

TRINIDAD - TOBAGO

SOLIDARITY

USA

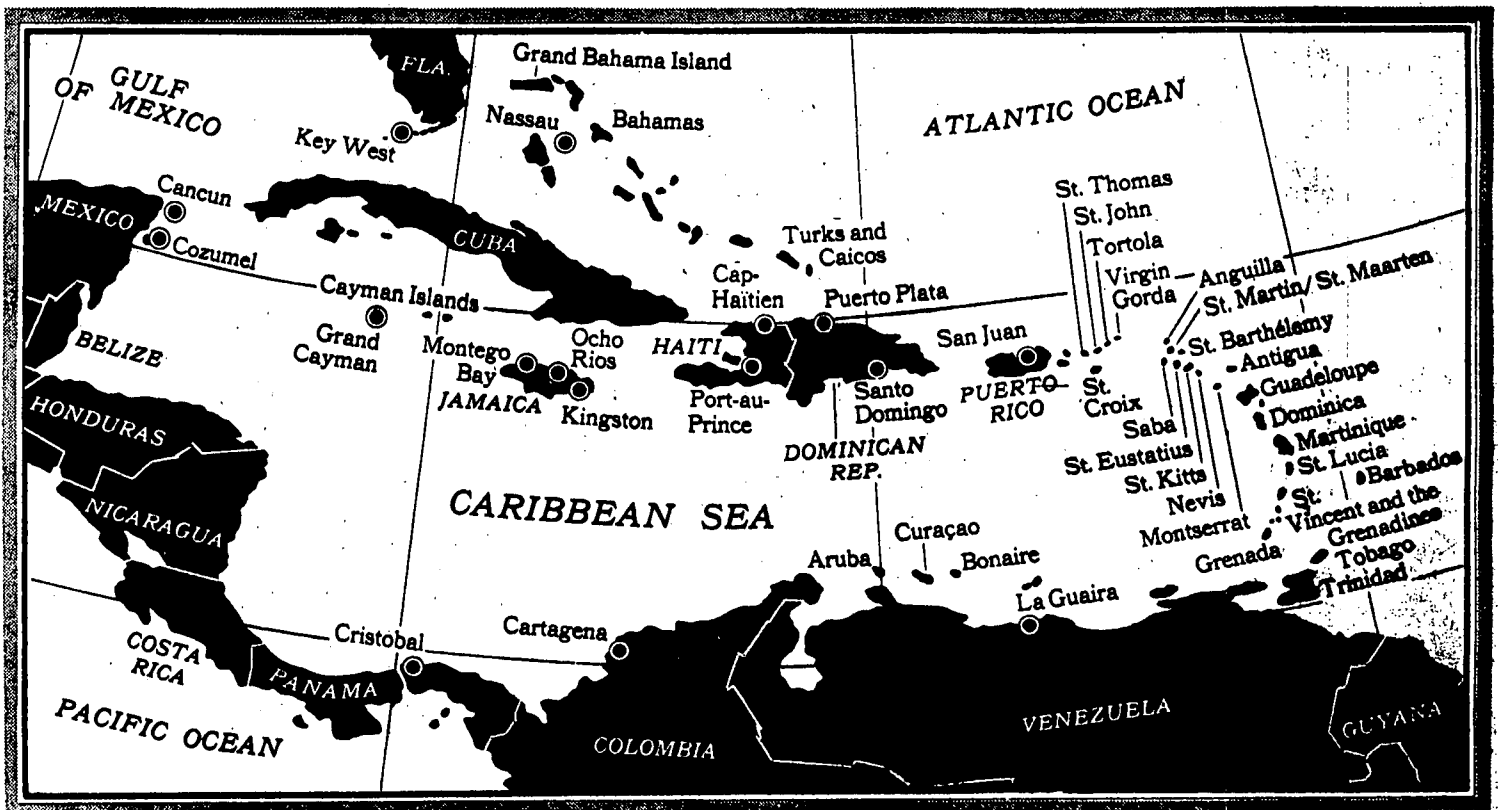


**Building a World Wide Movement for Peoples Power
1988**

Solidarity

Documenting the tour of David Abdulah
of the Oilfields Workers Trade Union
and
Committee for Labor Solidarity
to the U.S.A.

November 13 - December 1, 1988



1. page 3

Tim Hector

Antiguan Liberation Movement

p. 2

Council of Progressive Trade Unions

p. 13

names

Farouk Dhondy (India-UK)

Sonya Sanchez (USA)

CLR James (Trinidad)

Darcus Howe (Trinidad-UK)

Abdul Alkalimat (USA)

Daniel Abdullah (Trinidad)

Kole Omotosio (Nigeria)

p. 33

drop picture w/ Ambassador

(add ALSC photo w/ White House
in Background)

Introduction

This is a documentary record of new political relationships, an activity of building solidarity for peace and social transformation. Twenty-first Century Books (TCB) invited the Oil Fields Workers Trade Union (OWTU) to meet with people in the USA to inform and mobilize progressive support for the struggle in Trinidad-Tobago. This is made clear in a letter from Abdul Alkalimat, TCB, to Errol McLeod, President General of OWTU:

24th October, 1988.

Comrade Errol McLeod,
President General,
O.W.T.U.

Dear Comrade McLeod,

First let me express my solidarity and support for your leadership of the O.W.T.U. as you face the grave and serious economic and social crisis. My brief experience with you and your comrades has proven once again that when one stands up and faces problems with courage and organisation, guided by a strategic VISION, it is possible to be a heroic light and provide guidance through inspiration for us all. I congratulate you and the O.W.T.U. for your great work.

This letter is to confirm our conversation that I am extending an invitation to the O.W.T.U. to send Comrade David Abdulah to the USA for the purpose of meeting with Trade Unionists and the broad leadership of the African American Community. The main purpose is to expand the network of support and friendship for the O.W.T.U. by exchanging information, setting up exchanges of publications, and laying the foundation for the O.W.T.U. to be invited to speak at regional and national meetings in the USA.

Yours in solidarity and friendship,

The tour went to six cities: Chicago, Detroit, Boston, Raleigh, Washington, DC, and New York City. The main purpose of the tour was in establishing a network of contacts for future joint work - Trinidadians in the USA, media (radio, TV, and newspapers), Black liberation movement activists, and progressive community activists.

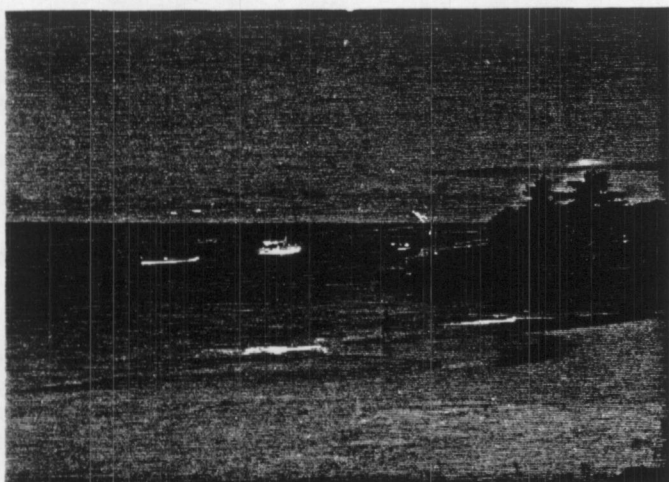
Without reservation this tour was an overwhelming success. Comrade Abdulah was clear and well informed, combining a grasp of the sweeping motion of historical currents with an unfailing recall of factual detail. Comrade Abdulah placed us inside of the fight for a new society in Trinidad-Tobago and he "turned us on." We all became better informed and stimulated to learn more. Everywhere people wanted more information, asked about organizing tours to visit, and immediately expressed their solidarity.

OWTU and CPTU (Coalition of Progressive Trade Unions) are unique and pace setting efforts in the trade union movement. The trip helped to spread the word about this new workers movement for "BREAD, PEACE, and JUSTICE." Furthermore, the goal of New Democracy is a mandate for all progressive forces.

This tour helped to clarify a key aspect of the international movement -- *How to build mutual solidarity between peoples in a country facing an advanced capitalist crisis as part of a world empire in decline, with people facing IMF debt as part of the crisis of the deformed neo-colonial state?* In a strategic sense, solidarity and mutual support begins through the struggles working people wage to transform their own societies. Our tactics flow from this -- we find our friends among those engaged in struggle, we unite comrades across national boundaries by sharing experiences and learning from each other.

Those of us in the USA have a unique role as we live and struggle in the heart of Babylon. This is especially true for Black people as we fight the legacy of terror forced on all third world peoples. Out of Africa and India came the population of Trinidad-Tobago who now live under the domination of US imperialism. This must end! Our commitment is unyielding, our goal clear.

DOWN WITH US IMPERIALISM!
LONG LIVE THE FIGHT FOR PEOPLES POWER IN TRINIDAD-TOBAGO!
FORWARD! LET US MARCH TOGETHER TOWARDS A NEW DEMOCRACY!



The Caribbean is an island filled region full of natural beauty, and a pleasant year round climate. To many in the developed countries this means tourism, especially when it's the US or England in control of the economy. But this is not so for the peoples of the many island nation-states. As with most countries in the world the masses of workers and farmers are fighting for a better way of life.



This is a panel discussion at the 2nd Caribbean Peoples International Bookfair, October 20, 1988. Organized by OWTU in Trinidad. The topic was *Perspectives on Caribbean Unification*. From left, David Abdulah (Committee for Labor Solidarity, Trinidad-Tobago), Don Rojas (Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement, Grenada), Keith Lookloy (Committee for Labor Solidarity, Trinidad-Tobago), Tim Hecotr (African Caribbean Liberation Movement, Antigua), and Lucien Perutin, (Guadeloupe).

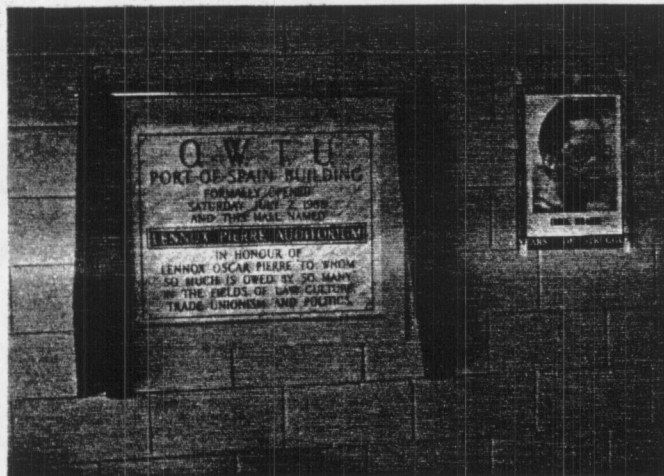


Leading now as in 1937 and 1970 is the BLUE SHIRT ARMY of the OWTU. Here is a picture of the OWTU contingent in a workers march against government policies based on IMF pressure. This demonstration was held during a working day requiring over 5,000 people to take a day off to fight back - October, 1988.

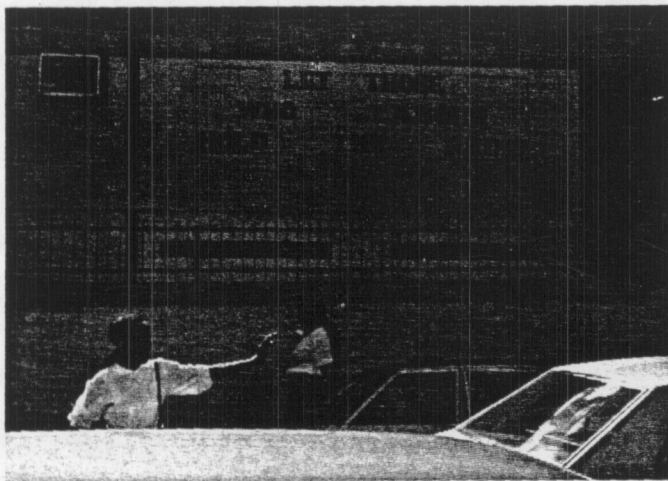
The recent history of the struggle in the Caribbean focuses on Grenada, it has been such a beacon light of hope, and now since the murderous counter revolutionary coup d'etat and US invasion, it has become an equally important negative example of imperialist intervention. However, in the spirit of 1937 (with general strike and insurrection) and 1970 (with Black Power revolt and army mutiny) the people of Trinidad-Tobago are advancing forward.



The Paramount Building, general headquarters of the OWTU in San Fernando (2nd largest city of Trinidad-Tobago). This was formerly a hotel with a *whites only* policy, and now serves the interests of working people!



This plaque announces the new OWTU building in Port-of-Spain named after Lennox Pierre, revolutionary lawyer and poet. The poster is of Errol McLeod, current President General of the OWTU.



This is the new Port-of-Spain office of the Committee for Labor Solidarity (CLS), a preparatory political organization. On November 12th over 1,200 invited guests mandated the CLS to form a new political party to lead the fight for a new democracy based on peoples power.

The OWTU is a fighting union, born when the economic interests of the workers could only be advanced through the political goal of ending colonialism. Today the workers face a new form of colonization through institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The new colonization is based on the crisis of third world debt negotiated by oportunist incompetant neocolonial government leaders. Again, the interest of the workers can only be advanced by the political goal of a new government, a new democracy based on peoples power.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO STATISTICS 1987

POPULATION 1,079,800

LABOUR FORCE

MALE 312,400

FEMALE 158,500

TOTAL 470,900

UNEMPLOYED 99,500

BALANCE OF TRADE :

IMPORTS \$4,387,500

EXPORTS \$5,264,600

OIL EXPORTS \$3,749,100

FOOD IMPORTS 833,400

GDP AT FACTOR COST \$15,793,600

GNP " " " \$14,809,700

GNP PER CAPITA 1,2168

GROSS PUBLIC DEBT \$ 6,536,200

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

PRODUCTION

SUGAR	119,000 Tonnes
COCOA BEANS	1,501,000 Kg
COFFEE BEANS	1,842,000 Kg
ORANGES	1,674,000 Kg
GRAPEFRUIT	1,195,000 Kg
BEEF	1,324,000 Kg
PORK	3,382,000 Kg
BROILERS	15,799,000 birds
RUM	3,629,000 Gallons
CEMENT	326,000 Tonnes
FERTILIZER	1,842,000 Tonnes

HEALTH

No. of Physicians	1164	
No. of Hospitals and Nursing Homes	39	Beds 4241

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO HISTORY

1498	-	C. Columbus Landed in Trinidad
1797	-	Trinidad captured by Britian from Spain
1802	-	Trinidad became first British Crown Colony
17th & 18th Century - Tobago ruled by Dutch, French & British		
1814	-	Tobago became a British Colony
1834	-	Abolition of Slavery
1845	-	Arrival of Indentured Indians
1889	-	Tobago joined to Trinidad administratively
1899	-	Trinidad and Tobago became a joint Crown Colony
1946	-	Full Adult Franchise
1956	-	Self Government granted. Peoples National Movement
1962	-	Trinidad and Tobago became Independent
1976	-	Trinidad and Tobago became a Republic
1980	-	Tobago House of Assembly established
1986	-	NAR (National Alliance for Reconstruction elected to replace PNM

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO - UNIONS

2 Labour Federations

1) Council of Progressive Trade Unions

- Oilfields Workers' Trade Union - 10,000
- Transport and Industrial Workers Union - 4,000
- Steel Workers Association of Trinidad and Tobago - 1,000
- Communication Workers Union - 2,000
- Aviation, Communication and Allied Workers Union - 1,000
- Customs and Excise Guards Association - 200
- National Foodcrop Farmers Association - 2,000
- Trinidad Islandwide Rice Growers Association - 400
- General Poultry Farmers Association - 100

- **Southern Mercantile Workers Association**

ii)

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO LABOUR CONGRESS

- **Public Services Association – 15,000**
- **National Union of Government and Federation Workers Union – 25,000**
- **Bank and General Workers Union – 800**
- **Bank Employees Union – 2,000**
- **All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers Trade Union – 9,000**
- **National Petroleum Staff Association**
- **Contractors and General Workers Union**

POLITICAL PARTIES

Peoples National Movement (PNM)

- **Ruled from 1956 - 1986**
- **Now holds 3 seats in Parliament**

National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR)

- **Won Elections in 1986**
- **Hold 33 seats in Parliament**

CLUB 88 – a break-away faction from NAR led by Deputy Political Leader Basdeo Panday

Committee for Labour Solidarity (CLS) - a pre - party Workers and Farmers Organisation

National Joint Action Committee - a Black Nationalist Party. Lost all seats in 1981 and 1986 General Elections.

KEY CABINET POSTS

A.N.R. ROBINSON – Prime Minister / Minister of Finance

SELWYN RICHARDSON – Attorney General

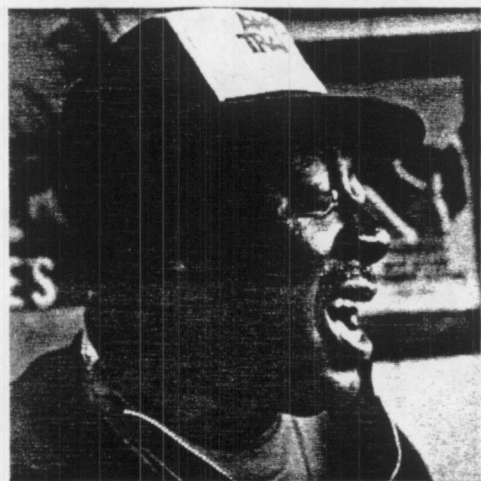
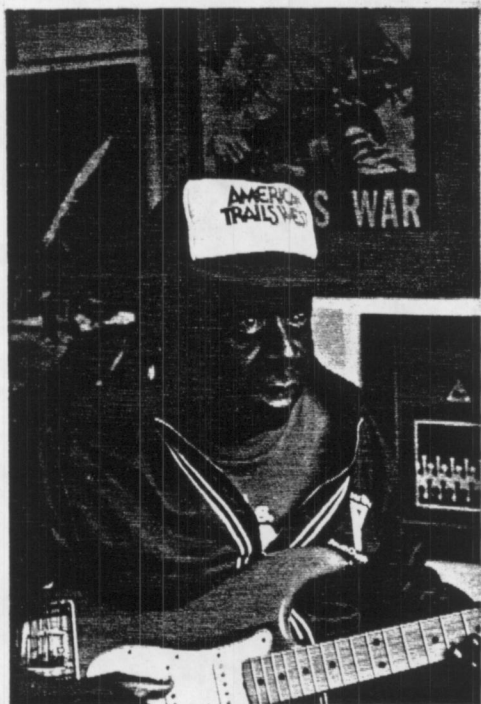
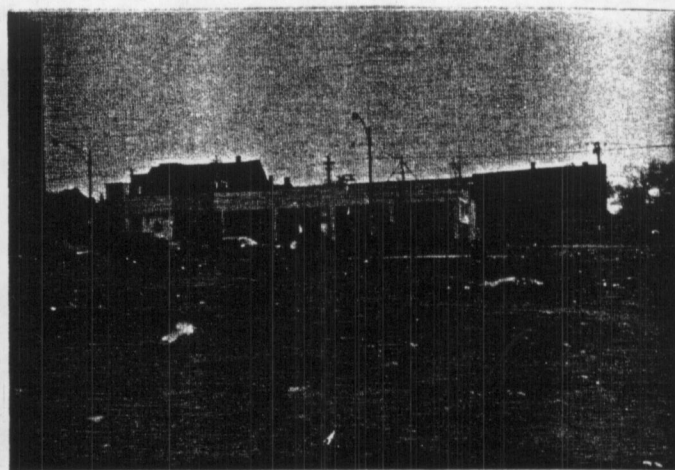
KEN GORDON – Minister of State Enterprises

CLIVE PANTIN – Minister of Education

WINSTON DOOKERAN – Minister of Planning and Mobilisation

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC – Noor Hassanali

CHIEF JUSTICE – Clinton Bernard



Smokey Smothers performing at TCB. He lives across the street, and used to play with Muddy Waters.

