relief workers,\textsuperscript{140} surrounded the Government House. Finally, police restored order. This riot fuelled the rumour that the PMSD was going to disrupt the independence day celebration. Rioting erupted in Port Louis where politicians had their network with gangs controlling illegal drugs and prostitution. Creoles and Muslims, who had sided in general elections killed each other. It was the most serious riot since Mauritius was occupied by the French. More than 25 were dead, over hundred wounded and thousands fled their home. Violence continued for 10 days. John Rennie, the Governor declared a state of emergency on 22nd January 1968 and British troops were called from Singapore.\textsuperscript{141} Refugee centres were opened for Creoles and Muslims. Behind the riot scene was Razack Mohammed, leader of the CAM angered by his defeat and success of the PMSD in attracting Muslim votes. He wanted to restore himself as leader of the Muslim community. "If the Muslims had reason to fear the Creoles, they would leave the Parti Mauricien and Duval and rally behind Mohammed. this indeed is what happened. Muslim Parti Mauricien supporters went into hiding, and by the end of the riots Ramgoolam confidently

\begin{footnotes}
\item[140] The total number of relief workers in 1967 was 32,000 and it was costing 35 million rupees per year on them. It was cut to 11,768 by March 1968. See Biannual digest of Statistics, June 1968, p.44.
\item[141] The Times (London), 24 January 1968.
\end{footnotes}
claimed that Mohammed was again the leader of the Muslims". The PMSD on the other hand had interest in proving that the presence of British might was indispensable.

142 Simmons, n.5, p.188.