This book examines how "historically constructed social divisions have militated against the successful development of a united working class and/or socialist party" (p. 1) in Trinidad and Tobago between 1937 and the early 1990s. The politics of labor in Trinidad and Tobago is unusual because the major trade unions played a political role but failed to create a political party, while the chief political party, the People's National Movement (PNM), is not based on a trade union.

Kiely begins by critically evaluating several sociological approaches to the study of labor and development in the Caribbean, including modernization theory, the theory of the plantation economy, dependency theory, world systems theory, and M.G. Smith's plural society theory, which argues that conflict between culturally defined segments is central to Caribbean societies. He concludes that "class is a central category for any analysis of labour and development, but it should not necessarily be given a primacy that would lead to a neglect of ethnicity and gender" (p. 27). "Social classes" and "ethnic groups," like genders, are interrelated codes of social difference that create, reflect, and contest changing social inequalities and, in so doing, are closely linked to developments in the organization of labor. In the culturally pluralistic society of Trinidad and Tobago the changing relations of capital and labor in the last two centuries are intimately linked to the social construction of "race" and gender. Kiely advocates a theory of uneven development, taking account of the relationship between the advanced centers of capitalism and the peripheries, and argues that labor, analyzed in terms of class, "race," and gender, is "the key factor" (p. 41) in explaining development. The changing
politics of labor, therefore, constitute the core of the different stages of social development, from resistance to slavery and indenture, to trade unionism and party politics.

Kiely summarizes the history of labor in Trinidad, from the comparatively late establishment of plantations based upon slavery, through the system of indentured labor and the development of a peasantry following emancipation in 1838, to the establishment of the oil industry and the emergence of trade unionism in the early twentieth century. The formation of social classes, associated initially with the production of sugar and cocoa but later in urban occupations and the oil industry, was inseparable from a process of racialization in which "Africans," "East Indians," and "whites" were differentiated as social groups. Kiely correctly insists that "the impact of racism on dividing the labour force should not be underestimated ... but at the same time the historical roots of racism must be explained, rather than described (as is the case in the plural society model), in terms of a timeless cultural group conflict" (p. 53). Working-class culture and resistance was developing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in a period when "race relations" in colonial Trinidad were extremely complex.

In 1937 working people of all kinds - African and East Indian, nativeborn and immigrant, women and men, rural and urban, sugar workers and oilfield workers - exploded in rebellion. Their new organizations, led by such people as Tubal Uriah Butler, Elma Francois, and Adrian Cola Rienzi, established the modern political agenda. However, the labor movement was so fragmented in 1946, when the first elections based on universal suffrage were held, that the way was left open for the rise of middle-class politicians, first Albert Gomes and then Eric Williams. The international context of the Cold War and the dominant development strategy of "industrialization by invitation" were more important than Kiely allows because they left no room for the emergence of a socialist labor movement. Trade unions had to be "responsible," which meant limited to moderate and apolitical demands within the existing capitalist system so as not to frighten away potential investors. Kiely could have made this clearer had he paid more attention to what was happening elsewhere in the early 1950s: the purge of the left-wing of Jamaica's People's National Party, the destruction of the Caribbean Labour Congress, and the counter-revolution against the People's Progressive Party government in British Guiana (Bolland 1997).

By the 1956 elections, labor issues were suppressed and "race" became increasingly politicized between Williams's PNM and Bhadase Maraj's People's Democratic Party (PDP). The triumphant Williams became particularly concerned in the 1960s that a "climate of labour..."
unrest was discouraging foreign investment" (p. 98), so he pushed through the Industrial Stabilization Act (ISA) in 1965 in order to depoliticize labor and protect his development strategy. However, as Kiely points out, the reliance upon capitalist industrialization increased unemployment and the "informal sector," resulting in the wave of opposition that included the "Black Power Revolt" of 1970 and formation of the United Labour Front (ULF), an alliance of progressive trade unions that won ten seats in the 1976 general election. The attempt to create a socialist labor party failed, however, when the ULF split in 1977, leaving the working class "ill-prepared for the recession in the 1980s" (p. 151); the country suffered negative growth rates every year from 1982 to 1989 and unemployment doubled. A coalition National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) government from 1986 to 1988 was committed to the private sector, and public sector unions, in particular, lost thousands of members.

Finally, Kiely analyzes the origins of a new movement toward labor unity in 1989, leading to a new national Trade Union Council in 1991. However, racial politics and labor politics remain intertwined and at odds: on the one hand, Basdeo Panday's United National Congress (UNC) is still a largely East Indian party and the PNM remains a largely African party, while, on the other hand, the Movement for Social Transformation (MOTION) tends to dismiss racism as an epiphenomenon of capitalism. While government economic policies, following global trends, widen economic and social inequalities, the attempt of trade unions to join other organizations, including feminist groups and religious and cultural organizations, in a new "social movement unionism" has not, to date, overcome the racialized politics that still characterizes the major parties. Kiely concludes, soberly, that "uneven development and racialization have meant that the working class has rarely acted as a homogenous force" (p. 172). This has transpired not only because political leaders have racialized party politics but also because labor leaders have not taken "full account of the diversity of experiences of working class people" (p. 173). Kiely's thoughtful study helps us understand the complex dynamics of the politics of labor - and the racialization of politics - in relation to changing patterns of economic development.

REFERENCE