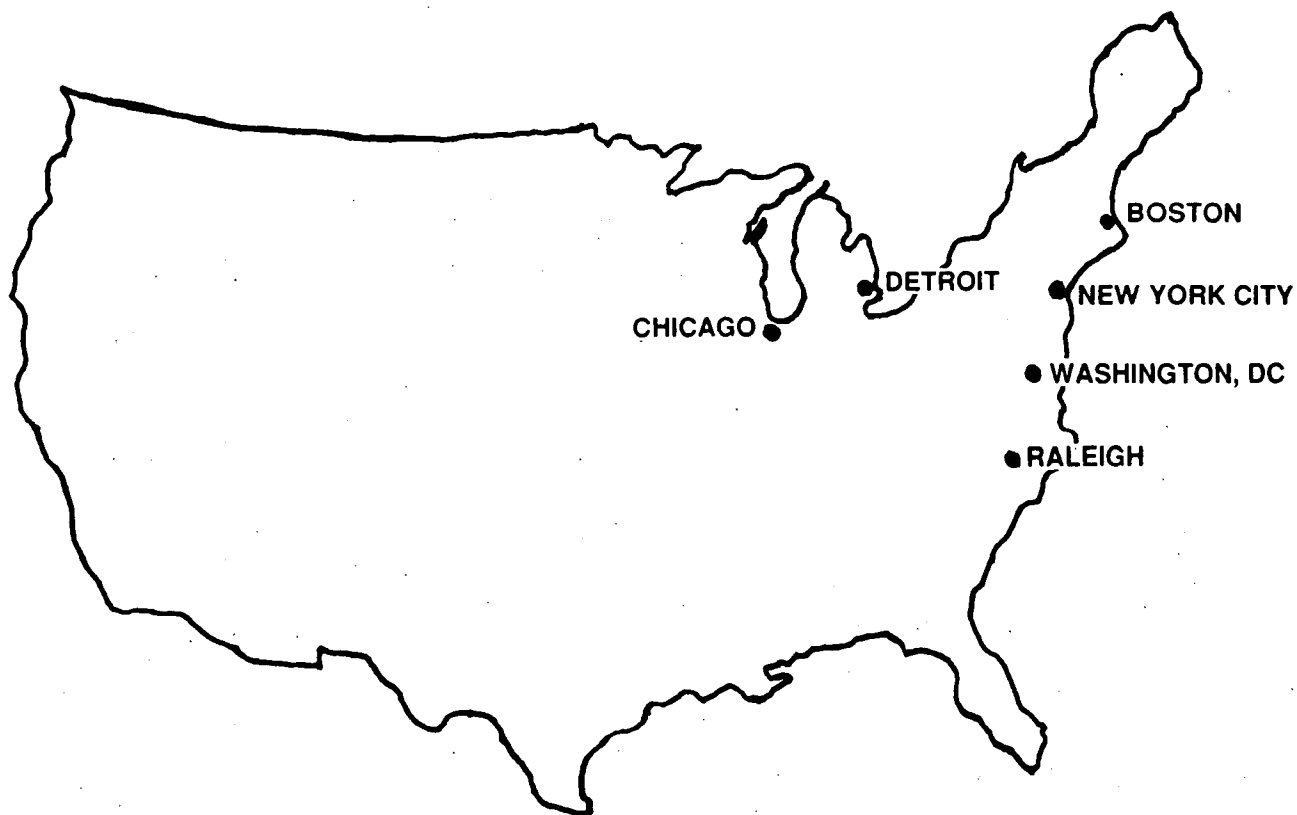
Twenty-first Century Books carries out publishing and book distribution from its base in Chicago, Illinois. TCB has been active in the international movement, especially the bookfairs held in London (under the leadership of John LaRose, carried out by publishers New Beacon and Race Today), and Trinidad (under the leadership of the OWTU). Out of this context TCB established a relationship with OWTU and CLS.

TCB has published a leading textbook in Black Studies - *Introduction to Afro American Studies* and the main bibliographical reference tool on the field - the *Afro Scholar Newsletter*. A major publications program is planned on the history of Black radicalism, e.g., the works of Malcolm X.

TCB is located at 607 East Muddy Waters Drive in a Chicago neighborhood we call *Blues City* and sometimes, *The Lower End*. The great musician Muddy Waters used to live just down the street from TCB. In fact, the actual building TCB occupies was the last location of Theresa's Lounge. Theresa Needham is know all over the world as Chicago's *Mama of the Blues*.

**POLITICS MUST BE
GROUNDED IN THE
CULTURAL FORMS
AND STYLES OF THE
PEOPLE!**

The tour went to six cities:



November 1988

13 - 16	CHICAGO
16 - 18	DETROIT
18 - 20	BOSTON
20 - 22	RALEIGH
22 - 24	WASHINGTON, DC
24 - 30	NEW YORK

List of literature distributed on the six city Solidarity Tour.

CLASSLINE PUBLICATIONS

1. Committee for Labour Solidarity (CLS), Towards A New Democracy and the Road to Full Employment The Draft Programme of the New Party, November 1988 32pp \$2.50
2. CLS Speaks: A Collection of Statements by the Committee of Labour Solidarity (Preparatory) 1981-1987 (1987) 80pp \$4.00
3. Keith Lookloy, Democracy in Education (1987) 24pp \$2.00
4. Raftique Shah, Race Relations in Trinidad: Some Aspects (1988) 11pp \$2.00
5. HOLD THE FORT: Monthly Newspaper of the Committee for Labour Solidarity (Preparatory) \$.50

"Let Those Who Labor Hold the Reigns"

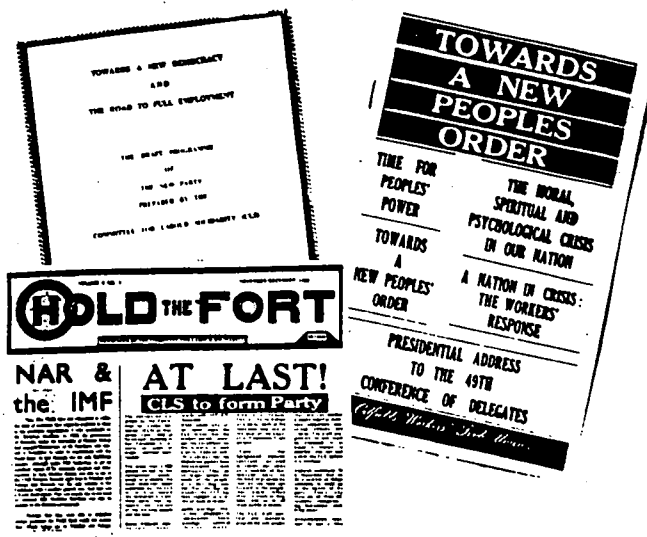
Main OWTU Slogan

"Towards A New Democracy"

C.L.S. Slogan

VANGUARD PUBLISHING COMPANY

6. David Abdulah, The IMF/World Bank and Trinidad and Tobago Statement to the Permanent Peoples Tribunal on behalf of the OWTU, Berlin West Germany, September 27, 1988. 29pp \$3.00
7. Towards A New Peoples Order A collection of articles (1988) \$4.00
8. Oilfields Workers' Trade Union: July 1937 - July 1977 A pictorial history of the OWTU, its staff, organizational history, interviews and portraits of its leadership. (1977) 72pp \$8.00
9. Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, 50 Years of Progress: 1937-1987 (1988) 68pp \$5.00
10. George Weeks, The President General's Address to the 47th Annual Conference of Delegates of the Oilfields Workers Trade Union (September 1986) 31pp \$2.00
11. OWTU, Our Fight for People's Ownership and Control of the Oil Industry: Memorandum Submitted to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago by the Oilfields Workers Trade Union on the Nationalization of the Oil Industry (September 1982) 85pp \$5.00
12. Lemnos Pierre, The Ideology of the Working Class Lectures and Discussion Papers of the OWTU Leadership Seminars (October 1975) 26pp \$2.00
13. Maurice Bishop, Fascism -- A Caribbean Reality? Lectures and Discussion Papers of the OWTU Leadership Seminars (October 1975) 36pp \$2.00
14. Errol K. McLeod, Presidential Address to the 48th Annual Conference of Delegates (September 1987) 13pp \$2.00
15. Errol McLeod, Role of Labor (2 speeches) (June 1987) 18pp \$2.00
16. OWTU, Memorandum to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (November 1987) 124pp \$5.00
17. VANGUARD: Monthly Newspaper of the Oilfields Workers Trade Union \$1.00



NEW BEACON BOOKS

18. Khafra Kanbon, For Bread, Justice, and Freedom: A Political Biography of George Weeks (1988) 353pp \$17.95
19. Susan Craig, Seeds and Blood: The Ruling Class Response to the Workers Rebellion in Trinidad and Tobago (1988) 70pp \$8.95
20. Rhoda Reddock, Eina Francois: The Negro Welfare, Cultural, and Social Association and the Workers Struggle for Change in the Caribbean in the 1930's (1988) \$10.00
21. Arthur Lewis, Labour in the West Indies: The Birth of a Workers Movement (1938, 1977) 104pp \$6.95

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOOKS

22. Abdul Alkalimat and Associates, Introduction to Afro-American Studies: A Peoples College Primer (1986) 391pp 12.95
23. Alkalimat, A Scientific Approach to Black Liberation (1974) 28pp \$2.00

TCB

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS
Main Post Office Box 803251, Chicago, IL 60680
Retail Sales: 607 East Muddy Waters Drive (43rd St.) 312/538-2188

TRINIDAD

TCB is proud to offer this list of material relevant to the struggle for workers and peoples power in the country of Trinidad-Tobago. We are coordinating the Fall 1988 tour of David Abdulah to six cities in the USA. He is a leader of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (OWTU Treasurer, and Educational and Research Officer), and the convener of the Committee for Labour Solidarity (Preparatory). TCB is serving as U.S. distributor of the OWTU and CLS materials. Please use the order form on back page.

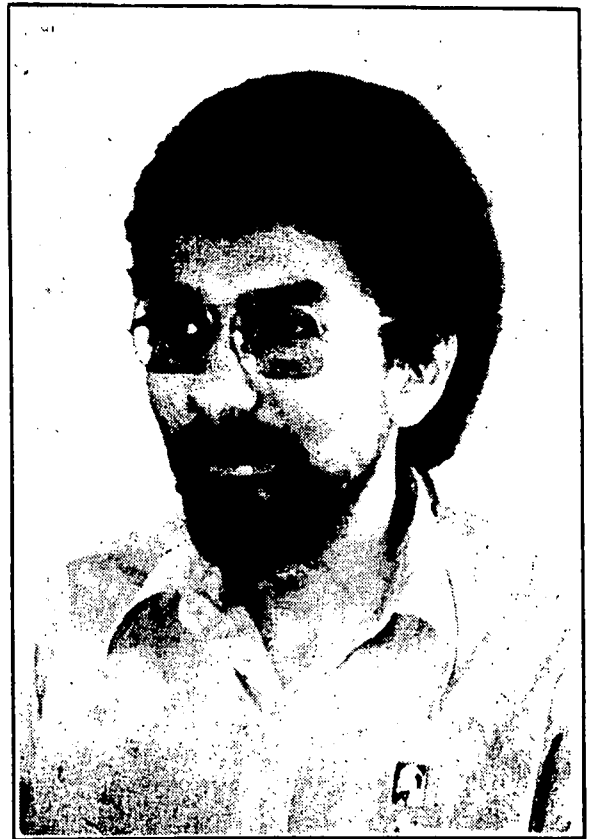
DAVID ABDULAH

Treasurer

Oilfields Workers' Trade Union

Convenor

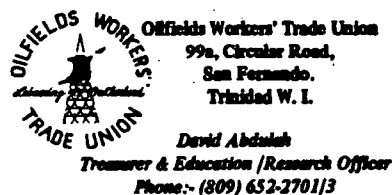
Committee for Labor Solidarity



Education BA University of West Indies, St. Augustine

OWTU 1977 Education and Research Officer
 1982 Treasurer (3 terms)

- Former President of Students Guild
University of the West Indies (St. Augustine Campus)
- Weekly column, Sunday edition of *Trinidad Express*
- Regional committee for Cultural Sovereignty of the Americas
- Trinidad representative, Petroleum Commission of International Labor Organization
- Lectured extensively throughout the Caribbean, England, Berlin, and Canada
- Secretary, Organizing Committee, Caribbean Peoples International Bookfair and Bookfair Festival



JULIAN STARLETON



Abdul Alkalimat is a leading African American intellectual, and political and cultural activist. He has long been active in the struggle for Black social liberation and for radical, political and social change in the USA.

He was the chair of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Chicago between 1963 and 1965. In 1965 he helped to found the Organisation of Black American Culture (OBAC), together with Hoyt Fuller and Conrad Rivers. OBAC initiated the modern public mural movement in the USA. Between 1973 and 1976, he became a leading member of the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), which mobilised massive crucial support across American cities for the liberation struggles in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and South Africa and Namibia.

Abdul Alkalimat has been involved in the academic black studies movement in the USA since 1965, almost from its inception. Between 1968 and 1969, he helped to found the *Black Scholar* and the Institute of the Black World and directed the Institute's first national summer

seminar in black studies in Atlanta in 1969. Since then he has contributed consistently to the debate about black studies. Abdul Alkalimat has taught in the Departments of Afro-American Studies at Fisk and Illinois Universities and has written one of the standard black studies texts *Introduction to Afro-American Studies* (A People's College Primer, 1984) He is editor of the *Afro Scholar Newsletter*; and his forthcoming book *Paradigms in Black Studies* is due out in 1988. He is co-author with Doug Gills of 'Black Power vs Racism: Harold Washington Becomes Mayor', the main study in *The New Black Vote* edited by Rod Bush.

Abdul Alkalimat has always been closely involved with independent and radical publishing and bookselling in the USA. He recently resigned from his post as Professor of Sociology at Illinois University to work fulltime with 21st Century Books and Publications, a new independent and radical publisher, distributor and bookshop in Chicago, which he helped to found.



Photograph from the 2nd International Bookfair, March 1983, London.

CHICAGO

The tour began in Chicago. This is a city of great significance based on the battles waged by the working class and oppressed nationalities - Irish, African-American, Mexican-American, etc. The 19th century fight for the 8 hour day in Chicago led to the founding of May Day, the holiday of the international working class. Also, the first 20th century Black member of Congress was from Chicago, Oscar Depriest (1924-1934). By 1983 Chicago was a center of Black political power - Harold Washington was mayor 1983-1987, and Jesse Jackson was a serious contender in the presidential campaigns of 1984 and 1988.

The crisis of industrial capitalism has closed mills and factories, and led to widespread social decay in housing, education, health care services, streets, drugs, and crime. But Black militant struggle, at the heart of a multi-national progressive community based coalition, has raised the issue of state power and social transformation.

TRINIDAD

The Next Grenada?



A REPORT FROM THE FRONT LINE

DAVID ABDULAH

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH OFFICER OWTU
OILFIELDS WORKERS' TRADE UNION, AND
SECRETARY, ORGANISING COMMITTEE

CONVENOR CLS
COMMITTEE FOR LABOR SOLIDARITY

NOV 14th

Monday
7:00 pm

Center for
Inner City Studies
700 E Oakwood Blvd
Cosponsored by
NATIONAL BLACK UNITED FRONT
FACTS

FOR INFORMATION CALL: 312/538-2188

Please post or pass on. Labor donated.

NOV 15th

Tuesday
7:30 pm

New World Resource
Center
1476 W Irving Park Rd
Cosponsored by
NEW WORLD RESOURCE CENTER
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOOKS

Social Transformation? YES! U.S. Interference? NO!

Trinidad is an island nation in the eastern most part of the Caribbean region. The economy is based on oil and sugar, and the population is about half African and half Indian. Both groups were forced from their original homelands by the Colonial rule of England. Today the economy is controlled by multinational corporations and a state bourgeoisie, neo-colonialism. The mismanagement of the economy and government has plunged the country into impending social crisis.

The people have been organized in the fight for a better life every since the days of slavery. The main exploitation of the people has been in the oilfields and the sugar plantations. For the past fifty years the main fight for better economic and living conditions has been the unions, especially the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, founded by Uriah Buzz Butler, led for the past 25 years by George Weeks, and now led by Erroll McCleod.

Trinidad won its political independence from England in 1962. The first Prime Minister was Eric Williams, author of Capitalism and Slavery. He represented a middle class solution that failed to move toward economic independence based on peoples power, the organization of workers, tenants, students, and farmers to control their own destiny.

A Black power movement and army insurrection failed in the early seventies, and the United Labor Front failed in the late 1970's. An advance was made in the early 1980's with the formation of the Committee for Labor Solidarity (Preparatory). The CLS is the leading revolutionary organization fighting for peoples power in Trinidad-Tobago.

David Abdulah will speak on the fight for a new Trinidad, from the crisis facing the masses of people, to the movement for a new political party. The Grenadian revolution was destroyed by the invasion of US troops. We have a responsibility to defend the birth of a new Trinidad. Everyone is welcome!

