

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FJM-24: Trinidad
Black Power and National Reconstruction

Port of Spain, Trinidad
May 7, 1970

Mr. Richard Nolte,
Executive Director,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
535 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10017,
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

For the next year, the Trinidadian's sense of history will go no further back than the events of the past ten weeks. What occurred from the afternoon of February 26 to May 4 will become the nation's reference point when any discussion of political or economic change arises. Certainly, any person or group seeking to retain or acquire political power will have to take into consideration the successes or failures of the February Revolution. The critical question, of course, is who has gained and who has lost this political round? And who will eventually emerge the winner?



For Dr. Williams, the retention of control of the Government will depend essentially on his ability to "white-wash" the obvious inadequacies of his administration during the recent crisis; on ensuring himself of the reliability of the police and mobilising them against his most serious opposition; and in making an effort to undercut his opposition's support by appearing to adopt their popular policies. The Opposition on the other hand, whether in Parliament (the Democratic Labour Party), in the streets, on campus or in the labour movement will of course exploit Williams' weaknesses and his dependency on the use of force.

Yet, the Opposition itself is not unified. And each group, in attempting to fill the political vacuum now existing in Trinidad, will employ different strategies for change. In some instances, these strategies will come into conflict and it will be to Williams' advantage to exploit them. How these groups differ in terms of policy and tactic will be examined below. What the man in dark glasses now has in mind is the first question.

What Dr. Williams intends to do and the methods he means to employ became quite explicit during the course of a May 4, televised address to the people of Trinidad. Following the restoration of order in the Regiment, the Prime Minister finally gave the nation his account of events of the past ten weeks and then outlined his proposals for "national reconstruction". The most important excerpts of the address follow:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I am glad to have this opportunity of speaking to you tonight. If I have not spoken before, it is either because the picture was not as clear as it is today or because we did not want to show our hand or because I did not want to come before you to utter vague platitudes.

The facts as they have been pieced together are broadly as follows. For some years now we have been aware of dissident elements in the society, especially among a minority of trade unions, seeking to displace the Government.

At first they tried to do so by the electoral process, no one can have any quarrel with that. When that failed, however, they turned increasingly to unconstitutional means and armed revolution.

This embraced certain sections of the Black Power movement copied from the United States of America, a dissident group at the University comprising both students and lecturers, elements in two particular trade unions, some politicians, and other sections of which I have been advised specific mention should not be made so that the fair trial guaranteed under our Constitution would not be jeopardised.

The first date selected for the contemplated overthrow of the Government was foiled by developments which I do not wish to discuss tonight. The alternative date selected was ruled out by the declaration of the State of Emergency.

Both at home and abroad the question has been raised as to why the Government waited so long to act. There was one principal consideration.

The Black Power movement enlisted the sympathy of a number of people, especially young people, who bitterly resented discrimination against Black people at home and abroad.

This is a legitimate grievance, and I would have been no party to any attempt to repress this. I knew that much more was involved. But these young idealists had to see for themselves the ulterior motives of those who were seeking to use slogans of Black dignity and Black economic power as the basis of enlisting mass support. They had to see for themselves how the Black Power slogan degenerated into race hatred and even to attacks on Black business in Tobago and Point Fortin.

Moreover, if I had told the general population of the larger plan I have indicated to you tonight, 75 per cent of you would have been sceptical and would not have believed it. You had to be made to put your finger in the wound in order to believe.

It was only when the total breakdown of the trade union movement was imminent that I decided to act.

Difficulties arose at Teteron when the State of Emergency was proclaimed.

The take-over of the Teteron Barracks by certain persons meant the take-over of the arsenal. The forces on which the Government could depend were at a disadvantage in respect of their weapons.

The Government had first to seek to buy arms from outside as quickly as possible. We sought help from many countries. We first thought of African countries and contemplated approaches to three of them but had to abandon this plan because of the distance involved and the urgency of the matter.

We then approached Guyana and Jamaica, as well as other countries. Eventually we succeeded in purchasing, I repeat purchasing, some weapons from the United States of America and from Venezuela.

In the meantime the personnel at Teteron Barracks had requested an opportunity to speak to the Government, and I sent first the Attorney General and then the former Commander of the Defence Force, Lt. Colonel Serrette.

It was requested that a military enquiry be instituted into the events on and before April 21. As you know a Military Committee under the Chairmanship of Major Roderick Marciano was appointed to report within 72 hours, whilst Colonel Serrette was recalled and appointed Commander of the Force.

The Military Committee has reported, but the Attorney General has advised me not to make the report public, however disappointed the citizens might be, because it might prejudice the fair trial which the Constitution guarantees to those who are involved.

There remains now the question of what we are to do in the future in respect of the urgent task of national reconstruction. In my previous broadcast on March 23, I dealt with immediate measures. I now deal with more fundamental issues. Several questions immediately arise.

The first is that we must proceed urgently to reconsider the role and function of the Defence Force. The establishment of the Defence Force was one of the requirements for independence laid down by the British Government. We now have ourselves to re-examine this question.

The second question concerns the Black Power movement in its constructive aspect. Let me make no bones about it. I identify myself fully with its constructive aspect. I shall give you some examples. I did all I could to encourage the dock workers to take shares in the Port Landing Company.

I have assured the Seamen and Waterfront Workers' Union of the fullest support from the Ministry of Finance in respect of implementing the Union's decision to set up a Workers' Bank.

