



**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES



**60<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**  
CELEBRATION

**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

# THE CCLCLCS *Story*

**A 60-YEAR JOURNEY FROM THE CIPRIANI  
LABOUR COLLEGE TO THE CIPRIANI COLLEGE OF  
LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES**

# GENESIS OF THE MOVEMENT

## The Seed in the Ground

Long before the opening of the labour college by then Prime Minister Dr. Eric Eustace Williams on October 19th, 1966, there was something of a persistent buzz in the atmosphere related to workers in Trinidad and Tobago. That buzz signalled the germination of an idea whose relevance had been consolidating over years. That buzz could not have imagined then, the rumble that was to grow, reflecting the antecedent conditions of the 1920s that provided the groundwork for sixty

years of growth, the starting point, if you will, of a six-decade historical arc. That arc was the overall trajectory, the shape of events over time, framing the history of what is today, the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies, CCLCS.

PRELUDE



# Not Accident –DETERMINATION Not Drift–INTENTION

The history of CCLCS is, at its core, a story of determination and intention. It is a story inextricably interwoven in the fabric of the history of Trinidad and Tobago. The lobbying by the people for political independence in the 1920s and 1930s occurred alongside the fight for workers' rights during that time. During that period of Trinidad and Tobago's history marking the road to nationhood, labour and political movements dominated. Even as Trinidad and Tobago were united as a British Crown Colony in 1898, life was not always harmonious; poor economic, social, and political conditions fostered a sense of anti-colonial solidarity. These sentiments were said to have been fuelled after World War 1. Returning local soldiers who had served in the British West Indian Regiment were responsible for this fuelling. But one particular returning soldier spoke out strongly and publicly. That soldier was Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani. As we lead up to the October Diamond Jubilee of CCLCS, to omit the labour history of the 1920s and 1930s would be a great dishonour. Were that period to be ignored, it would be a grave disservice to the labour that built the College.

No single day of celebration could carry the weight of that era. In this regard, the person and legacy of Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani must constitute an essential component of this 60-year celebration. Having been instrumental in sowing the seeds of the labour movement, Captain Cipriani became the leader of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, TWA, the leading workers' organisation at that time; and in 1919, he led the nation's first major industrial strike: the Watermen's Strike. This industrial action, referred to as the 1919 Dockers' Strike or General Strike in Trinidad and Tobago, was initiated due to stagnant wages, soaring post-World War 1 cost of living, and deep-seated grievances among returning ex-servicemen regarding racial discrimination and poor treatment. It is worth noting here that Captain Cipriani is acknowledged as the founder of the first political party in Trinidad and Tobago, the Trinidad Labour Party, TLP.

Other key figures to emerge in the labour movement, who not only made their voices heard but helped shape the CCLCS as it is today, include Uriah "Buzz" Butler, chief lieutenant under Captain Cipriani and a member of the La Brea branch of the TLP; Vincentian, Elma Francois, described as an "Africentric Socialist political activist", known for her pro-trade union, anti-war and anti-colonial work, and for subsequently being declared a national heroine in Trinidad and Tobago, October 14th 1987; Cyril Lionel Robert James, CLR James, known as the leading voice of Pan-Africanism, and for being a teacher at the Queen's Royal College, QRC, of the young Eric Williams who subsequently became the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Despite no direct affiliation with the founding of the CCLCS, the College pays homage to the Pan-Africanist by naming its auditorium for him. The youngest of the five key figures was Adrian Cola Rienzi (formerly Krishna Deonarine). This name change was the result of a decision he took so as "to avoid problems that his Indian name might cause" upon his going to England to study. The choice of name came from a fourteenth century Italian activist about whom he was reading: Cola di Rienzo; and "Adrian", from Adrian Clarke, an English magistrate who mentored him. Notably, with the exception of the lone female, all four men were born in the month of January.