The Chicago Defender is the leading newspaper of the largest chain of Black newspapers in the USA. These articles announced the tour.

Caribbean unionist to visit Chicago

David Abdullah, treasurer, education and research officer of the Oil Field Workers Trade Union in Trinidad is due in Chicago Sunday for a three-day visit as part of a lecture tour of the U.S. on the situation in the Caribbean. He will speak at forums at the Center for Inner City Studies Monday at 7 p.m. and at the New World Resource Center, 1476 W. Irving Park, Tuesday at 7.30 p.m. His subject will be: "Caribbean after Grenada" and "The case of Trinidad." Abdullah recently attended the conference in Berlin, West Germany hosted by the IMF on the debt situation of Caribbean countries. The forums are sponsored by the National Black United Front and FACTS, a group that sponsors education programs on issues.

CHICAGO
DEFENDER p2
11-9-88

Bush urged to adopt new Caribbean economic policy

by Nicholas Thompson

Deploing the Reagan administration's economic policies and interference in the Caribbean, a visiting trade unionist and political activist has warned of "social explosion" in the region if the incoming Bush administration adopts them.

David Abdullah, education and research officer of the Oilfields Workers Trade Union and convenor of group planning a new political party in Trinidad, said the Black community can help avert misery in the region by organizing against any attempt by President-elect Bush to continue current U.S. policies.

Speaking at a forum at the Center for Inner City Studies, and later in an interview with the Defender, Abdullah denounced the IMF and World Bank as the main instruments for the "West's recolonization of the Third World."

He said the continuation of President Reagan's policies by the Bush administration will worsen

the already deep Caribbean economic crisis with its high unemployment and crime rates.

Abdullah stated that the Reagan administration frustrated attempts to make the Caribbean Economic Community to serve the best interests of the people of the region.

"The fall in foreign exchange earnings and the use of a substantial amounts in servicing debts as demanded by Western governments, the IMF and the World Bank have contributed to high unemployment and crime wave in the region," he said.

"Unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago, which is oil-rich, is at its highest level of 23% with a total of 170,000 out of a population of 1.2 million people not working. In Jamaica, the rate is about 30%.

Noting Trinidad's oil earnings had fallen drastically, Abdullah stated that the Reagan administration also enforces "protectionist" policies against the country's vital exports.

"In terms of trade, America has placed protectionism against our critical exports. It has reduced sugar importation by 30% and stopped importation of Trinidad steel and other products developed during the country's oil boom."

As a result, he said, real wages had fallen by 25% in four years coupled with rising inflation. "There has been no wage increase for government workers in 5 years. It has become difficult to pay workers; workers are owed \$1 million in back pay, and fired workers are also owed \$20 million in severance pay," he said.

Today's Notebook

Beautiful visions comes very true

by Ada M. Phillips

An intimate fellowship was one of the ways the Reverend Dr. Johnnie Coleman described the black-tie grand opening celebration on November 3, of the beautiful visions banquet facility of which she is chairman of the board. In an elegant atmosphere, the socialites wined and dined on purple tablecloths, lavender doily and red napkins, with an approximately eighteen inch clear vase centerpiece. It was wrapped with a gold cord and topped with a pedestal holding ten red roses, one for each guest. Additionally, the socialites danced to the music of Sydz Band, directed by Sydz Brown. Also during the gala, Reverend Coleman presented posthumously to her late friend, Ernest Bush, Sr., founder, Bush Construction Company, who built all three of her churches, and with Visions being the last building he completed, the first Visions Award, which was accepted by Ernest Bush, Jr. The beautiful facility has three unique dining experiences, Visions Dining Room, the Garden Room and the Banquet Facility, which currently accommodates up to 900 persons, which will in-

crease to 3,500 upon it's completion.

Among those attending the Visions gala were: Mayor Eugene Sawyer, Helen Cary, Reverend Willie Barrow, Reverend Addie Wyatt, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Gardner, Attorney Willie Barrow, Reverend Addie Wyatt, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Gardner, Attorney Tom Todd, Spencer Leak, executive director, Cook County Department of Corrections, Albertiana Walker, gospel singer, Judge R. Eugene Pincham, Mary Ella Smith, teacher, Merri Dee, William Brazley, president, William Brazley Architects, Mr. and Mrs. Claude Kahn, Carl L. Bibbs, Chicago manager, Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, and Leon Robinson, Jr., Robinson Bus Service.

Congratulations are in order for Margo Dunlap Dawson, who began last Monday as the new manager of contracts, purchasing and affirmative action at the Adler Planetarium. Prior to her move, Dawson was the program administrator for urban affairs at Borg-Warner.

David Abdullah, treasurer and education and research officer for the Oil Field Workers Trade Union in Trinidad, which is said to be the largest trade union in the English speaking Caribbeans, will speak at the Center for Inner City Studies on November 14 at 7 p.m. The meeting is free and open to the public. And on November 15, 7:30 p.m. Abdullah will speak at another free meeting at the New World Resource Center.

And one of Chicago's global human rights activist's, Dr. Abdul Alkalimat, president, Twenty-First Century Books & Publications, will accompany Abdullah on November 16 when he leaves on a tour of the U.S. to speak in Detroit,



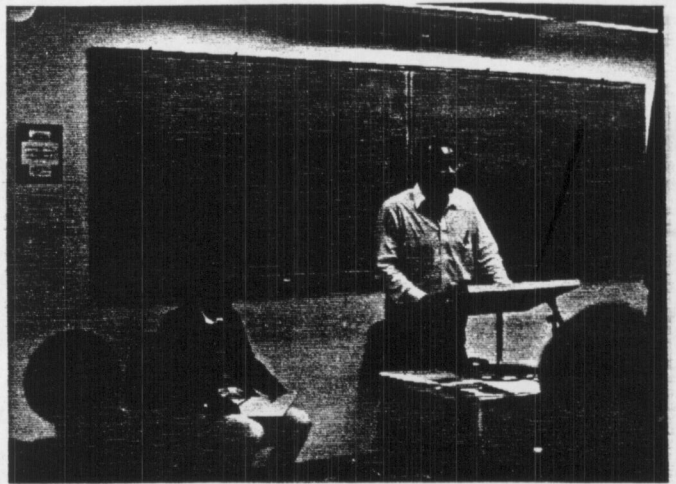
A truly great lady (right) Rev. Dr. Johnnie Coleman receives accolades from board members. From left, Harry J. Simmons, Sally Johnson and Don Jackson. (Photo by Ada M. Phillips)

Boston, Raleigh-Durham, N.C., Washington, D.C. and New York.

Last Wednesday, the very talented singer and actor, Bernard Mixon, stepped into the male lead role of Hoke Colburn in the Pulitzer Prize winning play, "Driving Miss Daisy" at the Briar Street Theatre. Mixon will star in the play for two weeks while the regular actor, the Jeff Award winning Rill Cobbs, is on vacation.

Celebrating...November 11, Wilma Sutton, vp, Savings of America, birthday....November 12, Christiane Montgomery, public education specialist, Lighthouse For The Blind, birthday....Alderman Lemuel Astin, birthday....

Abdulah is being introduced by Dr. Conrad Worrill, president of the National Black United Front.



The first forum was held at the Center for Inner City Studies where many community and political groups meet.



The audience was intense. A lively discussion was initiated by political activists, trade unionists, and Trinidad-Tobago nationals living in Chicago.



After the forum at a TCB reception, Abdulah raps with people interested in the leaning more about the peoples struggles in Trinidad-Tobago.



The New World Resource Center is the main center for the third world anti-imperialist support groups in Chicago.

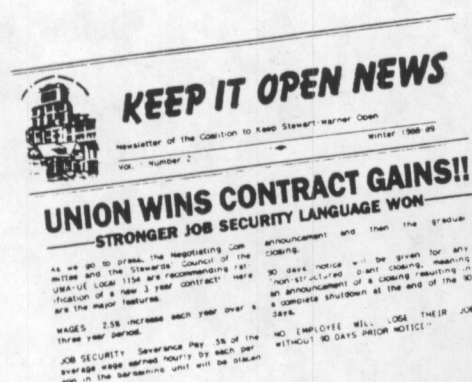
NEW WORLD FORUMS

"TRINIDAD: THE NEXT GRENADA?"

Speaker: David Abdulah: Trinidad Oilfields Workers' Trade Union
Tuesday, November 15 7:30pm
(Co-Sponsored with Twenty-First Century Books)



Slim Coleman is a leading community activist, and was a close policy advisor to Harold Washington. Slim is the editor of the *All Chicago City News* newspaper.



This photograph is of the leaders of UWA-UE Local 1154 and the Coalition to Keep Stewart-Warner Open. Left: standing - John Cane, Al Sagora, David Abdulah, Fred Harris (President), Abdul Alkalimat, George Price, Andrew Poise. Left: seated -Susan House, Shirley Williams (Vice President), Helen Horn (Chief Steward).

Stewart-Warner was purchased by British Tire, a multinational with interests in Trinidad as well. This meeting was extremely important for international solidarity.

World magazine



**Political gains
of independents
in the
1988 elections**

pp. 14-15



**An interview with
David Abdulah
Trinidadian Oilfields
Workers' Union**

p. 12

**The origin of the
Oilfields Workers'
Trade Union
in Trinidad**

p. 13

OILFIELDS WORKERS' TRADE UNION



**Highlights
of the
Week**

pp. 16-17

Building solidarity across the sea

David Abdulah is the head of the Education and Research Department of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union in Trinidad and Tobago. He was elected to treasurer of the union in 1982 as part of a slate of progressives. The OWTU is the largest trade union in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Mr. Abdulah is also a leading member of Trinidad's Committee for Labor Solidarity. He is currently on a speaking tour of the U.S. and was interviewed in Chicago by Mike Giocondo, correspondent for the People's Daily World.



David Abdulah: *We need to build an international solidarity movement combining committees all across the world to achieve a shorter working week.*

WORLD MAGAZINE: What is the Committee for Labor Solidarity?

DAVID ABDULAH: The Committee was formed in October 1981. It is a pre-party formation and a collective of trade unionists and political and cultural activists.

On November 12, we had a conference attended by 1,200 people representing a cross-section of the national community — workers, farmers, the unemployed, youths, students, housewives, progressive and patriotic intellectuals and professionals. This conference mandated the formation of a new political party by the end of April 1989.

We presented a draft program for the party which we will be discussing at the workplace and at assemblies of the people over the next few months.

When the final program is presented to the coming conference of the party it will truly reflect the interests of the working people as a whole.

The leadership of the Committee for Labor Solidarity includes the leaders of the Oil Workers Trade Union, which is the most important trade union in the country, the Communication Workers Union, the Aviation Workers Union, the Small Farmers Association and the Sugar Cane Farmers Association. It also includes rank and file leaders from the Dock Workers Union, Transport Workers Union and the teachers' movement.

WM: What are the goals of the Committee for Labor Solidarity?

ABDULAH: The first objective is to form a party. The second objective is to continue to organize working people across the divisions of race, religion, party affiliation, trade union affiliation and occupation — to unite the people and prepare to intervene in the existing crisis.

We are in a very deep and fundamental economic, social and political crisis. There is 23 percent unemployment and the standard of living for working people has fallen by 25-30 percent in the last four years. There are numerous plant closures, bankruptcies and layoffs.

These economic and social conditions are laying the basis for a major political explosion. We are preparing the working people to intervene because only then can they realize their objectives — a new democracy and a new kind of trade union activity founded and predicated on the basis of people's power. That's what we are struggling for.

WM: What role do the transnational corporations play in the crisis in Trinidad?

ABDULAH: Amoco is the largest single oil producer in Trinidad. It produces crude oil offshore. It controls 90 percent of the national gas production and

all of our electricity. If Amoco decides to shut off its gas valves, the entire country shuts down. They have a disproportionate amount of power and can sabotage and pressure the government into all kinds of concessions.

Amoco also owns 49 percent of a large fertilizer company called Fortrin. The other shares are owned by the government. The government, however, is pursuing a policy of privatization and is encouraging foreign capital to come in and exploit the natural resources of our country. In the case of the oil industry, there have been two licenses recently granted for offshore exploration. One to Mobil, with a minority shareholder being one of the national oil companies and a second to a subsidiary of Shell, with another state company having a minority share.

The international oil industry is changing. There have been no new oil finds in North America in the last five to seven years and oil production there is declining. That means that the West is once again going to be subject to OPEC and the Middle East. They are not happy dealing with the Middle Eastern oil producers and are looking at the southern part of the Western hemisphere — targeting that area for the control of oil.

Foreign capital has also been important in many of the manufacturing industries. There is more foreign capital per capita in Trinidad than in most other Western countries of the Third World and we are highly indebted to international bonds. We are a foreign debtor by about two and one-half billion dollars and are paying about 200 million dollars a year in debt service.

Because of the government's policy of privatization we will see a return of foreign capital to many other areas of the economy that are supposed to be state controlled. We are also likely to see an influx of foreign capital to establish sweat shops and offshore banking, which they use to launder drug money. We are also a transfer point for cocaine from South America to United States.

WM: What role does the International Monetary Fund play in Trinidad?

ABDULAH: Its role is more political than economic. Trinidad and Tobago have never had a formal agreement with the IMF, but is currently negotiating several agreements.

We have struggled against the government engaging in any kind of negotiations with the IMF or the World Bank for loans. We are aware of what the IMF has been doing to Trinidad and Tobago throughout the years.

Davison Budhoo, a Grenadian economist who worked with the World Bank for seven years and IMF for 12 years, worked in Trinidad and Tobago in 1985, '86 and '87 as a member of the IMF commission.

Every year each member country is

visited by the IMF. The visiting commission looks at the economy and makes recommendations. The IMF, according to Budhoo, perpetrated the worst kinds of statistical fraud in an attempt to force the government to introduce certain kinds of policies.

The IMF used a particular statistical index, relative unit labor cost, which measures the cost of labor in one country compared with labor costs of other countries. It turned out the labor cost in Trinidad and Tobago was not only too high but was also escalating. The IMF said that over a period of time it was going up as much as 147 percent. In truth, the relative labor cost had only gone up by 60 percent.

Based on its faulty figures, the IMF advocated a massive currency devaluation. This was one of the reasons why the government devalued its currency from \$1 U.S./\$2.40 TT to \$1 U.S./\$3.60 TT in 1985.

That was one example of using statistical fraud to put pressure on the government to drop the cost of labor through devaluation. They also used that fraudulent figure to pressure the government and the private sector to drive down the cost of labor by negotiating with unions to cut wages and remove benefits.

They also manipulated the figures relating to the government's financial deficit. The government was running a deficit and the IMF manipulated the figures to show that the deficit was much larger than it was. They tried to pressure the government into reducing certain kinds of expenditures and social services and to increase the cost of public utilities. Between 1984 and '87 the cost of utilities rose by as much as 300 percent.

Budhoo claimed that the IMF was proposing that the government sabotage the constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. Under the constitution there is a body known as the Public Utilities Commission. The public utilities commission is the sole authority that can establish and set the price for electricity, water and telephone service. The IMF advocated that the PUC should be subverted and the government itself should set the rates, in contravention to the constitution.

The IMF has been clearly manipulative in Trinidad and Tobago. The harsh penalties they have imposed constitute interference in the independence of our country.

WM: What is the potential for building solidarity between U.S. and Trinidadian workers?

ABDULAH: There is a common basis for solidarity. We face the same employers that U.S. workers face. We face the same labor issues — plant closures, retrenchment, the introduction of new technology — it is exactly the same in the U.S. as it is in Trinidad and

Tobago.

The basis in political economy of that solidarity is this: There is a global reorganization of production taking place. That global reorganization of production is based on the new technology of the microchip, robotics and microelectronics.

The introduction of robotics has affected autoworkers in a major way. The capitalists are trying to use the new technology to consolidate their power and wealth by weakening the power of labor. If you have robots on the assembly line you don't get strikes, walkouts and protests. You don't have to pay vacation, medical benefits and sick and maternity leave. If the robot falls apart, you just pull him out and plug in another one.

This new technology affects entire countries because the entire earnings of many countries are dependent on one industry. That is the basis of solidarity of working people all across the world. There is this new technology and the employers are using it to strengthen their position and to gain more wealth by marginalizing workers, planning us out of work and destroying economies.

In the initial period we have to struggle for a shorter working day and a shorter working week. The new technology means that more production is possible in a shorter space of time. Therefore, more wealth can be created in a shorter space of time. Consequently, workers don't need to work as long.

A worker should work five, six or seven hours a day and not have a reduction in their earnings. What we can produce in five hours today used to take eight or ten hours to produce under the old technology.

We celebrate the world over on May Day, marking the historic struggle for the eight-hour day. We have to begin a new struggle for a shorter working day, a shorter working week, just like the workers of Chicago did in the 1870s.

We need to build an international solidarity movement combining committees all across the world to achieve a shorter working week.

If that new technology is in the hands of the workers, is the basis for a new society. The Industrial Revolution was the basis of the establishment of capitalism. This second industrial revolution can be the basis of establishing another new society. If this technology is in the hands of workers we can produce so much that it can be distributed for the benefit of all mankind.

Ultimately, that has to be the objective of the solidarity movement that we must build.

In 1937, the working class of Trinidad arose in a wave of anti-colonial sentiment. It was obvious to all that the conditions for such an uprising existed in the colony. Poverty was the rule rather than the exception, unemployment was high.

Workers slaved away in the fields and the refineries under backward and dangerous conditions. The work was hard since there were few machines to ease the burden of labor. Working hours were long, with many injuries to life and limb and little or no compensation. Housing was a major problem, health services almost non-existent and some workers only earned seven cents an hour.

On top of the conditions was an unsympathetic Colonial Government whose interests were bound hand and foot to the big oil companies. The antagonism was heightened by the overt racist attacks on the workers by the white bosses and managers. This attitude was typified in the comment by one manager, "These Black dogs only bark, they cannot bite." Total subservience for the working class was the order of the day.

The workers themselves, though, were deeply conscious of their plight and realized that the only way out was to fight back. They had nothing to lose. It was in this milieu that Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler emerged to voice the sentiments that the workers had been developing for some time. He provided the leadership necessary to transform the idea of struggle into reality.

He held hundreds of meetings throughout the oilbelt during the period 1936-37. The response was nothing short of tumultuous. His meetings provoked much discussion and debate among the thousands who came out to listen to him.

After these meetings, workers would spend hours in the fields, in the shops, and on the streets discussing their problems and deciding what must be done. This whole period was one of mass political awakening and agitation. Butler was telling the people to prepare for action — for it was only action that would alleviate their problems.