I rejoiced when I learned that a trade union had been awarded the contract to operate a concession at Piarco Airport.

I am now working on positive proposals from two Diego Martin steelbands to set up an agricultural co-operative. I have actively encouraged the steelband movement to form a co-operative to establish and run a factory for the manufacture of steelbands.

This emphasis on Black economic power will be intensified, especially in relation to the tourist industry in Tobago.

I wish you all to understand that the claims of Black people to social justice, economic dignity and a fuller life will be unequivocally supported and positively encouraged by my Government.

The third immediate question is the reconsideration of the Development Programme for 1970 and 1971 in the light of what has happened, so as to accelerate the creation of job opportunities and encourage the greater involvement of the people in economic development.

As you can well appreciate, this is not a question on which we can act on impulse or make ad hoc decisions. For the past few days an intensive and concentrated study of this subject has been taking place and draft proposals are already in my possession. I hope in a short while to give you some idea of the new proposals.

The fourth immediate question is the reorganisation of the governmental machine. I am at work now on a drastic reconstruction of the Government and its administrative arm, and I hope shortly to be able to tell you in more detail what my decisions are.

But one point I shall raise here tonight for you to think about. We can only work within the resources available under the Constitution.

Even larger countries with more talent to draw on find it difficult to secure sufficient people from among representatives in Parliament to run the Ministries of Government.

Sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, we shall have to discuss the question of selecting the Cabinet from all the available talent and going outside of Parliament for this purpose.

One final word. The impression is being given in certain quarters that the emergency is over. I advise you emphatically that it is not. No democratically elected government can, after the challenge of armed revolution that we have passed through, evade its responsibility for seeking to protect the citizens of the country against a recurrence of this threat. We need to take positive steps to ensure that demonstrations in future do not get out of hand. We need to move positively to protect the legitimate rights of constitutionally recognised trade unions. And we need to ensure that the fair trials that are about to take place are not impeded by mass demonstrations seeking to intimidate the Courts of Law.

Listening to the speech, it quickly becomes apparent that the Prime Minister is out to do some hasty patch-work. For example, it may have been an oversight, but Dr. Williams' analysis of the February Revolution manages to avoid any mention of the underlying political or economic causes of the crisis. Only in one instance does he note "a legitimate grievance": racial discrimination at home and abroad. Moreover, he suggests that all dissident groups had turned to "unconstitutional means...to displace the Government". This is dishonest. Then the Doctor conveniently avoids any mention of his request for five American battleships and an aircraft carrier. The fact is too embarrassing politically. Finally, with regard to the negotiations between Government and the rebel soldiers, there is little official knowledge to go on but the suggestion that all the dissidents wanted was a "court of inquiry into events prior to April 21" implies that the rebellion was no more than a trade union affair, that Government was not really at fault and that it was simply an Army problem.

More important than these slight deceptions, however, are Dr. Williams' projections for the future. He proposes a four point programme of "National Reconstruction". First, the Prime Minister deals with the "role and function of the Defence Force". It is clear from recent events that Government cannot "rely" on the Army. As a result, it must be assumed that a "re-examination" of the need for a Defence Force means that Williams intends to really disband the Regiment as soon as possible. Police will therefore be strengthened and their powers expanded.

There is another reason for this move by Williams. The only man to emerge a hero during the recent crisis was Lt. Colonel Joffre Serrette, now Commander of the Defence Force. Serrette is an extremely popular man in the Army and with the population as a whole. Dr. Williams has no intention of sharing power with any other personality -- one of the reasons why he has had such great difficulty attracting and keeping talented associates.

The second point the Doctor makes is his willingness to associate himself with the "constructive aspects" of the Black Power movement. In this regard, he offers the nation a few examples: a co-operative grocery store, shares in the port-landing, a steel-band co-operative and a trade union concession at the airport. As examples of economic "black power", these suggestions from the Prime Minister are, in the local slang, pure "pappy-show" (pure posturing). Such fraudulent devices disguise the fact that real economic power would still remain in the hands of the local and foreign whites and that such programmes would never alter existing inequalities.

The third consideration taken up by Dr. Williams is the Development Programme which he himself has legislated for 1970/71. He now suggests that it needs changes "in the light of recent events" and hopes that once altered "the creation of job opportunities" will be accelerated.

However, the Prime Minister offers no concrete proposals in this regard and so it is difficult to know just what he intends to do. There is one thing to consider nevertheless. If, after 14 years of undisputed power, the Government is about to alter its economic programmes, one wonders why such action wasn't taken long ago. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that Dr. Williams can command the intellectual or moral resources necessary to do what is really necessary -- a complete about-face in terms of development policy.

The fourth point made by Williams deals with the problem of his listless administration, the ineptness of his Ministers. For some time it has been recognized that the British-styled cabinet is inadequate in these smaller islands. The second-rate talents in the PNM have not helped matters. Consequently, Williams' Cabinet has only one talented individual remaining after Robinson's departure (FJM-23) and as a result of the crisis, Williams is certain to ask for the resignation of several Cabinet Ministers. Among these will certainly be the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Gerard Montano.

In sum, the address does not really offer any new approaches or new policies. It does, however, suggest that Dr. Williams intends to rely more than ever before on the police powers of the State. The reasons are clear. Government cannot cope with the domestic divisions developing in the country and therefore must resort to the use of police powers to enforce its control. The hint that any radical opposition is out to undermine the constitution is implicit in this position.