*Parenthetically, the name January originates from the Latin, Ianuarius or Jānuārius, and named for the Roman god of transitions, Janus. The myth that*



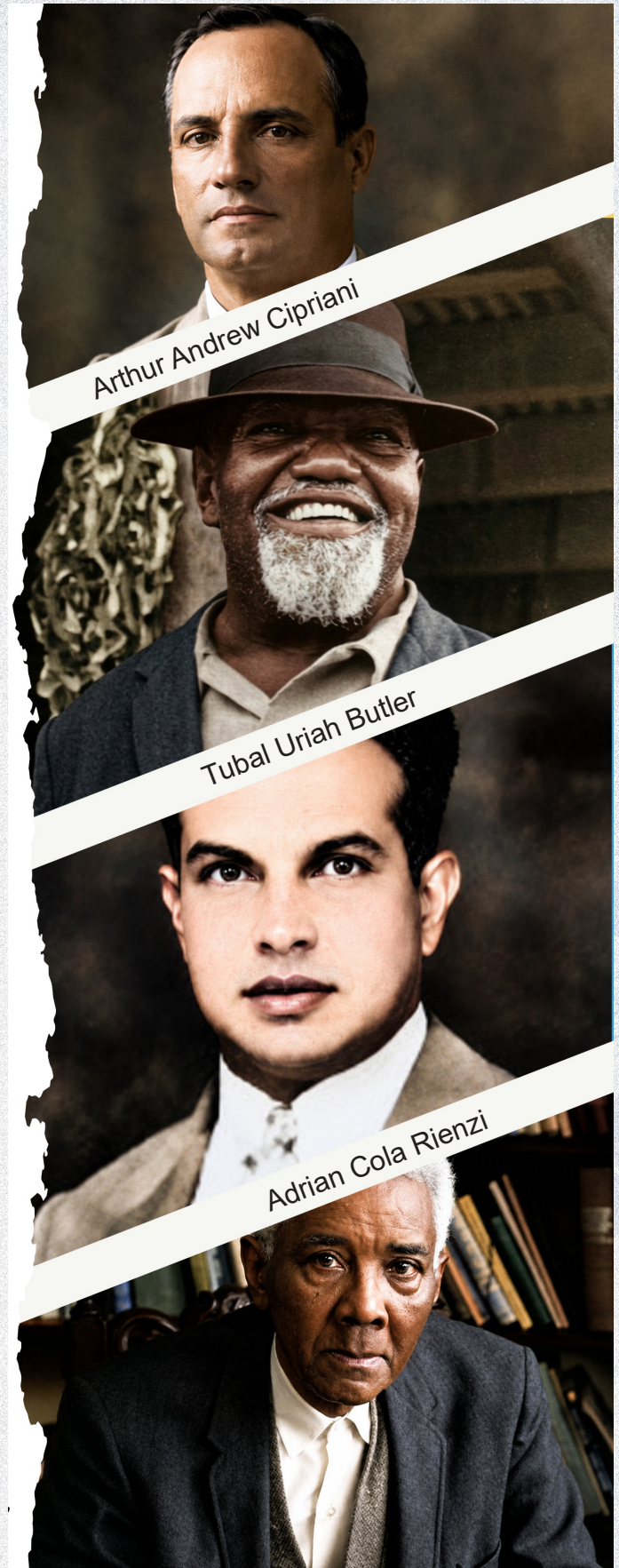
*exists is that Janus was the Roman god of doorways, beginnings, and transitions. He is usually shown with two faces, one looking to the past, and one looking to the future. True to its origin, January is regarded as a month of reflection, renewal, planning, and setting intentions.*

*I thought this piece of mythology surrounding Janus significant enough to include in this account chronicling the beginnings of the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies.*

These activists marched through doorways of change, starting a movement built on transitions that led to the College that now proudly sits in Valsayn, Trinidad. This is the history in brief, the beginning of the buzz that signalled the germination of a seed more than six decades ago. That seed, very much like the seed that birthed the spreading samaan trees now framing the College's façade, has matured. From humble local beginnings, the CCLCS has grown into an institution with regional and international reach. And the College does not bury its past; it reads it so as to better inform its future direction.



Elma Francois



Cyril Lionel Robert James

## The Early to Mid-'60s

History shifted decisively in 1963 regarding the Trade Union Movement in Trinidad and Tobago. Early in that year, the Prime Minister's conference with the Trade Union Movement—no doubt a consequence of the buzz that had by now swelled into a full-blown movement—generated further discussion between the Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, and representatives of the Trade Union Movement. Talks focussed on the idea of a Trade Union Center. The final outcome was the adoption of a resolution by one of the committees to establish a Labour College. And so it was that the Cipriani Labour College came into being, offering trade union training and worker education, coupled with seminars, courses and other activities in the field of Industrial Relations, and the undertaking of research into problems of Labour.