The strike began in the Apex Oilfields in Fyzabad, in the early hours of the morning of June 19, 1937. Within a few hours, it had spread to most oilfields, the word of the strike being relayed by contingents of workers on bicycles.

The struggle soon became nationwide, embracing workers from the sugar plantations as well as those who labored in Port of Spain. The workers were struggling to improve their very quality of life — better wages, improved housing, proper provisions for health, a workmen's compensation ordinance and unemployment compensation were but some of the demands.

The call for Home Rule was another rallying cry of the workers, as they believed at the time that the achievements of Home Rule would be a step forward in their struggle to determine their destiny. Demonstrations, marches and acts of sabotage were the means that the workers thought best capable of bringing about their objectives.

The colonial government reacted in a fashion characteristic to its nature, by bringing in troops and marines, who, coupled with the local police, set about viciously crushing the uprising. The uprising lasted until July 2, by which time armed forces of the capitalists had killed 14 people and left hundreds of others wounded. A temporary halt had been put on the aspirations of the people.

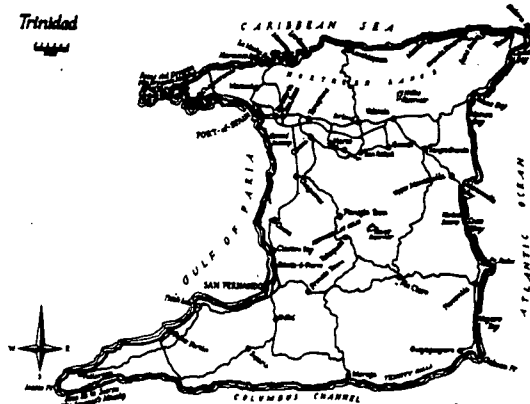
It was out of this political situation that the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union was born, and from its inception it was imbued with the spirit of the 1937 movement. The Oilfield Workers' Trade Union was created because the workers needed an organization to defend their interests against the employers. It was a natural and historic step for the oilworkers to take.

Established on July 25, 1937, the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union soon became a word on the lips of every oilworker and his family. After a number of clandestine meetings held on Lum Tack Hill in Fyzabad, the first official meeting was held at one Mr. Williams' quarters, Coon's Town, Forest Reserve, Fyzabad, on July 15, 1937.

The Conference to establish the union

The origin of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union

Trinidad



nificant too was that many meetings were held under the auspices of the OWTU and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Trade Union, of which Adrian Cola Rienzi was also first president. The close working-class links between the workers in oil and sugar had its beginning with Butler in 1937.

Because of a warrant for his arrest, Butler went into hiding and was out of the mainstream of the early organizational work of the Union. The person whom Butler entrusted with that responsibility was Rienzi, and he and the other Executive officers openly canvassed support in the name of Butler.

It was generally understood by workers that on Butler's return to public life he would be at the helm of the OWTU, as it was his rightful place as leader of the working class. This, however, was not to be.

Butler had come out of hiding on September 27, 1937, to give evidence before the Forster Commission, on the undertaking by the governor that he would be free. He was, however, immediately arrested and was not released until May 1939. Throughout this period, the Union had consolidated its position in the Oilfields.

On his release, Butler was given a hero's welcome, and to the surprise of many was made — not president general of the union — but general organizer. The differences between the philosophy of Butler and that of Rienzi were beginning to appear.

Butler immediately threw himself into his activities as general organizer — mobilizing the workers for another confrontation with the companies to win better wages. The executive of the Union, headed by Rienzi, did not approve of Butler's militancy. They were already showing signs of compromise with the employers.

According to the acting governor, the Executive had "developed a real sense of responsibility." When the workers at the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Operating Co. went on strike on July 6, 1939, Butler supported them, the Executive did not. As a result, Butler was twice called before the Executive to explain his position. He refused to go, sending excuses on both occasions. The Executive then turned their backs on Butler and expelled him from the union on August 3, 1939.

The split between Butler and Rienzi came about essentially because of two different views of working-class struggle. Rienzi had wanted the trade union as an institution of the workers, to become what the colonial officials had desired — "an organized means of collective bargaining through which the claims or grievances of the workpeople could have found ample means of expression."

It was the opinion of the governor that had these trade unions existed prior to 1937 "the disturbances might have been avoided."

Butler's view, and that of the workers, was the opposite. They needed a fighting organization that could bring the companies and the Colonial Government to their knees. The workers felt that only in this way could they effect a fundamental change in their lives.

Adapted from Fifty Years of Progress, a history of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (Vanguard Publications: San Fernando, Trinidad, W.I., 1968).



The Grenada Revolution: 10 years after



by Lou Turner

Because March 1989 will mark the tenth anniversary of the Grenada Revolution, my next two "Black World" columns will be devoted to a discussion of the fate of that revolution which came to so tragic an end in October, 1983. This issue I have turned over my column to present excerpts of an interview I had with David Abdullah, a Trinidadian revolutionary who is the treasurer of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union of Trinidad-Tobago, and the convenor of the recently formed political party, the Committee of Labour Solidarity. This will be followed next month by an examination of Raya Dunayevskaya's political-philosophic letter of Nov. 28, 1983, "Counter-Revolution and Revolution: Grenada, the Caribbean Today, and the Challenge from 30 Years of Movements from Practice That Were Themselves Forms of Theory," and its relationship to the present situation in the Caribbean.

Black World

(continued from page 1)

they saw that the possibility of something new was now smashed. Many then had to retreat and assess the whole situation.

We in the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU) have had a very close relationship with the progressive movement throughout the Eastern Caribbean. Maurice, of course, being one of those people. Maurice often visited our union to give lectures before he became prime minister. And the last time he visited Trinidad, in July 1983, for the Caribbean heads of government summit (CARICOM), he specially requested a reception at the OWTU.

We also knew Bernard Coard because he was a lecturer at the University (of the West Indies) campus in Trinidad for many years, at the Institute of International Relations. Bernard was known as a progressive lecturer, but he was not known as a "Marxist." In the period when Maurice and others were being beaten, brutalized and killed in Grenada under Gairy, Bernard was out of Grenada for that entire period.

After 1979, we were always concerned about Bernard's position because of his relation to a number of groups in the region whom we identified as trying to impose a type of political culture that was quite alien to the experience of the Caribbean people, and in our view tended to be very elitist. So, we were rather estranged from Bernard and others in Grenada for a number of years, and had to rectify that with Maurice in 1982. We only began to resume a close relationship in 1983, and were about to cement that just around the time he was killed.

CRISIS OF THE PARTY

When we first heard that Maurice was under house arrest we had absolutely no hesitation in supporting him. We tried to intervene in that crisis by sending messages to the government that they should free Maurice from house arrest. Of course, they didn't listen to what we had to say. And immediately at the time of Maurice's murder, that night we held a massive vigil in Port-of-Spain with thousands and thousands of people

Historically, there has been a very close connection between Grenada and Trinidad-Tobago. There are more Grenadians in Trinidad than in Grenada. In fact, we have a saying that the working class of Grenada is in Trinidad because the industrial working class is so minute in Grenada. So, culturally and in terms of families who have relatives in both Grenada and Trinidad, there is a very close relation between the two.

Therefore, what happened in Grenada in March of 1979 (the overthrow of the Eric Gairy regime) was very important to Trinidad-Tobago, and the whole Eastern Caribbean. There was a certain sense of pride that emerged. After March 13, 1979, all of a sudden people admitted being Grenadian who had never done so before. When you have someone like Maurice (Bishop) who epitomized what Grenada was all about, and who had such a deep concern for the people of Grenada and for the people of the whole Caribbean and expressed it in very concrete ways, the entire region began to say that something new is happening.

THE NEW SMASHED

When Oct. 19, 1983 came (the murder of Maurice Bishop and others by the military led by Hudson Austin and Bernard Coard), there was equal shock throughout the region. Everyone felt it very, very deeply when

(continued on page 9)

On Grenada's Revolution

in solidarity with the people of Grenada.

The lessons, therefore, that arise out of the whole Grenadian experience is that as part of the struggle for change in the Caribbean we must build a new kind of democracy which has two interrelated aspects: one is that there must be democratic institutions of workers' and people's power, institutions that have real power in society; and the other aspect is that there should be a new kind of political party.

One of the traditions that came out of Grenada which we need to deal with is that the party must control the trade unions, the party must control the government totally, etc. In Grenada, this boiled down to 14 or so people in the Central Committee of the Political Bureau controlling everything.

Our view is that the trade unions must be independent of any political party. The power of the OWTU is predicated on a) its internal democracy (one man, one vote), and b) its independence from all the political parties. And we say that that must continue even after a fundamental change has taken place in the country, so that the party wouldn't control the trade unions and we end up with the kind of revolt that happened in Poland.

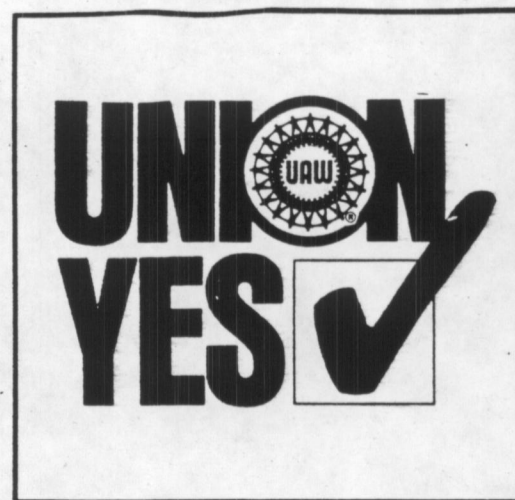
When the Grenada events took place in October, 1983, there was a constitutional committee beginning its work. It is our view that the new constitution would have given power, for the first time, to the parish councils and the zonal councils that had been established by the PRG (People's Revolutionary Government). Yes, state officials had to come before the people's councils and explain why this or that was done, etc., but the councils didn't have enough power. Clearly, had those institutions been vested with real power, it would have reduced the power of the party, and therefore, would have reduced the power of Coard. Coard had to move before that process had gone too far.

The Grenadian revolution, in our view, was destroyed with the murder of Maurice. The destruction of the Grenadian revolution took place from within. Its fate, of course, was sealed by the American invasion. But the American invasion isn't what destroyed the revolution itself. It is what took place inside.

DETROIT

Detroit is known for at least two reasons: economically it is the home of the US automobile industry and culturally it is the home of the *Motown Sound* that has been a leader in popular music all over the world.

Trade Unions are central institutions, and while they give working people some say they are limited by the racism, sexism, and backward politics of their top leadership and staff. However, the political socialization of Black workers in Detroit trade union locals has contributed to a militant political culture in which progressive institutions and leaders have been nurtured.



UAW Local 600 is the largest trade union local in the USA. Its history is rooted in heroic struggle of white and Black workers. Abdullah is pictured here with General Baker a leading trade unionist and revolutionary political activist. "Gen" emerged as a leader of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers founded in the 1960s. He has remained active since then as a leading member of the Communist Labor Party.



Inside Facts:	Re-Elect Agnes DeBrensd State Representative, City of Dearborn 31st District Democrat UAW Endorsed Candidate page 86	Back in Time Local #600 History Endorsement By UAW/CAP Page 7	Social Activism Plus Monroe & Washburn County Endorsements Page 9
		Page 8	Page 10

"The Strength of Our Union is Determined by the Degree of our Concern for Each Other" — Bob King

UAW

Once A Month PAID CIRCULATION 50,000 COPIES

LOCAL 600

OFFICIAL ORGAN WORLDS LARGEST LOCAL UNION

Facts

VOL. 50—NO. 10 OCTOBER 29, 1988

October 29, 1988

UAW FACTS

Page 9

— SOCIAL ACTIVISM —

—Walter P. Reuther

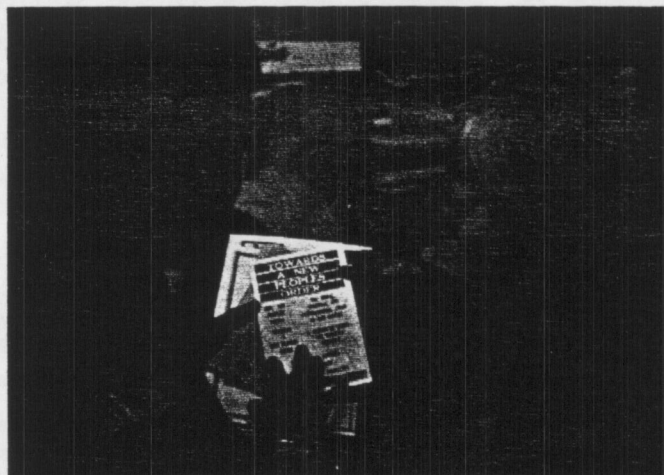
The labor movement is about that problem we face tomorrow morning. Damn right! But to make that the sole purpose of the labor movement is to miss the main target. I mean, 'What good is a dollar an hour more in wages if your neighborhood is burning down? What good is another week's vacation if the lake you used to go to is polluted and you can't swim in it and the kids can't play in it? What good is another \$100 pension if the world goes up in atomic smoke?'



Abdulah gave a detailed briefing to the editors of *Labor Notes*, a national newsletter representing a militant rank and file political perspective.



Abdulah made a presentation to and had a lively exchange with the editorial staff of *Against the Current* a nationally distributed monthly magazine of the organization Solidarity. Here he presents Solidarity National Committee member Joann Misnik with a recent publication by the OWTU.



Abdulah made a presentation to the Executive Committee of the Phylon Social, the Black Faculty and Staff organization at Wayne State University. WSU enrolls more Black students than any other historically white university in the USA. On the left in the photograph is Dr. Geneva Smitherman, an internationally renowned linguist currently doing research on language and class consciousness among auto workers in Detroit.



Abdulah was a guest in the home of Norma Hill, a leading organizer of the Michigan Anti-Apartheid Coalition. Also there were member of the local Haitian community. In addition to a presentation on current events in Trinidad-Tobago the discussion took up Haiti and general Caribbean issues.



WORLD NEWS

Union leader: *Trinidad suffering for opposition to Grenada invasion*

By Rose Enlow

Detroit- Trinidad and Tabago are suffering as a direct result of the twin islands' opposition to the U.S. invasion of Grenada. That was the message of David Abdulla, Director and Treasurer of Education and Research for the Oil Field Workers Union in Trinidad, W.I.

Abdulla was in Detroit on Thursday November 17 as one stop on his mission to America to expose the conditions under which the two Caribbean countries exist.

Speaking at the Walter Reuther Library on Wayne State's campus, Abdulla addressed members of the Phylon Society.

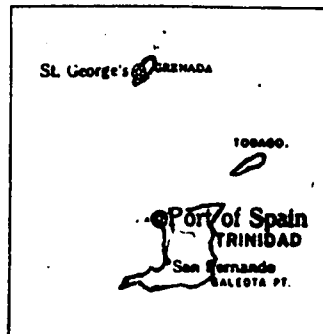
Abdulla said Trinidad, an oil economy, is like most Third World countries, in that it has primarily one major export commodity. That has been oil for most of this decade.

Trinidad has one of the oldest oil industries in the world. Its first refinery was built in 1910, the first oil well was drilled in 1860. The first commercial production began just about the turn of the century, Abdulla related.

He says although substantial in the beginning, Trinidad's oil industry is not large now, but has had historical importance to Western countries. Abdulla says the oil boom took off in 1973, when the the OPEC intervention led to rapid increases in the price of oil.

He said the economy of the Trinidad and Tobago oil boom, generated a surplus of some 30 billion U.S. dollars between 1974 and 1981. Half of that went to the government via taxes, the other half to corporations and banks, both local and foreign.

Abdulla said this dollar amount is for a population of 1.2 million people and includes



both Trinidad and Tobago. He said the population of Tobago is very small, with only 50,000 people.

Abdulla said for colonial convenience, Tobago was linked to Trinidad by the British in 1889, and had been previously linked administratively by the British to Grenada. Grenada is the next island of the chain, Trinidad, Tobago and then Grenada.

Thus when the U.S. invaded Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago naturally opposed this action.

The two islands gained independence in 1962.

Abdulla said during the oil boom period of seven years, a surplus of 30 billion U.S. dollars would have provided the basis for the fundamental transformation of the economy, and established the platform for self reliance, economic growth and development, as well as established the basis for an end to persistent poverty of the people.

Abdulla says Trinidad's problems were two-fold. First, the transformation did not take place despite the oil boom, and second, as a result of Trinidad's disdain for the U.S. invasion of Grenada, the U.S. refused to continue to purchase oil from Trinidad, shutting down its oil boom.

Abdulla said during the oil boom, unemployment dropped from 70% at the start in 1973, to

10% at the boom's end in 1981. He said unemployment in Trinidad has ballooned back to 23% currently, representing approximately 105,000 jobless people.

He said the actual number of unemployed is much greater, but people who are not seeking employment are not counted in the labor force. The real standard of living of people has fallen dramatically. Real wages have fallen by 25% in the last four years as a result of either wage freezes or cut backs, or as a combined result of inflation.

According to Abdulla, this economic crisis has effected the trade union movement. Its membership has gone from a peak of 21,000 in 1981 and is now down to 11,000. He said most of the other industrial unions have been hard hit by retrenchment.

Abdulla said the economic crisis has led to a severe social crisis.

Children are not able to attend school due to parents lack of available funds for books.

Hospitals are operating without drugs, prisons are overcrowded, nine prisoners to a cell. The prison officers are saying they can't cope with the situation. The police officers can't cope with the crime, which has been accelerated not only by the unemployment, but also by increased cocaine usage.

Abdulla said now Trinidad is one of the main transport points for cocaine from South America to the U.S. as, Trinidad is seven miles off the coast of Venezuela, the closest point. He said when cocaine is transported over land from Columbia into Venezuela, the small fishing boats carry it across the water into Trinidad and try to ship it for consumption locally. Abdulla admitted, "Once cocaine is prevalent, so are crime and guns."

Abdulla said the Oilfields

Workers Union is the oldest trade union in Trinidad and Tabago and one of the oldest unions of the English speaking Caribbean. He says it was formed in 1937, just days after the general strike and political revolt. He says the Union was born out of a vision by the working people, not only to improve wages and conditions at work, but also for an end to racism.

He said there were South African managers in the oil-fields fighting for the right to vote and the right to proper education, health care, and social justice, housing, and a right to independence.

He said the union is much more than just a traditional trade union. It is very much a movement of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean for social economic and political justice for all the people.