As a consequence of the growing powers of the police and other law enforcement groups, the most powerful man the Government apart from the Prime Minister will be the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Karl Hudson-Phillips. Hudson-Phillips will be in charge of prosecuting the black power leadership and those 27 military who are now being held by the police. He will also be responsible for providing Williams with the necessary legal powers Government will require in order to curtail the radicalisation of the population.

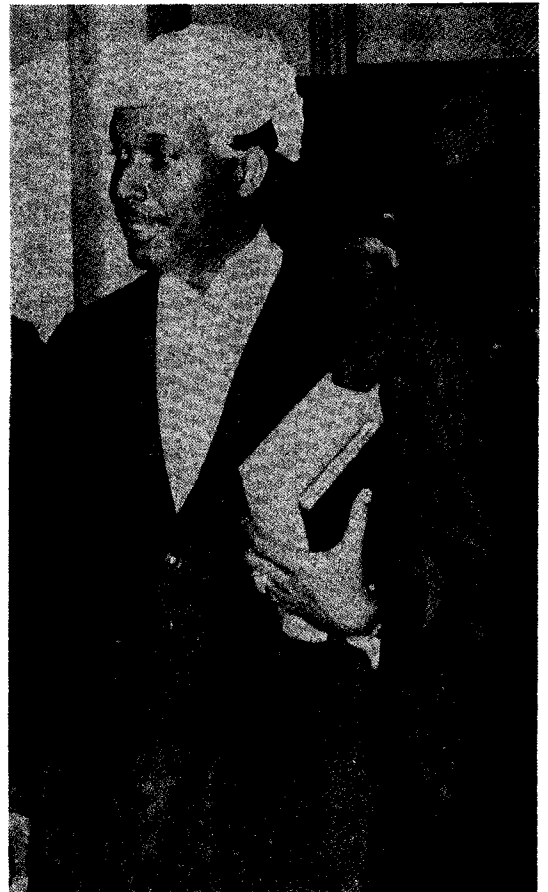
Most Trinidadians have taken little notice of Mr. Hudson-Phillips in the past. He has been viewed as a clever barrister, a bit of a "dandy" and although one of the brighter men in the PNM, a man not to be taken seriously. This is a mistaken notion. Mr. Hudson-Phillips is perhaps one of the shrewdest men in the Country, very able and extremely determined. Now that A.N.R. Robinson has left the Cabinet, Hudson-Phillips is the only man on whom the Prime Minister can really depend. This fact became clear during the recent troubles. If Government does embark on a policy of repression, those who view such a policy with apprehension must also be concerned that a man of Hudson-Phillips' abilities will be the one largely responsible for enforcing that repression.



Gerard Mantano, Minister of Home Affairs - Guarded by Special Police, Mantano enters Parliament. He will undoubtedly be the first Minister to go as Williams re-shuffles Cabinet.



Two poses of Karl Hudson-Phillips
Minister of Legal Affairs and
Attorney General.



For the past fourteen years, the Parliamentary Opposition to Williams has been the Democratic Labour Party. Supported predominately by the East Indian population of Trinidad and headed by a 40-year old East Indian barrister, Vernon Jamadar, the DLP has languished in Opposition as a result of its own ineptness and lack of organization. This year, Jamadar assumed the leadership of the Party from Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, a London-based mathematician who had been Leader of the Opposition for thirteen years. This absentee-Leadership was one of the major reasons for past DLP failures.

But apart from poor leadership, the DLP has also suffered from its lack of a programme. The Party has often announced that it is dedicated to the concept of "Democratic Socialism"; but no one has ever clarified exactly what that means. In fact, the DLP's policies in Parliament have not been very different from those projected by the PNM -- only the DLP has somehow always been one step behind.

During the last week of February, March and early April, as the NJAC and Geddes Granger moved away from conventional politics, Jamadar was nevertheless in support of Black Power. In an April interview, the leader of the DLP explained that he did not think that the Movement was a manifestation of racialism.

"What is going on is rather a struggle for social and economic status on the part of the deprived section of the society. If it happens that the line between those who are protesting and those protested against appears to follow a racial line, one could interpret it as racialism, but I think that would be wrong --- an over-simplification. The real point of the unrest is the situation in Trinidad after one and half decades of PNM rule. Our problems are grave -- unemployment, cost of living, nepotism, maladministration and incompetence."

Then, when A.N.R. Robinson resigned from Cabinet and Williams appeared to be collapsing, Jamadar called for the formation of a "National Government". He said that there were three courses open to the nation.

"First, the widespread use of Police. And this could include a State of Emergency which could have serious repercussions in that it could create a bloody confrontation. Second, a revolution which would be undesirable and could lead to consequences which would set Trinidad back for a long time. Or third, the formation of a National Government consisting of all dissident elements in the Country.

However, before Jamadar had received any reaction from the dissidents on this last proposal, most of them found themselves in the custody of Police.

Nevertheless, in spite of new leadership and even with an open policy toward Black Power concepts, it is unlikely that the DLP is going to be able to improve on its current position. It will remain an ineffective and permanent Parliamentary Opposition. Instead the most significant source of opposition to Williams will come from outside of Parliament.