Following the 1963 conference, the government of Trinidad and Tobago and the National Labour Congress formally sought the assistance of the International Labour Organization, ILO to attend to a critical urgency regarding shortage of specialized labour education. By mid-1966, a direct request for technical expertise to build Trinidad and Tobago's first institution founded for labour education was made to the ILO by the government of Trinidad and Tobago and the National Labour Congress. This was going to be, without question, the first place in the region where labour met learning.

The government's commitment to this labour initiative continued without wavering. In August 1966, it appointed a Board of Governors with representatives of the Trade Union Movement, the University of the West Indies, the Government and the Public, charging that Board with the responsibility for the management and development of the College. The Cipriani Labour College Act, no 4 of 1972 came into being, providing the legal framework for the functioning of the College.

By mid-October 1966, the alliance between the ILO and the CCLCS had coalesced into a partnership of purpose. There was first the tripartite demand—the conference with the Prime Minister and trade union leaders; the government of Trinidad and Tobago; and the National Labour Congress. Then

there was curriculum development, with the ILO playing a central role in the design of an academic framework, and developing a foundational two-year Diploma in Labour Studies that focussed on industrial relations, collective bargaining, and union organization.

There was, also, leadership provision from the ILO that ensured structural alignment with international labour standards. Additionally, the ILO also furnished the College with its first Director to oversee its beginnings. Above all else, this alliance between the ILO and the CCLCS converged through a shared philosophy of the college's mission to empower working people and promote social justice since it directly echoed the core philosophy and decent work mandate of the ILO.

## Opening Day: From the Cordon to the Classroom

The global labour landscape in 1966 was described as being at its peak of influence. Headlines around the world covered matters concerning labour movements. October 1966, in particular, was a flurry of activity for labour movements across continents: Fire-fighter Strikes were mediated in the United States through high-level negotiations involving the Atlanta Aldermanic Board of Firemen and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments for what has been described as a landmark case involving the Transportation-Communication Employees Union v. Union Pacific Railroad Co.; in Great Britain, automotive production stalled at a major British car plant. This action triggered a localized labour walkout, forcing workers to yield control of the negotiation to national union executives. And in India, the first industry-level bipartite settlement between the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) and bank employee unions was officially signed.

In Trinidad and Tobago, however, news reporting on labour developments was overwhelmingly positive: The stage was set for the historic opening of the Cipriani Labour College. The common thread

running through all these events was that each occurred on the same day in 1966: October 19th. Trinidad and Tobago stood shoulder to shoulder with notable entities worldwide in the field of labour. Serendipity, perhaps—yet this chance alignment spoke volumes at home and abroad.

At the College's opening, the Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, in his inaugural address exhorted the unions to honour this milestone. In his words: "The opening of this college provides the opportunity for unions to make more effective use of their resources as they would be able to underwrite scholarship schemes and to give other assistance to their members to enable them to benefit from the training which the college will offer."

Emphasis must be placed on this aspect of the Prime Minister's speech because it spotlights the *raison d'être* of the College's existence and the role unions were expected to play. Additionally, and possibly more importantly, the Prime Minister was pleased to note that the programme of studies articulated, took into account organizational matters in addition to focussing attention on social sciences and general matters about which the citizenry ought to be informed.

Powerful words highlighting the College's role in keeping citizens informed. Dr. Williams felt that this was necessary if workers were to "appreciate fully the responsibilities of citizenship and nationhood."

The Prime Minister also addressed employers, calling on them to assist by way of donating books towards the establishing of a library, and by contributing to the scholarship fund, which had already been launched by the chairman of the Board of Governors. Moreover, Dr. Williams was of the opinion that releasing students for day classes warranted attention.

Dr. Williams' inaugural speech is highlighted, in part verbatim, because it embodies the fundamental purpose of the College. As we begin the countdown to the Jubilee celebration of the CCLCS, reminders of the College's core mission and founding purpose must be kept before us always.

In offering thanks to the Prime Minister, then president of the Trinidad and Tobago Labour Congress, Mr. W. W. Sutton, held that unionists ought not to continue with outdated concepts that spoke to wages and working conditions, and chiefly, "waging continuous and sometimes unnecessary war against the employer class": Words worthy of recall.

## The Journey (Now) Start

Thus it began: October 19th, 1966. With the foundation laid, the Cipriani Labour College opened its doors on rented premises at Long Circular Road, Port of Spain. Indeed, it was the culmination of years of effort dating back to 1957. This was no labour lost; the Movement had triumphed up to this point. And so the sixty-year story unfolds.





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