Abdulla also represents a political organization, The Committee for Legal Solidarity, which groups together many leaders and activists in the trade union movement. He has been working for the past seven years towards the establishment of a labor-based political party.

He says last Saturday, the union had a massive convocation, which 1200 people attended, representing working people from all over the country to form a labor-based party before the end of April 1989. Abdulla is Chairman of the party called CLS.

Abdulla said there was a massive sentiment among the people of Trinidad and Tobago to remove the PNM party, Trinidad's main political party.

Abdulla said Trinidad's population is more than half of African descent, former slaves; half of the people of Indian descent through forced immigration to the Caribbean.

The racial differences have been exploited by politicians, he said.

BOSTON

Boston is a city known for mental labor, as it is the home for a large number of educational-research institutions, including Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But it is also a city of workers, including relatively segregated Black workers whose experiences vary distinctly from the high profile image of the city.



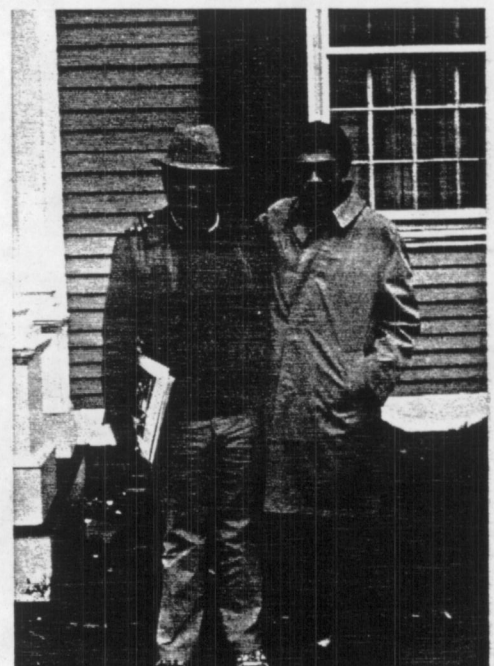
Throughout the tour Abdulah was interviewed on radio, television, for newspapers and magazines. Here he is pictured while appearing at the radio station of Boston College. The program is a very popular program of music from the Caribbean, especially Haiti. It was a fun program with progressive radio hosts.



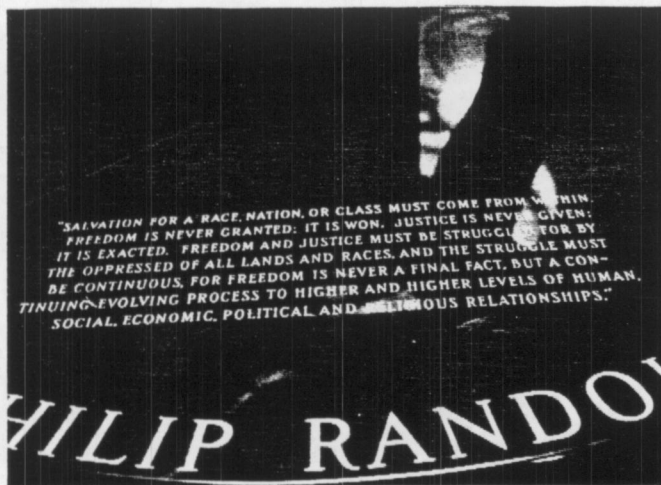
Abdulah is pictured here in Harvard Square with James Jennings, a prolific young Afro-Puerto Rican political scientist. Jennings has written the best recent work on Puerto Rican politics in New York City, and along with Mel King, he has been a major analyst of Black and progressive politics in Boston. He is now on the faculty of the University of Massachusetts in Boston.



Abdulah is pictured here with activists in the Black community of Boston.



Abdulah is here with Professor Selwyn Cudjoe, a national of Trinidad-Tobago, who is currently teaching literature at Wellsley College. This is but one example of many connections with Trinidad-Tobago nationals who enthusiastically embraced the motion of the OWTU and the CLS. Each person wanted to know what was happening, how it compared to other/previous political movements, and how they could get involved. What became clear right away is that everyone has a role to play, in Trinidad-Tobago as well as the USA.

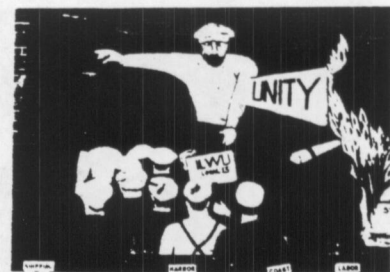


Abdulah is pictured here with Bill Fletcher, a union organizer for the UAW and a leading activist in the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. They are standing in front of a statue of A. Philip Randolph, a historic 20th century Black trade unionist and civil rights activist. His quote reflects the militancy of his youth when he organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.



The Indispensable Ally

*Black Workers
and the Formation of the
Congress of Industrial Organizations,
1934-1941*



by Bill Fletcher, Jr.

and

Peter Agard

RALEIGH

Raleigh is a city in North Carolina, part of the *New South*. This applies to a privileged strata however, as the bottom of the city is still stuck in the old south. From the superexploitation of the cotton fields to the textile mills, from the tobacco fields to welfare and public housing, the masses of Black and white people have been catching hell in the south for the last two hundred years and more.

However North Carolina is also a field of battle as the people have fought back against oppression at every stage of history. The modern Black student movement was born there at Shaw University, located in Raleigh. Shaw is a small campus of mainly Black students, that hosted the founding meeting of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in April 1960.

North Carolina was also the home of the Malcolm X Liberation University, the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU, that became the Youth Organization for Black Unity), and their Newspaper the *African World* and the organization of the African Liberation Day Demonstrations with the African Liberation Support Committee.

Currently, North Carolina is one of the main places for the Ku Klux Klan. On November 3, 1979, five members of the Communist Workers Party were gunned down in a demonstration by the KKK while the TV cameras filmed the entire event. Further more, North Carolina is one of the most punitive states, and has a notorious prison system and liberally uses the death penalty.

When a movement takes hold in North Carolina it has a great impact on the rest of the country. The Black movement is taking off again in North Carolina with the organization of the Black Workers for Justice, a rank and file organization of progressive Black workers and trade unionists, organizing workers and fighting their battles. We were the guests of the Black Workers for Justice in two cities, Raleigh and Rocky Mount.



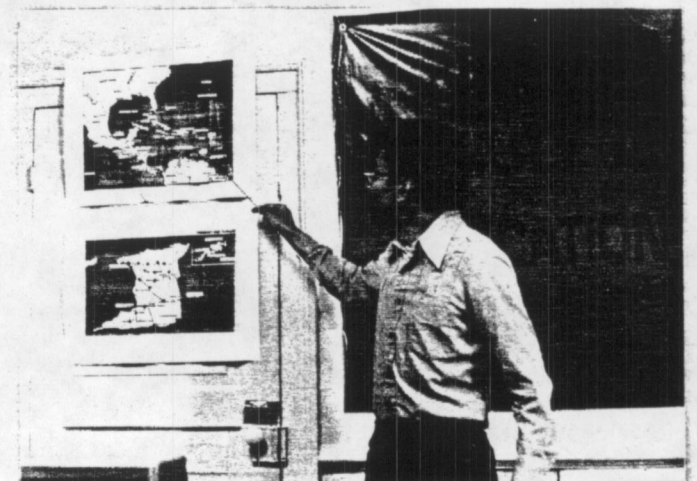
Justice Speaks is the official newspaper of the Black Workers for Justice. The editor made a brief presentation in the forum held at the Workers Center in Rocky Mount.



Each of these workers spoke of the struggles at their work places. Black activists supporting white workers and building multi-national unity.



Adbulah spoke about the historical battles of the workers and farmers in Trinidad-Tobago. He explained in detail how the workers in North Carolina shared common experiences with the members of the OWTU and the CPTU. There was a warm comradely exchange that laid the basis for future cooperation and support.



Freedom Books
P.O. Box 26774
Raleigh
North Carolina 27611
Greetings to Oilfields Workers'
Trade Union
and
2nd Caribbean Peoples
Bookfair.

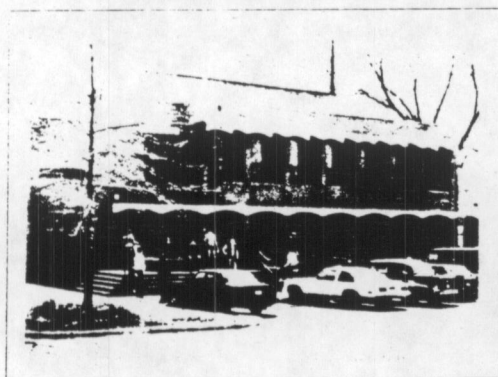


Comrade Gordon Dillihunt is a leading member of the Amilcar Cabral-Paul Robeson Collective, a member of the Black Workers for Justice, and the leading cadre of Freedom Books. He is also a leading trade unionist as a postal worker.

Freedom Books hosted David Abdulah for a talk. They had participated in the 2nd Caribbean Bookfair by distributing their newspapers and two documents, and advertising in the program.

INTERNATIONAL AND
ISLAMIC STUDIES CENTER

مركز
الدراسات الدولية والإسلامية



Shaw University officials with Chairman Arafat, Tunisia, 1984.



Shaw University has an International Center. Abdulah is shown here with members of a class on Caribbean politics after addressing them on the current situation in Trinidad-Tobago. This center has close ties with the middle east, especially the PLO.

JUSTICE SPEAKS

BLACK WORKERS FOR JUSTICE

Vol. 6 No. 4

December 88

Twenty-five Cents

page 7

TRINADADIAN TRADE UNIONIST SPEAKS IN N.C.



The Black Workers For Justice along with Twenty First Century Books and Freedom Books co-sponsored the North Carolina leg of a speaking tour by Brother David Abdullah, Educational Director of the Oil Field Workers Trade Union and the Committee for Labor Solidarity from Trinidad, a nation in the Caribbean Islands.

Brother Abdullah spoke at the Abner Berry Freedom Library and Workers Center in Rocky Mount, St Augustine and Shaw Universities and the Freedom Book Store in Raleigh.

The similarities in the history of oppression of the people of Trinidad and Tabago with African Americans were striking.

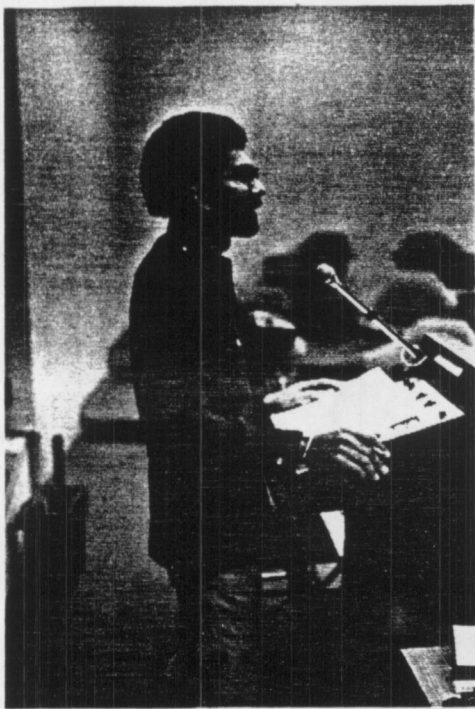
The understanding of the political and economic problems faced by workers throughout the world, and the strategy of the Trinidadian/Tabago workers amidst the many difficulties, was very inspiring.

The building of plants abroad by U.S. corporations in search of cheaper labor, has made international labor solidarity very important in the strategies of U.S. workers. Unless workers find ways to unite, the corporations will make workers from different nations believe that they are stealing each other's jobs. When the real blame lies with the corporations. There was talk after the Rocky Mount forum, about a possible delegation from the South going to Trinidad in 1989.

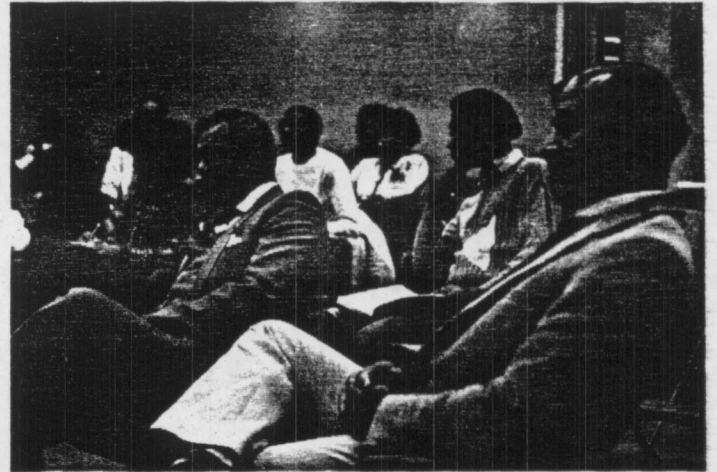
WASHINGTON, DC

Abdulah had friendly discussions of Caribbean wide issues and US foreign policy with Sir William Douglas, Barbados Ambassador to the USA.





An intense forum was hosted at Howard University by the Cribbean Students Association.



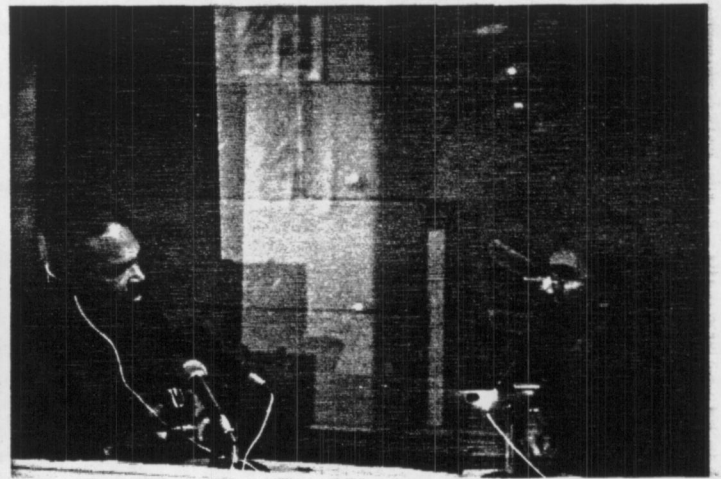
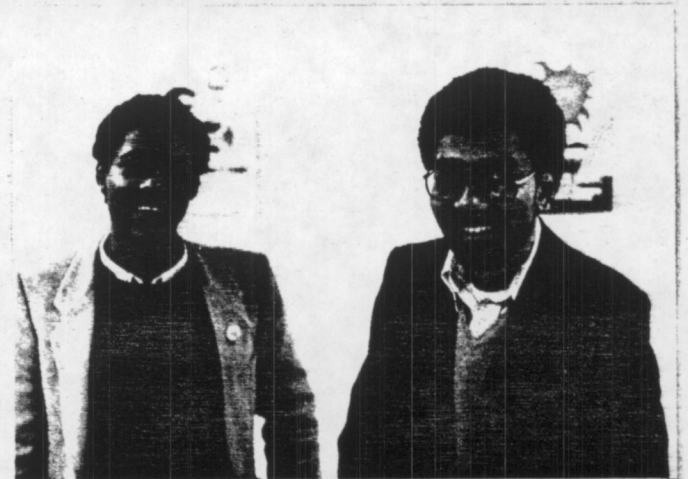
... with Jack O'Dell, Executive Director of the National Rainbow Coalition



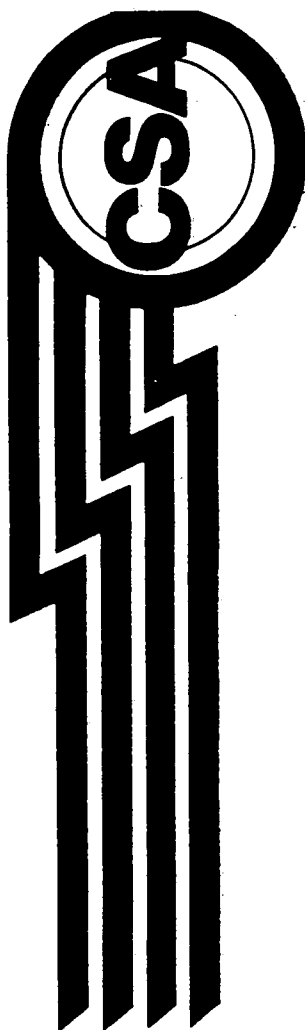
... with James Early of the *Frontline* newspaper.



... with the grandson of John Rojas.



Throughout the tour Abdulah was interviewed on radio.



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE

CARIBBEAN

FOCUS : Trinidad and Tobago.

CHAIRPERSON : Anthony A. Walcott-Joseph
Chairman, CSA Political Committee.

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

2. INTRODUCTION OF GUEST SPEAKER.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS : David Abdulla,

TOPIC : Recent Developments in Trinidad and Tobago :
IMF, World Bank, Debt and Politics.

3. COMMENTARY : Dr. Hilbourne Watson
Chairman, Department of Political Science.

4. PANEL DISCUSSION .

5. OPEN FORUM (Question and Answer Period).

Courtesy :

Dept. of Political Science.
Dept. of Economics.
Dept. of Sociology.
Dept. of Afro-American Studies.
Caribbean Students Association.

UNITY --> PROGRESS --> POWER

CARIBBEAN STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

presents

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO: IMF, WORLD BANK, DEBT & POLITICS

Speaker: **DAVID ABDULLA**
President of Oilfield Workers
Trade Union

Tuesday, November 22, 1988
Forum, Blackburn Center
8:00 p.m.

Co-sponsored by the Departments of:

Political Science : 636-6720

Economics : 636-6717

Sociology : 636-6853

Afro-American Studies : 636-7242



THE HILLTOP



Volume 72, Number 11

The Nation's Largest Black

November 18, 1988



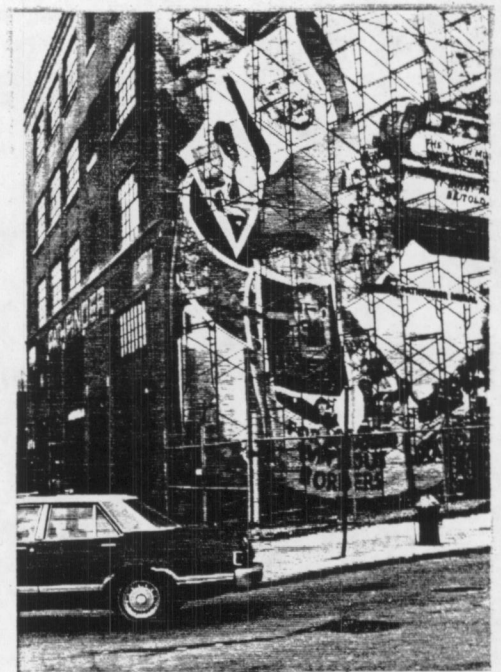
The Pan Masters steelband, all of whom are Howard University students and alumni, will be performing at this year's Christmas in the Caribbean celebration. The event, sponsored by the Caribbean Students Association, will be held on Dec. 8 at 7:30, in the Blackburn Center Ballroom.