As a result of the February Revolution, Trinidad's politics has distilled into a direct confrontation between Williams' "pragmatism" on the one hand and a collection of more ideologically radical groups on the other. Essentially, these groups break down into three movements: 1) James Millette's United National Independent Party (UNIP); 2) Geddes Granger's National Joint Action Committee (NJAC); and 3) Lloyd Best's Tapia House Movement.

All three groups endorse different degrees of radical change: national control of Trinidad's resources; local re-distribution of political divisions which separate the East Indians from Afro-Trinidadians. Each group, however, employs different tactics or strategies of change in order to bring about these aims.

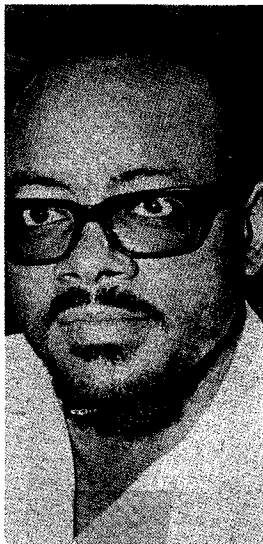
James Millette, a University Lecturer, has decided to devote his efforts to electoral politics. He has therefore organized his own party, the UNIP and plans to contest the coming elections (probably to be held within the next nine months). Millette, a long-time critic of Eric Williams, believes that a bi-racial party, composed of East Indians and Afro-Trinidadians has a very good chance of pulling voters away from the two ethnic parties -- the PNM and the DLP. (Aware of the impending damage of a third party; Vernon Jamadar of the DLP recently disclosed that he had once asked Millette to become co-leader of the DLP, an offer Millette rejected last year.)

The UNIP was launched in January this year with a Party Executive composed of Trinidadians of East Indian and African extraction, thus emphasizing the need for unity between the two major populations of the island. The UNIP's programme calls for a "deliberate insulation of Trinidad's environment from metropolitan influences...which have exacerbated our economic and social problems". This, the Party says, requires "a great degree of regulation which is in essence different from an 'open' or 'free enterprise' system". Detailing this programme of "Black Re-construction" (Black here meaning Trinidadians of both Indian and African origin), Millette would bring the sugar industry under local control and management; work out the ultimate control and ownership of the petroleum industry (U.S. owned today); and legislate against any form of land speculation (which would require a land reform programme).



Mr. Vernon Jamadar

Mr. Alloy Lequoy
General Secretary
Democratic Labour Party



Dr. James Millette



Recently, however, Millette has come under severe criticism from other radical thinkers who were once his colleagues. They view the UNIP as an expedient device which at best is unworkable or worse -- a self-serving means to fulfill personal ambitions. In response to this, Millette views agitational politics or movements which work at community level as "romantic".

"I hold to the view that direct political intervention via the electoral system is the most relevant, and radical, demand of the moment. Others differ.

Many men with whom I believe myself to agree on nearly all else that is important say that the time is now right for electoral politics. They say that the job to be done is agitational, social, educational, everything else but directly political.

They say that if these tasks are done well the edifice will collapse and a political party will one day "inevitably emerge".

I call that view the "Termite" approach and I shun "termite" politics, like the plague. Nothing emerges in politics, not in that way, and few things simply collapse.

And therein lies our difference. I am helping to organise a political party into existence; they are doing they know what.

Millette's chances in the forthcoming elections seem slight. If the UNIP is to become a major political force in the nation, it must undercut the DLP hold on the East Indian vote in the rural areas while at the same time making inroads on the PNM vote amongst the disillusioned Afro-Trinidadians in the cities. This will be difficult with both groups. For although both major parties have been discredited over the years, they still command hard-core support from the older generation of voters. And younger people who might have been sympathetic to a radical, bi-racial UNIP prior to the emergence of "Power" may now be less inclined to take an interest in electoral politics of any sort. A snap election now would almost certainly find the UNIP unprepared.

Nevertheless, as soon as the State of Emergency is lifted, Millette intends to begin a series of meetings and speak out on the present situation in Trinidad.

"I reject the Prime Minister's contention that he is unequivocally in support of the legitimate aspirations of black people. The evidence is quite to the contrary and history will record otherwise.

The real problem is the transference of power. The PNM has never treated this as a really practical prospect. It has never faced the fact that at some time whether it liked it or not, it would have to go.

And if today there is a desperation to opposition politics it derives from the conviction that the PNM has effectively excluded all legitimate political activity of an oppositionist kind.