WDCU-FM

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING FOR THE WEEK ENDING November 21- 25, 1988

TIME	MONDAY 11/21	TUESDAY 11/22	WEDNESDAY 11/23	THURSDAY 11/24	FRIDAY 11/25
12:00 NOON	CROSSTALK HOST: E. White OPEN LINES 1:00 CARMEN TURNER GENERAL MANAGER OF METRO	CROSSTALK HOST: E. White PEACE PARK VIGIL (HOMELESS) ELLEN THOMAS 12:45 ACT-SO PROGRAM- NAACP SAM JOHNSON 1:30 OIL FIELD WORKERS TRADE UNION DAVID ABDUALLA	CROSSTALK HOST: E. White ARE YOUNG BLACKS FOR- SAKING JAZZ FELIX GRANT HILTON FELTON	CROSSTALK HOST: E. White HAPPY THANKSGIVING! GOSPEL SPECIAL	CROSSTALK HOST: E. White WHO'S TO BLAME IN PRESSURING TO HAVE INTERCOURSE? (MALE OR FEMALE) TAKEISHA ROACH TAREN BRADLEY
2:00 PM		MUNDO LATINO HOST: N. Carvajal	CONVERSATIONS FOR CONSUMERS produced by the Council of Better Business Bureaus	FOCUS produced by Longhorn Radio Network	
6:30 PM	MAIDEN VOYAGE HOST: E. ETHELBERG MILLER	THE LAW & YOU HOST: KEVIN CHAVOUS	MEDICAL RECORD HOSTS: Dr. Peters	START-UP HOST: P. Woolfolk	CAPITAL SPORTS HOST: DR. LEE MCELROY

NEW YORK CITY



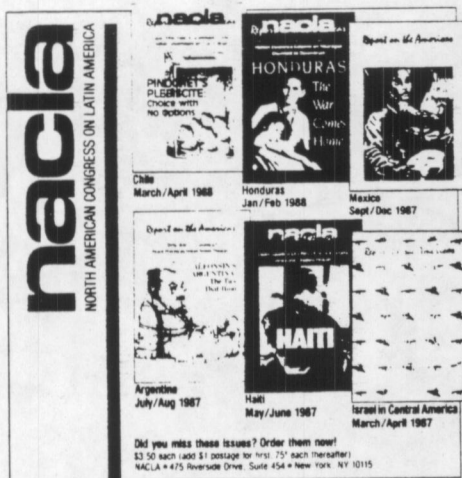
Mural site at headquarters of
Pathfinder Press in New York City.

Abdulah spread the message of OWTU and CLS in New York City

... the *Militant* Newspaper



... WBAI radio, with Jesse Keyes



... at North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)



MONTHLY REVIEW

... at *Monthly Review* with Paul
Sweezy and Harry Magdoff



... with other trade union officials.



... at the New York Marxist School
with Prof Rod Thurton.



... with the editors of *The City Sun*.



Crisis in Trinidad and Tobago leading to 'tumultuous times'

Interview with leader of Oilfields Workers' Trade Union

BY JAMES HARRIS
AND DON ROJAS

Trinidad and Tobago is in the midst of a deepgoing economic, social, and political crisis. That was the clear conclusion from our visit to that country of 1.2 million people in order to participate in the Second Caribbean Bookfair in October, and to launch the new Pathfinder book *One People, One Destiny: The Caribbean and Central America Today*.

During our trip we were able to interview Errol McLeod, president general of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (OWTU). With 11,000 members, the OWTU is the largest industrial union in the English-speaking Caribbean, and has a history of leading important working-class struggles.

"I see us having some tumultuous times in Trinidad and Tobago," McLeod told us as he described the crisis his country is undergoing.

Trinidad and Tobago, he said, has a "neocolonial economy" that is "organized to satisfy the needs of the multinational corporations," such as the 200 U.S. corporations doing business there.

Like other semicolonial countries economically dominated by the United States, Britain, and other imperialist countries, Trinidad and Tobago is especially vulnerable to shifts in the world market. In particular, the drop in the price of oil — the country's main source of revenue — has led in recent years to a growing strangulation of its economy. In 1987, for example, the Gross National Product shrank by 6.1 percent, after having contracted 5.5 percent in 1986. The trend has not abated over the last year. The decline has also affected the OWTU, which has lost 10,000 members.

Added to the drop in oil prices, a recent series of floods has devastated agricultural production, hitting the country's working farmers hardest of all.

International Monetary Fund

Within this framework of economic decline, what weighs most heavily on Trinidad and Tobago's economy today is its foreign debt of \$471 million to bankers in New York, London, and other financial centers. Unable to service this debt, which, proportionately speaking, is gigantic, the government has recently sought \$143 million in new loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But in return for granting the loans, the IMF has imposed a series of stringent conditions.

McLeod listed some of these:

"The IMF has prescribed large-scale devaluation of the country's currency.

"It has prescribed that the government should reduce its wage bill by some TT\$2 billion [US\$470 million], or alternatively, that the government should retrench 50,000 workers."

In response, the government devalued the Trinidad and Tobago dollar by 15 percent in August, thereby raising prices of imported goods. Since most consumer goods are imported, this amounted to a general price hike without an offsetting increase in wages.

On November 16 shortly after we spoke with McLeod, the Trinidadian government announced plans to eliminate the jobs of 10,000 public employees within the next two years — 15 percent of the total number. This comes at a time when unemployment already stands at 22 percent — twice as high as six years ago.

At the same time, the government instituted a 10 percent across-the-board pay cut for all public employees, on top of taking steps to withhold agreed-to cost-of-living increases.

"The IMF has also prescribed that there should be the removal of import barriers," McLeod continued, and that "there should be the removal of price controls." This will mean "the poorest of the poor will be the hardest hit in that regard." The government has already agreed to these conditions, also announcing plans to impose a series of in-



Errol McLeod

direct taxes that will disproportionately affect working people.

On top of these austerity measures, moves are also under way to undermine Trinidad and Tobago's national sovereignty by selling off state-owned enterprises — what is called privatization — to the highest bidder, usually to foreign corporations.

"The IMF has prescribed privatization of those areas in the economy that we have under national control. That would be in food, steel, hotel industry, even the public

utilities," stated McLeod.

What privatization means concretely can be seen by what is happening to workers at the state-owned T&T Meat Processors, Ltd. The Trinidadian government is currently attempting to sell off that enterprise and lay off its entire work force. In response, the workers — who are members of the OWTU — have occupied the plant in opposition to the move.

'IMF must go!'

The IMF's blackmail, and the government's measures acceding to it, have already called forth a round of protest by Trinidadian working people.

On October 21, more than 3,000 workers marched through the capital city of Port of Spain chanting "IMF must go!" and expressing their opposition to the government's moves.

At the close of a rally at the Parliament building, the OWTU issued a resolution of 35 demands to be presented to the government. These included a moratorium on layoffs, stopping privatization of government-owned industries, a 50 percent cut in the food import bill, reintroduction of cost-of-living clauses in public service workers' contracts, and an end to devaluations of the national currency.

The OWTU

Not accidentally, the center of growing opposition by working people to the latest measures is the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union. We asked McLeod to explain why this is so and describe more about the union.

"The OWTU is what you might call an omnibus [amalgamated] union. It organizes and represents workers in the oil industry — oil and petrochemical. It also organizes workers in the electricity company, workers in agriculture, workers in the hotel industry. We are in manufacturing, we are in food. We are in construction. So one might say that we are in almost every sector of the economy," McLeod said.

Don Rojas to speak in U.S.

BY DOUG COOPER

NEW YORK — Don Rojas, the well-known Caribbean journalist and political activist, will speak February 23 at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, on "Ten Years After the Grenada Revolution: The Caribbean and Central America Today."

The meeting, sponsored by the West Indian Students' Association, will take place at 7:00 p.m. in the Clark Room of the Student Union.

Rojas worked in revolutionary Grenada from 1980 to 1983. He was the editor of the *Free West Indian* newspaper and later press secretary to Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. Bishop was murdered in a counter-revolutionary coup in October 1983. Since the U.S. invasion in 1983, Rojas remains barred from Grenada by the U.S.-imposed regime.

Rojas edited a recently published book by Pathfinder, *One People, One Destiny: The Caribbean and Central America Today*. It contains speeches by leaders of the Anti-Imperialist Organizations of the Caribbean and Central America. Founded in Havana in 1984, this organization embraces 43 political organizations from more than 20 countries in the region. Rojas is the secretary for propaganda and information.

His talk will detail the increasingly explosive social, economic, and political conditions in the Caribbean and Central America today. Rojas attended the recent 30th anniversary celebrations of the Cuban revolution in Havana and then spent two weeks in Nicaragua.

Rojas will be available to speak throughout the next few months. Information on

arrangements and honoraria can be obtained from his publisher. Write or call Pathfinder, 410 West St., New York, N.Y. 10014. Telephone: (212) 741-0690.

from Pathfinder

ONE PEOPLE ONE DESTINY

\$5.95

The Caribbean and Central America Today

Edited by Don Rojas, press secretary to Grenada's late Prime Minister Maurice Bishop

The struggle in Nicaragua and El Salvador, impact of the Grenada revolution, U.S. militarization of Puerto Rico, Panama's struggle for sovereignty, and the region's crushing foreign debt. These topics are discussed in speeches and resolutions drawn from the Anti-Imperialist Organizations of the Caribbean and Central America. 115 pp. \$5.95. Sold at bookstores listed on page 12 or by mail from Pathfinder, 410 West St., NY, NY 10014. Please add \$1 for postage.

"In terms of the areas of the economy in which we find ourselves, we are the most significant, the most powerful union in Trinidad and Tobago," he said, "and I feel happy to say that we are the most significant and powerful union in the English-speaking Caribbean."

Since the early 1960s, the union has become widely known for its militant stance on a wide range of issues. The government felt so threatened by the union's growth, McLeod recounted, that it enacted the Industrial Stabilization Act specifically to limit the OWTU's growth in other sectors of the economy.

"We see the OWTU as being more than just a trade union that will bargain for wages and improve conditions and employment," McLeod explained.

"The OWTU is about building a new society. And you cannot build that new society only by winning higher wages."

Along those lines, he explained, the OWTU has taken up broader issues, such as the foreign debt. For example, it sent representatives to a 1985 international conference in Havana, Cuba, on the foreign debt, and participated in last year's anti-IMF conference in West Berlin.

Another activity that the OWTU has begun to sponsor is the now annual Caribbean Bookfair, which it views as a way of drawing in broader layers of society and to heighten their political understanding. This event, McLeod said, "allows us to have other people come and interact with the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, meet with our international friends, benefit from the experiences of people from North America, people from Europe, people from Africa, and so on."

This approach fits into the OWTU's attempts to make contact with allies outside the labor movement. For example, the union has adopted positions favoring the country's working farmers, and has attempted to reach out to students and intellectuals.

The OWTU is also a leading member of the Congress of Progressive Trade Unions. McLeod explained that the CPTU is a federation that today has about 15 affiliated unions. It was the CPTU that sponsored the October 21 anti-IMF protest march.

Another federation, the Trinidad and Tobago Labour Congress (TTLCC), which is larger than the CPTU, receives funding from the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) and the AFL-CIO.

Political crisis

Trinidad and Tobago's sharp economic crisis and discontent among working people has already led to a shake-up in the country's capitalist political structures. In December 1986 this widespread dissatisfaction brought the recently formed National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) to power in an election after 30 years of rule by the People's National Movement. Since that time, however, the government of Prime Minister A.N.R. Robinson has been rocked by repeated government crises.

McLeod spelled out the origin of these: "Whatever Margaret Thatcher and Reagan prescribe, that is what Robinson follows," he said. "So that in 18 months, the NAR has become in our view the most hated bunch of people, at the leadership level, in all of Trinidad and Tobago."

The OWTU, explained McLeod, sees this political ferment as an opportunity to advance the interests of working people.

"The time when unions would have been concerning themselves only with wage negotiations and little local issues, that time is long gone," he said. "The leadership of the trade union movement, particularly the unions that are representing industrial workers, must begin to take a position on the political and economic issues affecting their countries."

"We have to intervene in the politics of our states," he continued. "We have to aim



Tomato farmers in Green Valley, Trinidad and Tobago. Recent floods in this Caribbean country have devastated agricultural production, worsening problems already facing working farmers.

Militant/Sam Manuel

to be in the ownership and control of our states. If we are not in control, then the two cents that we gained here, that we gained there, will be nothing, will be meaningless. If we are not in control of the politics, if we are not in power, then we cannot translate those trade union victories into anything that is meaningful."

Committee for Labour Solidarity

This view helps explain the initiative taken by the OWTU-supported Committee for Labour Solidarity (CLS) to form a new political party in Trinidad and Tobago.

"The Committee for Labour Solidarity is made up of some trade unionists, progressive intellectuals, small businessmen, farmers, some students," McLeod said. "We are saying that both the economy and the politics in the country must be addressed. You can't deal with one and leave out the other."

"The CLS was established on June 19, 1981," he explained. "We thought that we should get ourselves involved at the work place, we should get ourselves involved in the communities, relate with the problems at the work place and the communities. And in our education series, we thought it should deal with the questions of classes and society, with the question of the state, with all the questions of the economy and what kinds of decisions are taken and what influences those decisions, the class interest that the particular party in power will represent. And the people, then, understanding all these things that we have been able to relate with them, started calling for a party."

This sentiment was clearly expressed in the October 21 protest, when one of the favorite chants was "We want a party, amen! A workers' party, amen!"

During a visit to New York in November, OWTU leader David Abdullah reported that a November 12 assembly sponsored by the CLS drew 1,200 people and adopted a draft program of the proposed new party. It also announced plans to hold the founding conference before the end of April 1989.

McLeod explained that the new organization would be "a party that represents the interests of those classes that have been disadvantaged." The convocation of the November 12 meeting stated that this effort is directed toward "workers, farmers, unemployed, self-employed, youth, students, housewives, small businesspeople, and patriotic intellectuals and professionals."

Workers must come together

The OWTU's perspective, explained McLeod, goes beyond the shores of Trinidad and Tobago.

"I think that the workers in the United States of America, like the workers in the Soviet Union, the workers in Cuba, the workers in Great Britain, the workers in the Caribbean, all these workers must come together," he said.

"We have to come together on the question of the freedom of the people in southern Africa. We must come together on the question of the right to sovereignty of the people in Nicaragua. We must come together on the question of anti-imperialism generally."

In particular, the OWTU views itself as an integral part of the fight of working people throughout the Caribbean region. Many of their activities promote the goal of Caribbean unity, which, as McLeod stated, "is the broad perspective of the OWTU."

Grenada revolution

One development that had a big impact on the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union was

the 1979-83 revolution in nearby Grenada.

For years, the OWTU had maintained close relations with Grenada's revolutionary leaders. "We had a very important, a very close, a very intimate relationship with Maurice Bishop," McLeod related. "Indeed, I remember 1974 when Maurice Bishop came here to get away from the brutality that [Prime Minister Eric] Gairy had unleashed on them. And I remember Maurice and Unison Whiteman taking their shirts off to show us all the scars on their backs from the beatings by the Mongoose Gang."

"The OWTU was at its high point because of the revolutionary development in Grenada," explained McLeod. "Grenada

UN leader justifies Namibia report

BY SAM MANUEL

Under pressure from the Movement of Nonaligned Countries and the Organization of African Unity, Secretary General of the United Nations Javier Pérez de Cuellar issued an "explanatory statement" February 10 regarding UN forces for Namibia. The secretary general's aim was to offset opposition to a January 24 report to the UN Security Council that proposed reducing the number of UN peacekeeping troops to be sent to Namibia from 7,500 to 4,650.

The force is scheduled to arrive before April 1 when a UN plan to bring about Namibia's independence from South Africa is to begin. South Africa has militarily occupied that southwest African country since 1915. The 2,850 soldiers cut from the proposed force are to be held in reserve. They could be called into service at the discretion of the secretary general with the agreement of the Security Council.

The secretary general's statement said the permanent members of the Security Council have assured him that they would "respond promptly to any need for additional military personnel that I might deem warranted."

The permanent members of the Security Council — the United States, Soviet Union, China, France, and Britain — have demanded that the UN troops going to Namibia be reduced to 3,000. That proposal has been strongly opposed by the African and Nonaligned groups' representatives, seven of which are also rotating members of the Security Council.

"We want to see what form these assurances from the permanent members will take concretely," said Hinyangerwa Asheeke of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) Observer Mission to the UN. Asheeke termed "inaccurate and contradictory" a February 12 *New York Times* report, which said that the African and Nonaligned groups had accepted the secretary general's assurances.

In a January 29 speech to Namibian stu-

dents at Cuba's Isle of Youth, President Fidel Castro criticized the secretary general's report. "That report does not satisfy us. That report does not satisfy the Third World countries," Castro explained.

The outcome of the new stage of the battle for Namibia's independence, Castro added, "will not only depend on the UN soldiers that will be there, nor will it only depend on the civilian officials present."

"It is the Namibian people who will have to be mobilized and united to fight this last battle, this political battle," Castro said.

"That is why it has been said," the Cuban leader added, "that all Namibian students in Cuba who meet the age requirement to participate in the process should return to Namibia after the implementation of UN Resolution 435 to work on the tasks of educating and training the people, as well as to vote in the elections. Not a single vote can be lost," the Cuban leader stressed.

Following the elections the Namibian students would return to Cuba to finish their studies. But, explained Castro, "no one can guarantee that 100 percent of those who leave will return. . . . You are well-educated, prepared, organized, and disciplined. I think it is possible that SWAPO may need some of you there later."

Apartheid-trained police force

While the secretary general's report proposed to raise the number of UN police going to Namibia from 360 to 500, it reaffirmed an earlier Security Council position that "primary responsibility for maintaining law and order in Namibia" during the transition period shall rest with the "existing police forces."

The report requires the secretary general's Special Representative to Namibia to "satisfy himself" that the South African-appointed administrator-general ensures the "good conduct" and "suitability for continued employment" of the police force. The special representative would also make arrangements, when appro-

presented to the Caribbean an alternative that we had been talking about for a very long time, but which we were not able to put in place, as Maurice was able to."