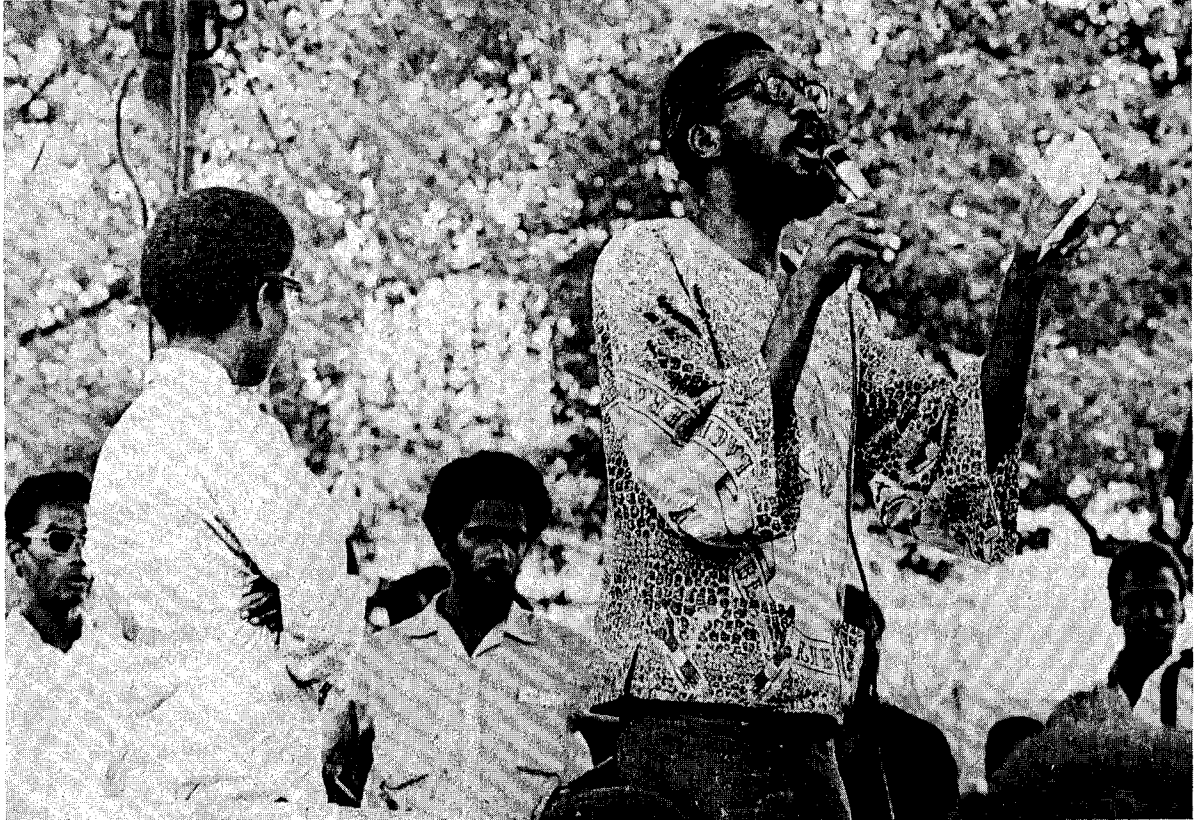
All elements of political opposition share this view. To some the symbol of political tyranny is the voting machine. To others it is the party system itself. To some it is the abuse of Parliament. To still others it is the abuse of the courts."

Meanwhile, in Trinidad's highest Court, the leadership of NJAC and several other radicals face charges of sedition as a result of the confrontation of recent weeks. So, NJAC's agitational politics led to the Royal Gaol and its leadership is for the moment, silent. However, only the naive would expect that agitational politics is finished in Trinidad. For if not Geddes Granger, it will be some other figure who will arise to assume the leadership of this particular brand of "Black Power". In the future, however, there will have to be programmatic and tactical changes made in the movement if it is to serve as a means toward radical change in the Caribbean. Granger's brand of "Black Power" only led to anarchy.

As for Granger himself, there is almost unanimous agreement that his greatest assets were a very accurate sense of timing and a flair for oratory. The crowds in Woodford Square loved him, and he became an almost messianic figure for the thousands who flocked to hear him. In turn, Granger himself responded to this adulation. It carried him away -- often to point where he would begin to say things he did not really mean. More than once, when confronted with statements he had made from the platform in Woodford Square, he would admit that such remarks conveyed more than he had intended.

In fact, Granger was a demagogue. His ability to gather 20,000 Trinidadians into Woodford Square (The "People's Parliament") convinced him that the population would support him under any circumstances. He became very difficult to work with; and a number of his colleagues grew increasingly uncomfortable with him. Moreover, Granger was a "one-issue man". That is, for him blackness alone was the entire basis for a political movement. With a severe single-mindedness, Granger suggested that all of Trinidad's problems and their solutions could be analysed on the basis of colour alone.

A radical was defined not in terms of ideas or actions, but by the colour of his skin. Thus, even though one could identify the oppressed and the oppressor in terms of colour, the struggle soon bogged down in this context and the more fundamental problems of programmatic change were avoided.



Geddes Granger

Perhaps due to the spontaneity of their successes or as a result of Granger's leadership, the NJAC never presented a coherent programme of change. Operating on a day-to-day basis, Granger "played for change" figuring that between his key support in the labour movement (George Weekes of the Oilfield Worker's Trade Union) and in the Army, there was a very real possibility that with proper timing, the Government might collapse. Whatever, as a consequence of this strategy, a great part of the NJAC programme was platitude. It became a movement which was essentially negative: Granger knew what he was against (foreign control of the economy, massive exploitation of black labour, local inequality of wealth) but no more, and without a constructive programme to offer the thousands who filled the People's Parliament, the population began to resort to violence, terror and arson. This, and reverse racism crept into the movement until finally, the NJAC lost control of its own movement.

Nevertheless, Granger and NJAC accomplished a great deal. They succeeded in exposing Williams' failures and consequent unpopularity. With a single stroke, on a February afternoon, Granger brought the Government to account for its fraudulence. And at one point on an April afternoon, Williams' and his Government almost came crashing down. But instead, it is Granger now who must confront Williams' Court on sedition charges, a confrontation which Geddes Granger will probably lose.

Yet this has been only the first round. Other Grangers will arise. Agitational politics will continue to be a significant part of Trinidad's radical movement. And unless Williams is successful in convincing Trinidadians that he has understood what "Power" is all about, his regime will continue to be pressured. But then, there are always the courts.