In October 1983 the Bishop-led People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada was overturned by a coup organized by Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard. A week later U.S. troops invaded and imposed a government subservient to Washington.

"And the demise of that movement had serious consequences for us too," McLeod stated. "I know that quite a lot of people became disillusioned as a result of that."

But, the union leader continued, "These three revolutions — the Cuban, the Nicaraguan, the Grenadian — have helped a hell of a lot to develop our own consciousness." In particular, he stressed, "We have learned a hell of a lot from Cuba. . . . We have learned quite a lot of lessons from Fidel [Castro]."

Work stoppage

Since our discussion with McLeod, the level of working-class protest against the latest series of economic attacks has risen sharply. Currently, the country's two labor federations are planning a national one-day work stoppage to protest the government's 1989 IMF-imposed budget. The two main demands of the proposed action are to withdraw the budget and to convoke a national referendum on whether Trinidad and Tobago should be seeking new loans from the IMF.

This latest move highlights Errol McLeod's words about prospects for the struggle by Trinidadian working people: "I think that we are in for some very, very serious and exciting times."

appropriate, for UN police to accompany the existing police forces in the discharge of their duties.

The secretary general's report had said that 300 of the UN forces to Namibia would be unarmed observers. According to Asheeke, Pérez de Cuellar now says those observers will be provided with defensive arms as originally specified in Resolution 435.

Return of refugees

Thousands of Namibians who are eligible to vote and participate in Namibia's transition to independence are living in exile. Their return to Namibia would be organized in large part by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The secretary general's report proposes that the cost of the commission's work be borne voluntarily among UN member nations. The African and Nonaligned groups propose instead that each member be assessed the costs.

Asheeke said that opponents of reducing the UN force for Namibia would continue to consult with the secretary general but expected that the issue would be taken up in the Security Council soon. Under UN rules if a majority of the members of the Security Council were to vote against reducing the number of troops to be sent to Namibia, that vote could be vetoed by any one of the permanent members.

Under the provisions of Resolution 435 the UN force would oversee: the withdrawal of some 50,000 South African troops from Namibia; dissolution of the 24,000-member South West Africa Territorial Force; dissolution of the 3,000-member death squad unit known as Koevoet; UN-sponsored elections to establish the Namibian government.

The apartheid regime agreed to begin implementation of the UN plan first adopted in 1978 following the defeat of its troops last March at the Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale by Angolan, Cuban, and SWAPO forces.

naccla

NORTH AMERICAN CONGRESS ON LATIN AMERICA

TRINIDAD



A REPORT FROM THE FRONT LINE

**DAVID
ABDULAH**

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH OFFICER OWTU
OILFIELDS WORKERS' TRADE UNION, AND
SECRETARY, ORGANISING COMMITTEE

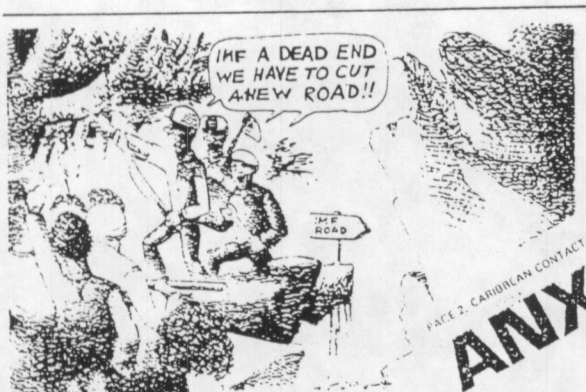
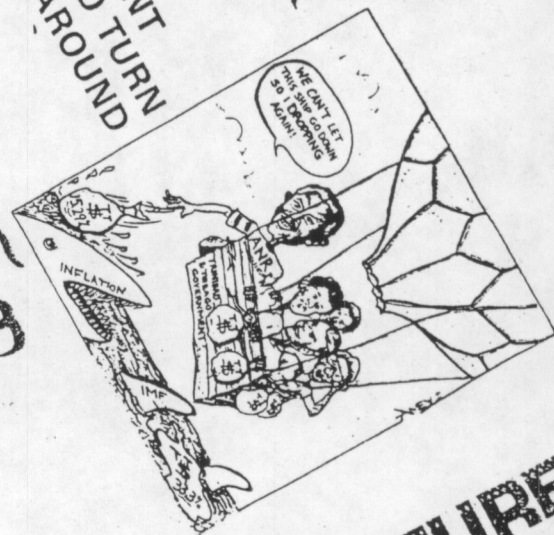
CONVENOR CLS
COMMITTEE FOR LABOR SOLIDARITY

GOVERNMENT
ATTEMPTS TO TURN
ECONOMY AROUND
T & T DOLLAR
DOCUMENTS

Brown-Bag Lunch
Monday Nov 28

- 1:00 PM -

Room 454



PAGE 2, CARIBBEAN CONTACT, SEPTEMBER 1988

ANXIETY OVER T & T'S FUTURE

for more info
call x 3146

475 RIVERSIDE DRIVE, SUITE 454 ■ NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10115 ■ TELEPHONE (212) 870-3146

TRINIDAD: A Struggle Against

ACCN Special Interview:

Trinidad Labor Leader DAVID ABDULAH



Q: *Maybe you could begin with a quick background on who you are and who you represent.*

A: My name is David Abdulah and I am the treasurer and educational research officer of the Oilworkers Trade Union in Trinidad. The treasurer is a national executive post, elected democratically by a one member, one vote system once every three years.

The Oilworkers Trade Union is 51 years old. It was formed in July of 1937, just a few weeks after the June 19 general strike and insurrection in 1937 which was an anti-colonial revolt.

That anti-colonial revolt was very much for home rule or independence as one of the demands. It was for an end to racism because we had South African whites running the oil fields in Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean.

The perspective of the founding fathers of the union,

therefore, was a perspective of the union struggling not just for wages and improved conditions at work but it was very much a struggle on the political and economic social fronts. We have maintained that perspective over the 51 years. We are a militant, progressive trade union that takes up issues not only of improved wages and conditions of work but also for the struggle of the nationalization of oil companies, and other elements of foreign capital in the country; the struggle for democracy, against right wing dictatorships and facism whenever it rears its head.

I am also the convener of the steering committee of the Committee for Labor Solidarity. CLS is a political organization that was formed in 1981, and over the last seven years we have been trying to build a new party. It is a collective of trade unionists, political activists, cultural activists, community activists. On November 12 we held a massive convocation of 1200

people: workers, farmers, unemployed, youth, women, progressives and intellectuals, and they came together and gave us a mandate to form a new political party by the end of April 1989. We are preparing, as a new political party, to intervene in the very serious economic political and social crisis that exists in Trinidad.

Q: *Can you expand upon the current "crisis" in Trinidad?*

A: The present crisis is primarily of the economy. We had a period of oil boom, from 1974 to 1981 as a result of the fantastic rise in oil prices by OPEC. This was really an aberration in the economic history of Trinidad because historically we have been better off than most of the other Caribbean countries having oil as a resource. But the history has also been that the people of the country have never benefitted in a real way from that production because the oil production was controlled by multinational

From Colonization to Independence

Trinidad trails at the end of the splash of islands called the West Indies, just 9 miles off the coast of Venezuela. It is larger than most of the islands, just over twice the size of Cook County. Its population of just over one million is smaller than Chicago's.

Unlike the other Caribbean islands, Trinidad's population is roughly split between East Indians and blacks. The first blacks came to Trinidad in the late 1700's as slaves of French planters. Although Spain had claimed the island in 1498 the Spanish had colonized half-heartedly, and welcomed the French presence as long as they continued to grow cocoa for trade with Spain.

Far more profitable, however, was the sugar and cotton trade carried on by the British, also employing slave labor. By 1797 the British had taken over Trinidad, whose population was by then predominantly black.

By the 1840's Britain at least officially abolished slavery throughout the Caribbean. The reason for this was not humanitarian but economic: the price of sugar from West Indies plantations was too high to satisfy British businesses. Ending the slave trade ended the West Indies monopoly on the sugar trade.

Wanting to make even greater profits from the plantations, the British government began importing hundreds of thousands of indentured servants forced from their homeland in India (also a British colony). Many blacks deserted the plantations and the newly arrived East Indians were forced to take their place.

The British, and later the U.S., promoted divisions between the East Indian people who were concentrated on the plantations and the black people who more and more came to find work in the cities. Divisions weakened the people's resistance to the colonial government—and later, to the control by multinationals (like Amoco and Texaco) of resources that could have been used to improve people's lives and working conditions.

tional corporations: British Petroleum, Shell, Texaco, and so on.

In the period of 1970 there was a major revolt in the country, and the government virtually fell. There were mass demonstrations in the streets. The government was saved, really, by the intervention of the police locally, and by the presence of foreign troops in the area: American, British and Venezuelan troops and some of those in fact landed quietly.

Then-prime minister Eric

Williams, who had been in power since 1956, in fact resigned in 1973 because of the continuing crisis and his inability to deal with that crisis. Then the price of oil went up as a result of the oil embargo by the Arabs and Williams recognized that the price of oil was going to go up and Trinidad was going to be awash with dollars like snow so there was no need for him to resign and all of his problems were over. So he changed his mind and continued in power. So then the petrol

Grassroots Party Forms to Fight for Trinidad's Future

By Anne Hayes

Nearly 27 years after gaining independence from the British government, the tiny islands of Trinidad and Tobago are engaged in a life and death struggle that will either direct them to a future of economic stability, or drag them into a cycle of poverty and debt that has become characteristic of third world countries.

Although the battle is being waged on the political front in the form of party politics, the outcome could ultimately affect policies of other third world nations.

Trinidad and Tobago are separate islands although they are under one government, and are located at the tail end of the West Indian islands. Because of the development of the oil industry, it has been relatively prosperous for a third world country, although

most of the money has been directed to the multinational oil companies.

Trinidad differs from many third world countries in that it is more educated (the literacy rate is 96 percent) and has a highly organized labor force. Trinidad was the only country in the Caribbean Basin to oppose the U.S. invasion of Grenada. Since the U.S. considers the Caribbean to be its backyard, the U.S. government has been uneasy with its relative outspokenness and its determination to be a sovereign nation.

During the 1970's the country experienced a boom in oil sales due to the OPEC embargo.

When oil prices collapsed in the early 1980's, the entire Trinidad economy collapsed with it. Unemployment reached 23 percent and the cost of living soared. With

*They raise up the taxi fare
No, Doctor, No
And the blasted milk gone up so dear
No, Doctor, No
But you must remember
We support you in September
You better come good
Because I have a big piece o' mango wood.*

(Calypso by The Mighty Sparrow in reference to PNM Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams.)

the elections in 1986, the government in power was voted overwhelmingly out of office.

Trinidad owns fully or partially 69 percent of its large enterprises. However, because of newly discovered oil in neighboring Venezuela and Brazil, and a drying up of resources in other parts of the world, giant oil companies like Amoco and Texaco are looking towards Trinidad with an eye for new oil finds.

Because of this, pressure is being put upon Trinidad to

sell its state owned companies to multinational corporations. This would mean that instead of Trinidad benefitting from any newly discovered oil, Amoco and Texaco would reap huge profits and control production.

The new government that rode in on the crest of the economic crisis appears willing to sell Trinidad to the multinationals. Now that the government is yielding to the pressures of the international community, a giant mobiliza-

tion for a progressive grassroots party to fight the multinationals appears to be in the making.

What makes the political scene in Trinidad so important to the future of the third world is this party's stubbornness and unwillingness to sell their country to the multinationals and buy their way into debt. The success of this grassroots party in the next election could signify to other Third World countries that it is possible to free themselves from the cycle of poverty and debt that has turned many nations into mere colonies feeding wealth to the larger countries.

As in most third world countries, Trinidad began borrowing from foreign banks to cover their giant loss in exporting monies when the oil market collapsed. The trend in third world countries

Re-Colonization



By 1857 oil was discovered in Trinidad. Foreign firms—especially from the U.S.—rushed in to plunder and control the oil fields. Although Trinidad remained a British colony until it won its independence in 1962, the increased role of the U.S. in the oil industry and in Caribbean affairs generally as the U.S. tested its ability to run things in "its own backyard" meant the domination of Trinidad's economy by the U.S.

The battle for genuine economic self-determination continues—in the face of giant multinational corporations, U.S. military power and those in the Trinidad government who would sell the nation's wealth to the multinationals for their own profit. The Oilworkers Trade Union has been a key force in the fight for basic rights and full economic as well as political independence for over 50 years.

dollars flowed in.

But when the economic boom came to an end with the collapse of international oil prices the entire Trinidad economy was plunged into a major crisis because oil accounted for 90 percent of all foreign exchange earnings. At the end of 1981 unemployment was 10 percent of the labor force. Today it is 23 percent.

Q: What has been the policy of the government since the 1970's?

has been to borrow heavily from foreign banks at exorbitant interest rates in order to stay afloat, thereby preventing them from investing in their own countries.

The last resort once a country is so deeply in debt that they need to borrow money to cover their loans is the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF imposes strict conditions on their loans, including lowering labor costs, devaluing the dollar, and even halting production of basic agricultural products. The result is that the country must starve or import foods, forcing it deeper into debt. Unemployment increases, forcing laborers to work for low wages, and overall poverty escalates.

The Trinidad government began implementing IMF's demands even before it went for a loan. Intense political pressure to drive down wages and reduce the quality of working conditions has been

A: There have been two governments in power during that time. The People's National Movement (PNM) from 1970 to 1986, and the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) from 1986 until now.

Generally the PNM during that time campaigned for the nationalization of the oil industry, under pressure from the workers' movement. But they moved too little too late. We should have nationalized when oil prices were up, but these good gentlemen decided to nationalize at the end of

accompanied by a consistent devaluation of the Trinidad dollar. Therefore, people are paid less while their money buys less.

These moves are viewed as setting the stage for the expansion of the multinationals. By devaluing the dollar, the country gets less money for exports, further driving it into debt. In the meantime, reduced labor costs and increased poverty will provide a cheaper more willing labor pool than exists on Trinidad today.

In the meantime, the Committee for Labor Solidarity (CLS) has launched an all out offensive to stop the current government from selling Trinidad down the river. At a recent conference of trade unionists, political, cultural and community activists, the Committee received a mandate to form a new political party with a platform to keep Trinidad economically viable.

the oil boom.

The present government, the NAR, is seeking to reverse all of that by inviting foreign capital to come down and take back control of the oil industry. For the first time in several years some off shore oil licenses for exploration and production have been given out to Mobil and Shell.

It's very interesting to note that the transnational oil companies were leaving Trinidad in the 60's and 70's to go to the North Sea because it was much more lucrative. We now have the multinationals coming back, because North Sea oil production is declining, and there have been no new oil finds in the U.S. or Canada. Two major oil fields have been discovered in Brazil, and one in Venezuela, so a lot of the companies are beginning to sense that there is going to be a major find in Trinidad.

Our position is that if there is to be another oil boom, if our oil production is to go back up, it should be the state companies, and therefore the nation that should benefit. The government is saying that the multinationals should come back in.

Q: What do you mean when you say that the Committee for Labor Solidarity is fighting the "Recolonization of the Third World?"

A: During the 60's and 70's third world countries made a series of gains in terms of

political independence. These governments, like India and Ghana, although they were neo-colonialist, were nationalist as well, and they moved to take control over their resources. Now this meant that multinationals were suddenly faced with shrinking control over natural resources, their markets, and their access to cheap labor. Now these three factors—labor, resources and markets—is what enabled them to make money. Now this was being threatened, so they have to reverse this trend

Trinidad primarily produced one good: oil. When the demand for oil fell, it's not like one plant dying or one town—a whole country dies. We still have to buy everything else but we can no longer sell anything, so we run into a serious problem of foreign exchange: to get foreign exchange you have to borrow. So you go to the IMF or the international banks, and they say, "Well, you are in debt. The conditions under which we will lend you money are these: sell your state enterprises. Governments shouldn't be into that type of thing. You people in the third world can't run businesses. You leave that to us."

So they get back control of the resources and markets. Then they say, "Your wage costs are too high. You have to drive down the wage cost. Break the backs of the unions. You must cut wages and benefits. Your labor is too expensive." So, they get back their cheap labor markets.

Then they say, "there are things you must produce for us. You know it is cold up here. We want winter vegetables because during the winter we can't provide enough vegetables." So, they tell the farmers of our country, "Don't grow food for the people of Trinidad." So then we are growing food for somebody else, and we are starting to get hungry. So we have to import food from abroad, and then we get more deeply into a system of dependence and debt.

Q: Can you tell us about the CLS platform and the nature of the society you are trying to create?

A: We believe there are sufficient sources in Trinidad and Tobago that can be mobilized for the satisfaction and needs of the people. We have less now than what we had in the oil boom, but there is still a lot of money in Trinidad. The problem is who has it and who benefits from it.

For example, for every dollar we produce, we pay 30¢ in foreign debt. If we reduce that to 10¢ we save \$600 million per year. With that we could further develop a viable agricultural sector and create jobs. We believe we can pursue a self-reliant economic development program with initiatives like these.

The key to it is the mobilization of the people. The bounds of the creativity of our people are endless. We need to harness that creativity to build a new Trinidad and Tobago.

Remember Grenada . . .

In 1983 the U.S. shocked the world with a massive show of force in a staged "rescue mission" of a few medical students on the tiny island of Grenada. Reagan's contention that the students were in danger was ridiculed then, as it is now.

The fact is that Grenada in 1983 was a threat to the U.S. and neighboring Caribbean countries only because of the remarkable progress the country had made since its revolution in 1979. The rising employment rate and relative prosperity of Grenada in comparison to the poverty of U.S.-aligned Caribbean countries was something the Reagan administration did not want to explain.

Four years after the revolution, Grenada's unemployment rate dropped from 49 percent to 14 percent. The major economic change was in the production and sale of agricultural products. Traditionally production of food was untouched by the private sector because they imported food to make a profit.

The government took control of this industry, leasing uncultivated land to individual farmers, buying up the surplus food and reselling it throughout the island. By doing this they were able to decrease dependency on imports and lower food costs for the general population. Two state owned banks

which distributed loans to small private producers were established to encourage them to expand, and help them to compete.

Quality education and health care drastically improved with the government building three state hospitals and totally restructuring the health care system. Education, which was previously limited to the elite, was made universal by eliminating tuition while at the same time a national literacy campaign was waged in the rural areas.