In contrast to UNIP's electoral efforts and the NJAC's agitational activities, Lloyd Best's Tapia group is participatory politics in its purest form (see FJM-15). Unlike the other two radical groups, Best is not set on changing leaders or Governments as such. Rather, Tapia, he says, "is interested in creating a new and exciting form of democracy". Best explains:

"The solutions which Tapia House is espousing are not feasible for a movement which simply controls the instruments of State. The movement must also enjoy power and moral authority in the community. It must have the trust and support of large sections of the population -- of all classes, ages, races and colours. It must be clear what it wants to do. It must not take office just to get rid of the old order. It must be united on the programme change".



The NJAC march to CARONI - Afro-East Indian Unity

Best therefore believes that change at the top (Granger or Millette for Williams) does not necessarily mean real change. For him, radical change means "change from below". The aim then is a radicalisation of the population through the development of community organisation. And for Best, radicalisation of the population presupposes the establishment of a sense of national self-confidence.

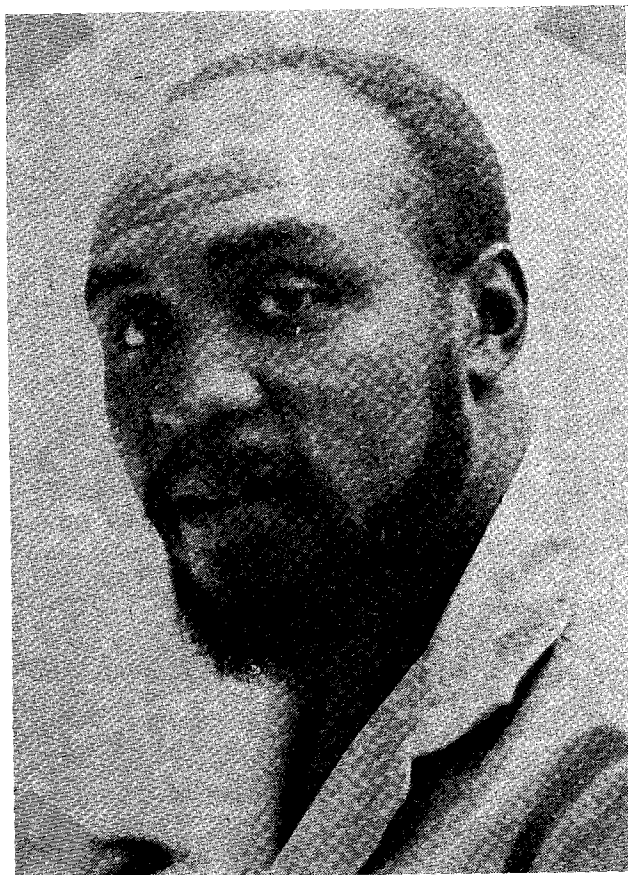
"It is clear the Country cannot be re-organised by one man --not even if he begins with a large and sympathetic following.....No we have to beware of movements and men who canvass change that way. There is no easy way. The road forward is through discipline, routine, unceasing initiative and patient slogging. Above all, we need comprehensive organisation. Even then, there is no assurance of complete success. We can only "play" for progress in the certain knowledge that we too will make errors. In this perspective positive action seems to suggest two parallel tasks: the first is hard thinking; the second, community organisation of practical projects."

This is commitment to participatory politics, a politics which deals with what Best suggests is Trinidad's biggest problem: "political illiteracy". That is, Best is concerned with the problem of getting the people to form their own standards of political judgement and then have the self-confidence to take the appropriate action: control of their own political and economic affairs.

"The Tapia House movement is not dealing in miracles. . We are first interested in self-knowledge and then we know change will come. The role or value of organising at a community level is to help us win our confidence in doing. This Country needs that confidence. Our reliance on foreign help in every conceivable field has brought us to the state of almost complete demoralisation. We have to regain and then retain the initiative in our own affairs. We must take charge."

The fact that Williams hasn't taken charge is the primary reason Best finds himself in radical opposition to the present regime. The PNM acceptance of the Puerto Rican model of development is the essential problem.

"Instead of dealing with sugar, petroleum and the banks, instead of breaking the metropolitan stranglehold on the economy which had kept the West Indian people in chains from the start, Williams and the PNM adopted the Lewis prescription of industrialization by invitation.



Mr. Lloyd Best

Tapia House Movement

We hoped for economic transformation by borrowing capital, by borrowing management, by borrowing technology, by borrowing this and by borrowing that, and by outwitting before every manner of alien expert we could find. We failed to see that this kind of dependence in our territorial context amounted to nothing but obsequiousness, servility, and in the last resort, to a shattering vote of no-confidence in the population of Trinidad and Tobago."

Therefore, Tapia's aim is to establish confidence in the population and then "deal with sugar, petroleum and the banks". And for Best, strategy and programme are one: both must involve popular participation on the widest possible scale. To begin, he points out that a re-organisation of the economy (that is the placing of economic control in the hands of the population) demands "two major acts of policy": the first is a settlement with oil, sugar and the banks; and the second is the "emancipation" of local enterprise.

"The biggest single problem here is that the petroleum and sugar industries are in the hands of foreign companies and that these companies have interests which are in conflict with those of the nation. We have to resolve this conflict once and for all by localizing these companies and fitting them into the framework of national planning. We have to make it clear that we are intending to break up the huge international corporations. We are not alone in this; other countries are thinking the same way too."

Sugar is first. There are few technical or marketing problems with which the Trinidadians would have difficulty. So a Government which has the moral authority of the population behind should without hesitation take control of the industry.

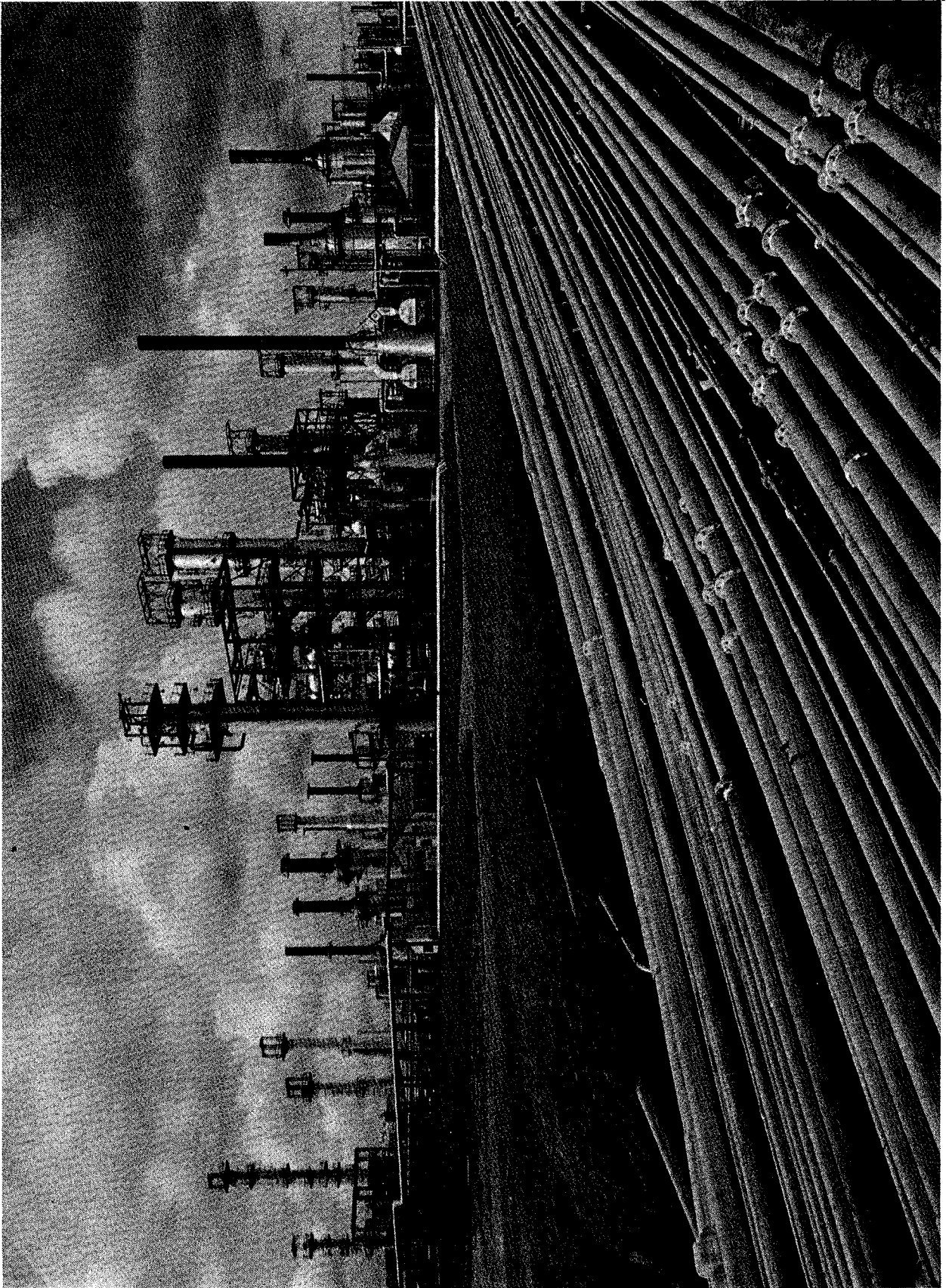
Oil is next. The objective would be a national oil company as soon as possible. Toward this end, several steps would be taken immediately:

"A separation of Texaco (Trinidad) from Texaco (International); Shares in Texaco Trinidad must be traded on the local market and made available to the Unions, the Central Government, the Local Authorities and the Public at large.

A schedule of jobs which must be held by nationals within a specified period.

The accounting practices of the companies must conform to national specifications.

All advertising, banking and insurance services must be locally procured."



Then there are the banks and insurance companies. Best insists that these foreign organisations bring nothing to Trinidad, that the nation cannot provide for itself. In fact, he shows that they often "stand in the way of a rational management of the local monetary system". They would also be localised immediately. The same would hold true for all advertising and the media. This would save the Country from a constant stream of American-oriented programming --everything from hair oils to Garner Ted Armstrong's inane moralising.

Finally, in terms of national enterprise, Best suggests six initial steps need to be taken. First, luxury imports would be cut so as to open up opportunities for local investment. Second, tourism, agriculture and industry would be dominated by local private initiative rather than foreign or Government domination. Third, a large-scale housing programme has begun involving re-organisation of mortgage banking. Fourth, the educational system would be altered away from the British patterns to a more suitable system geared to local needs. Fifth, a National Service would be established which would "introduce some flexibility in the pattern of employment". And sixth, an income policy would have to be initiated not only for organised labour but for the nation as a whole.

At the root of all of these programmes, however, is a dependency upon the concept of popular participation. This is what separates Best from the other radicals. Best considers Granger and Williams guilty of the same sin: autocratic rule.

As his strategy of political organisation and his economic policies are rooted in the concept of popular participation, so Tapia's functioning is itself an extension of this concept. Anyone is welcome to participate in the movement: black or white, rich or poor. Leadership is not autocratic but shared and open. And though Best himself is the creative energy behind the organisation, he tries to induce freedom of expression and places emphasis on the diffusion of participation.

"In exposing ourselves to each other's criticisms we learn about ourselves. Each of us has his own particular skill. Some are better at organisation. Others are fine speakers. And there are some who we know must be left at home in time of crisis. So we continue to test ourselves.."

Consequently, Tapia has strong reservations about the NJAC. Best's emphasis on participatory politics and serious programmes contrasts with Granger's inverse racism, political demagoguery and over-simplification of the issues. Tapia's conception of "Black Power" is defined in terms of the oppressed and oppressor rather than along colour lines.

"It is unfortunate that some of our Black Power advocates in Trinidad are still thinking that "black power" has something to do with the colour of one's skin. Castro could be the blackest man in the Caribbean; and the whitest, in these terms must be the medieval figures such as Bradshaw in St. Kitts, Bird of Antigua -- or Marie Antoinette Gairy of Grenada, the noted libertine who has now prescribed floggings for obscene language and disorderly behavior. The problem is one of terminology and semantics. It is crucial that in the ranks of the dispossessed there are no whites; but still the war is between the dispossessed and the over-privileged. It is between all the people all over the world who understand the need for and desire a better world and those who have the insensitivity to care only about fattening their own carcasses. To define the issue in these terms is not to underplay the significance of blackness, but to guard against the danger of racism in reverse.

Tapia also rejects the NJAC tendency to impose solutions on the population rather than trying to induce action from the people. In this respect, Best is really more radical than any other politician in the country. Best summarizes his conclusions about Granger in, as always, the most precise and positive framework.

"Revolution is not achieved simply by feeling the fraudulence and the brutality of the regime and reacting against it. Revolution, that is to say, fundamental change, is achieved when we also see so clearly through the regime that we can take the steps required, not to replace it with another tyranny, but to displace it with a better order.

Yet demonstration and protest are not enough. To hope that "ideas and technical direction" will come from elsewhere is too dangerously random a procedure. We cannot risk destroying more than we create. We cannot even risk threatening to do so because that would be playing into the hands of reaction.

This is not to deny that a time might well come when guns and violence may be necessary to overthrow those who have dispossessed us, in the last resort, by guns and violence. We know this very well, and our strong sympathies with the current revolt arises from precisely this understanding.

But we know, too, that the revolt must be reinforced by its own thought, must be informed by its own ideas. This blend between thought and action must be organic - which is a quite different thing from merely imposing plausible-sounding "technical solutions". That procedure can only lead to the Strongman, the Maximum Leader.

The present crisis, with its threat of utter breakdown and chaos, shows disturbing signs of taking just that turn. For TAPIA to join the revolt in the role of "technical advisor" would mean a betrayal of our integrity and our convictions. It would be helping to create precisely the kind of power structure to which we are fundamentally opposed. We leave that to the opportunists and the bandwaggoners who, having no position, are free to take up any that offers itself.

Blowing up Kirpalanis and slapping up white people out of a sense of outrage and resentment (for which indeed there is reason enough) will never destroy tyranny.

Yet the most important and urgent task in the wide world today is precisely that: to destroy tyranny. This is what Tapia has undertaken, and to jump on the bandwaggon now would be a betrayal of the very people who have started it rolling.

Our job is to continue to sketch perspectives for the entire nation and to engage in the community activity for which we are equipped. All of our activity is public and no one is debarred from participating. Our members are also free to participate wherever they will. If we do what we can honestly and well, the time will soon arrive when a broad cross-section of the nation will be able to agree on the next step. At that point, thought and action will have achieved their proper harmony, both within and between groups. And it will be power to the people".

During the State of Emergency, Best and others established what they called the Non-violent Committee for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms (NCDDF). This group held a few teach-ins and distributed leaflets (Best himself, on the streets of Port of Spain passing them out, was beaten by some policemen for doing so) calling on the population to offer non-violent resistance to the Government's State of Emergency. But there was little response. The NCDDF nevertheless represents another example of Best's commitment to participatory politics. In this case, as he often must be, he was disappointed by the response.



At one teach-in for example, some of the students attending objected to Best's conclusion that the PNM had been rejected by the population. The events of the preceding ten weeks apparently had not effected them. For Best, this sort of reaction is the most bewildering kind of experience. Yet, as Best pointed out later: "It is only the End Game that really counts.....and that's what we will continue to play for".

So as Tapia and other forms of political action continue to play for radical change, the High Court goes into full session: twelve leaders of NJAC and twenty-seven rebels from the Regiment face charges of sedition and treason. Meanwhile, Trinidadians settle back to routine, Government fills the radio stations with announcements of past achievements and one waits for the next round to begin.

Yours,

Frank Mc Donald

Frank McDonald.

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