But the Grenadian revolution was not allowed to succeed, and four years of progress ended with the U.S. invasion. Like Trinidad, Grenada lies within "our own backyard." While Trinidad is caught in an economic stranglehold, Grenada was forced to bow to U.S. wishes in a violent manner.

As one Caribbean minister put it, "One can understand why the Grenada revolution upset the dominant classes . . . Here for the first time the poor and powerless masses were being given pride of place. Their needs, problems and aspirations became the central focus for policy making. . . . Now Caribbean governments will find it harder to say to the masses that their hopes are but idle dreams. . . ."



Workers demonstrate for nationalization of oil industry (1982)—a historic demand of the Trinidad labor movement. Oilfields Workers' Trade Union

A Trinidad Labor Leader Speaks

Toward A Party of the Workers

David Abdulah is treasurer of the Oil Fields Workers Trade Union in Trinidad and Tobago and has served on the union's national executive since 1982. He has been employed by the union for eleven years as an education and research officer.

He is also the convener of the Committee for Labour Solidarity (CLS), a political group that describes itself as "a collective of trade unionists, political and community activists whose basic commitment is to build the solidarity of the working people as a class, which is the pre-condition for the working people to carry out their historical mission to transform the existing economic and political system into a new order."

The CLS has been carrying out extensive grassroots organizing toward the formation of a new mass party of the Trinidad and Tobago working class. As David Abdulah explains in the accompanying interview, the Trinidadian workers' movement is of pivotal weight in the class struggle in the Caribbean.

The development of a mass workers' party in Trinidad should not be viewed in isolation. It is part of a broader process that in recent years has seen the emergence of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil and the rise of massive militant trade-union organizations in South Africa, the Philippines and South Korea—organizations fighting for genuine unionism and working in opposition to pro-government U.S.-based labor bodies.

The importance that the CLS has placed on rank-and-file power and the creation of structures that will be energized and controlled from below means that a new party will be based on solid foundations, not simply on pro-

grammatic proclamations and good intentions. It is a process that North American socialist activists may find most educational as well as encouraging.

David Abdulah visited Detroit in November 1988. This interview was conducted for *Against the Current* by David Finkel and Joanna Misnik.

David Abdulah: To begin with a quick history, the Oil Fields Workers Trade Union is fifty-one years old. From 1962 to the present, it has been thoroughly democratic.

In June 1937 there was an anti-colonial revolt, with workers of the entire area arising against [British] colonialism and the conditions arising from it. Within days after the revolt was violently crushed by British marines, workers in oil and other industries began to form organizations to defend their interests—hence the formation of the Oil Fields union.

The union always had an outlook that we weren't only out for a five- or ten-percent increase, but to advance the interests of all workers in Trinidad and Tobago. Every local officer is elected by direct secret ballot annually, and the shop stewards every two years. We have also maintained independence; we're not run by any political party as is common throughout the Caribbean. This democracy and independence are the roots of the union's strength.

The Committee for Labour Solidarity (CLS) was formed in 1981 as a collective of political, cultural and community ac-

tivists—a preparatory political organization. We have worked for labor solidarity across lines of unions, jobs, etc., to develop the consciousness of the working people in all their struggles and to lay the groundwork for a new political party.

On November 12, 1988, we had a massive assembly of 1,200 people, which mandated the CLS to organize the founding of a new party for April 1989.

ATC: You come from a struggle for democratic trade unionism—how would that culture be brought into the party?

D.A.: This is an important point. Obviously our outlook has been changed by the work in the trade-union movement. For example, in the CLS and certainly within the party, there is and will be a great deal of democracy. We have not finalized the structure, but we recognize that the strength of the working class is predicated on the active involvement of the members in determining where the movement goes.

The strength of the Oil Fields Trade Union itself is based on the strength of the rank and file. For example, my colleagues and I go frequently to the shop floor to talk directly with the workers, quite apart from the local branch meetings, which not everyone attends. We are in constant contact through what we call COSSABO, the Conference of Shop Stewards and Branch Officers. This body first arose in the Oil Fields union in the 1970 strike, to free prisoners and resist some proposed fascist legislation [that

would have placed extreme restrictions on union activity—ed.). It has remained ever since as an instrument of workers' mobilization and popular democracy.

We had enough leaders to form a party in 1981, but that would have been fundamentally elitist. We formed, instead, a preparatory organization. We could have formed a party last Saturday at our convocation—that also would have been elitist and undemocratic. The activists have to go back to the base and discuss the proposed platform.

So we aren't simply asking people to vote. For example, our position always was that the party will be formed when the people are calling for it, not before. In the past year people have been saying to us, "we want a workers' party." We talk of two components—institutions of worker and popular power and a new kind of political party. These must go hand in hand.

ATC: What is the total size of the population and the working class? And what is the base of the CLS?

D.A.: The population of Trinidad and Tobago is 1.2 million. The official size of the labor force is 470,000. We have a very young population, and the labor-force statistic doesn't include discouraged workers, housewives or unemployed youth ... and there is 23% official unemployment. So you're talking about 350,000 employed. Of that, just 100,000 are organized.

The leaders of the CLS are the leaders of the progressive unions—the sugarcane farmers, food co-op farmers, communications workers, oil workers—and we also have key people in the teachers' movement. In the progressive union movement [the Council of Progressive Trade Unions] we have about 35% of the organized workers. The Trinidad and Tobago Council, backed by AIFLD [the American Institute for Free Labor Development, run by the AFL-CIO and the U.S. State Department] has more, because their federation has the government workers and public servants. Our movement dominates in all the key industries and among farmers.

There are two large unions not belonging to either federation: the teachers with 10,000 members and the sugar workers with 6,000-7,000.

ATC: What specific impact does the general crisis of the less developed countries—debt, for example—have on your own economy and working class?

D.A.: There is a massive economic, political and social crisis in the country. Oil contributes 90% of our foreign exchange, so when the price of oil fell and the international energy economy began

to reorganize, our oil industry became redundant. We had a drastic fall in production, price and refining—from 1981 to 1983 our foreign exchange earnings were cut virtually in half.

Unemployment went from 10% in 1981 to 20% in 1985 and 23% today—a loss of 70,000 jobs with a rapid increase in crime, family breakdowns and violence, substance abuse, and a return of pauperization that many Trinidadians never thought they would see again. Real wages have fallen by 25% in the past four years. There are families with both parents unemployed for several years, unable to send their kids to school. Now if, let's say, Dominica [a small Caribbean island state] has high unemployment, since it's a rural society people can at least feed themselves. Trinidad is an urban society and so the level of desperation is higher.

The crisis is massive and getting worse, because the government is intent on negotiating an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). I have quoted extensively in a speech I gave to Parliament from the letter of resignation by the senior IMF economist, Mr. Davidson Budhoo of Grenada, who worked for the IMF for eleven years. He gave a full account of IMF wrongdoing: statistical fraud, manipulations to force devaluations, sabotage of a country's institutions and the measures imposed for any loan. The government is already moving to privatize [state] industry, and to cut its wage bill by early retirement of thousands of government employees.

The political crisis exists because of: a) the economic and social crises, exacerbated by b) the split in the present ruling party, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR). We have to explain some political history here.

From 1956 through 1986 there was one party in government, the Peoples National Movement (PNM) of Eric Williams. This was a nationalist party led by

middle-class professionals, who make nationalist analyses but are totally incapable of confronting the essence of the problem, the local and foreign elite.

There was a strong Caribbean radical movement in the early '50s—with Cheddi Jagan in Guyana, the left wing of the Peoples National Party (PNP) in Jamaica, etc. In 1944 the Caribbean Labor Congress (CLC) was formed by all the labor-based political parties and trade unions in the region. They called for independence and an all-Caribbean federation (not just the English-speaking countries).

The British and U.S. set out to systematically break up this movement. Cheddi Jagan won an election, so they brought in troops, imprisoned the whole government, brought in Forbes Burnham, split the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP—Jagan's party) along racial lines, and the like. In Jamaica the left wing of the PNP was expelled. The Trades Union Congress was destroyed and the right wing of the PNP set up its own National Workers Union, which received assistance from the U.S. unions.

Then they broke up the CLC by forming a Caribbean Division of ORIT [the U.S.-backed labor federation for Latin America]. Thus the possibility of mobilizing the Caribbean workers through the CLC was destroyed by the [pro-West] International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and later AIFLD.

Neocolonialism and Resistance

In Trinidad the British cultivated Eric Williams' PNM with its middle-class leadership to ensure that it would set up a nice neocolonial regime. They agreed to a federal government without independence—a parliament and a prime minister without power. So when independence was finally granted [in 1962], it was guaranteed that a neocolonial policy would be followed, that there would be

A Brief Glossary of Abbreviations

In the course of this interview, David Abdulah refers to a number of Caribbean parties and movements outside Trinidad. The following is a brief explanation of these.

CLC (Caribbean Labor Congress)—An effort to unite Caribbean workers in the aftermath of the anti-colonial revolts of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Broken up by U.S. trade-union manipulation in the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s.

PNP and JLP (Peoples National Party and Jamaica Labour Party)—The two largest political parties in Jamaica. Despite the name, the Jamaica Labor Party (led by Edward Seaga) is the right-wing party, while the Peoples National Party (led by Michael Manley), which has just returned to power in the February 1989 election, is the social-democratic party. The U.S. is therefore favorable to the JLP, although Manley's PNP has abandoned most of its radical rhetoric of the 1970s.

WPJ (Workers Party of Jamaica)—The pro-Moscow party (led by Trevor Munroe) founded by leftist leaders expelled from the PNP in the 1950s, generally aligned with Communist parties internationally.

PPP (Peoples Progressive Party). The left populist movement led by Cheddi Jagan in Guyana, elected in 1953 and deposed shortly afterward by a British coup. □

no tampering with economic relationships.

In 1970 there was a serious popular attempt to remove the PNM, with mass demonstrations, a two-month-long insurrectionary movement and an army mutiny. This was only staved off with the intervention of U.S., Venezuelan and other foreign troops—as well as police action and a state of emergency. The people wanted to make a fundamental break.

That protest movement continued after 1970 despite the state of emergency in effect in 1971-72. There were strike movements in oil and sugar in 1974 and '75. The crisis didn't reach another high point for only one reason, the oil boom from 1974-81. The PNM survived because of the petrodollars. In 1973, with only six weeks of foreign exchange in the treasury, Eric Williams announced his retirement at his PNM's party conference—but before the party could choose a new leader there came the Israeli-Arab war, the price of oil skyrocketed and Williams came back.

With the decline of oil prices from 1982, the PNM's popularity collapsed. The popular struggle resumed and culminated with the PNM's removal in 1986 and the election of the NAR (National Alliance for Reconstruction). The NAR was a coalition of three main parties: the Democratic Action Congress (DAC) based in Tobago, which is the party of the present Prime Minister Robinson; the Organization of National Reconstruction (ONR) of Carl Hudson-Phillips, who like Robinson is a former PNM cabinet minister—in fact, he's a right-wing former attorney general close to the Jamaica Labor Party and prosecutor in the Coard trial in Grenada; and Basdeo Panday's United Labor Front (ULF), which was originally formed out of the strike movements of 1974-75 by sugar and oil workers and farmers.

ULF was born as a trade-union grouping at the height of this strike wave. Later the workers discussed their experiences, decided to intervene politically and to make ULF a political party in 1976. We won ten parliamentary seats and became the official opposition.

ULF however split in 1977 between the Panday faction and the faction led by Raffique Shah, the president of the Cane Farmers Union, who had been a central figure in the 1970 army mutiny. After he got out of jail the farmers invited him to organize a democratic union. The Panday faction had the majority support, because as leader of the sugar workers he was the traditional leader of the East Indian community in the country—that is the legacy of the British success in keeping workers divided by race. Also, Pan-

day is Hindu while Shah is Muslim.

[Editors' note: The traditional racial division in Trinidad pits East Indians against Blacks. Historically, East Indians were brought to Trinidad as indentured labor following the abolition of Black slavery. The Committee for Labor Solidarity argues that the middle-class forces among both East Indian and Black communities have a vested interest in preserving this conflict, while the unity of the Indian and Black workers can "lead this country not only out of the racial conflict but ... into economic prosperity" (Raffique Shah, *Race Relations in Trinidad: Some Aspects*, CLS pamphlet, 1988).]

Our faction [Shah] was the radical wing. Panday's ULF, generally representing the professional middle classes, therefore went into the electoral alliance with DAC and ONR to form the NAR that won the election massively in 1986. The former ruling party PNM went from twenty-six seats down to three in the thirty-six-member Parliament.



McEneaney workers and supporters on picket line, during 1984 lockout.

Oilfields Workers' Trade Union

But Robinson and company failed to capitalize on that historic moment. Having no faith in the people, they did everything to alienate the people, bringing in anti-labor measures. Within six months ministries were openly condemning each other; within a year there was a cabinet shuffle and shortly after that Panday was fired from the govern-

ment.

In November 1988, less than two years after the election, the coalition partners have irretrievably split. Panday has formed a new party called Club '88, which had a mass rally three weeks ago of 20,000 people. That has made the political crisis worse. You have a totally unpopular prime minister, a ruling party completely split, all its promises in collapse—and reports in the press speak of very low morale and rank-and-file protests in the army.

There is a great deal of drug traffic from Venezuela, overcrowded prisons and all the indicators of an immense crisis. Another 1970 is on the agenda; the situation that was suspended after the popular uprising then has returned, with a vengeance.

ATC: Your Committee for Labor Solidarity seems to come out of the split you mentioned in the ULF, right? Where does CLS see itself in relation to this unfolding situation?

D.A.: Right, the CLS used to be the Shah faction of the ULF. We were the radical wing of that movement. We've all come from different backgrounds and experiences—Shah came from his experiences in the army, for example. We don't have a "leader." Raffique hasn't been identified as a leader as much as in earlier years, even though he's very

much a member and was one of the speakers at the convocation of 1,200 people I mentioned before. As for my own background, I was a campus activist from 1972-74, then with ULF and then with the labor movement.

There are now no women on the steering committee of the CLS; this is a historical thing given where we came from. But there are women activists. When we become a party, the leadership will change to reflect our society.

ATC: Will there be two parties—yours and Panday's? Or is there any possibility of a unified labor party?

D.A.: We would just go back to 1976 again in that case. It would fall apart. We could have been a faction in Panday's party, but given his politics that would be a dead end. So there will be two new parties, as well as NAR. And PNM still exists—if the election were held today it would win with big African support. But 60 percent of the electorate wouldn't vote—there is massive disillusionment.

There's another party called National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), but they aren't now considered to be a national contender although they played a significant role in 1970.

Elections must be held by the end of 1991, with a possible three-month extension under extreme circumstances.

Our draft platform, which will be presented at the founding convention of our party, is called "Toward A New Democracy and the Road to Full Employment." We talk about the establishment of workers' and people's power through workers' councils at the workplace, where workers could talk about what is produced and how.

We looked at Maurice Bishop's experience in Grenada. There, the problem was that those councils never had power. The party could override them at all times.

ATC: How badly were you hurt by the catastrophe in Grenada?

D.A.: One could put it positively and negatively. There was a deep reflection afterward. Everyone had to make a step backward, given the political hysteria throughout the region. But that enabled some people to think the thing through and go forward again. We think we in CLS did that.

Of course, the working class in Grenada is very small, whereas we have a working class with a tradition of struggle—our first general strike was in 1918. We have a steel mill; we are the second largest exporter of anhydrous ammonia. We have been up against transnational corporations throughout the century.

ATC: Based on this kind of experience, your traditions and your observations of other struggles—what kind of party do you want?

D.A.: A mass party, with people who are prepared to be activists—not the traditional mass party, which is an electoral machine. We want people who will come to meetings, sell a paper, agree with the general policy and line of the party, contribute financially—but not a party whose membership is dependent on so-called deep ideological convictions of some kind. We will ensure that the workers themselves are dominant in the party.

ATC: A final question, which may be delicate because you might not want to comment on other parties in the region—but could you comment on how you see your party in comparison to the Workers Party of Jamaica, especially given its pro-Coard tilt in the Grenada tragedy?

D.A.: Our views on this are quite open and public. We have always opposed the politics of the WPJ as being frequently totally outside the realities of the Caribbean. That was demonstrated by [WPJ leader Trevor] Munroe, who is as much responsible for what happened in Grenada as Coard, because he was Coard's mentor.

[Editor's note: Bernard Coard led a military coup from within the New Jewel Movement that destroyed the popular revolutionary government of Maurice Bishop, killing Bishop and many other leaders of the NJM. The United States was able to invade and overwhelm Grenada one week later in October 1983.]

This is why the WPJ has split. Six members of the Political Bureau left the party over the same issue—not just over Grenada itself, but taking that as a manifestation of what was wrong in the party. The WPJ has lost most of its support. How their period of reflection will come out, I cannot say.

There are a number of people in the Caribbean with whom we have relations at different levels. Up to the time of our

split in the ULF in the mid-1970s, the Trinidad experience was a major advance for the whole region. That split obviously was a setback.

A little more about Trinidad and Jamaica. We have traditionally had much more foreign capital than Jamaica. But because Michael Manley [leader of the Peoples National Party] had power in Jamaica, a lot of people have been focusing on Jamaica. But nothing fundamental is going to take place in Jamaica for a while.

Now you can just imagine how much penetration by the CIA is going on in Trinidad!—because we have so much influence on the western Caribbean.

What has made us as strong as we are today is that we are in the mass movements. The main progressive trade-union leaders are in the CLS. That wasn't because we planted them there—they were workers who developed radical politics.

So the real thing is to be deeply involved among the people. Once you are, there isn't any need to get into "ism schisms," as one of our Trinidad calypsonians sang after the sad events in Grenada. □

Note

The views of the CLS are presented in the following pamphlets published by Classline Publications (Vistabella and Port-of-Spain, Trinidad):

CLS Speaks: a Collection of Statements by the Committee for Labor Solidarity (Preparatory) (1987); Keith Lookloy, *Democracy in Education* (1987 or 1988); Raffique Shah, *Race Relations in Trinidad: Some Aspects* (1988).

The program of the Oil Field Workers Trade Union can be found in the union's *Memorandum to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago* (Nov. 10, 1987); and in the collection of articles *Towards a New Peoples Order* (1988); both published by Vanguard Publishing Company, San Fernando, Trinidad.

For The People

Black Socialists in the U.S., Africa and the Caribbean by Daryl Grigsby

• **A unique book.** The only single volume available on the Black struggle for liberation through socialism.

• **Politically empowering.** An impressive account of the struggles of Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau, Maurice Bishop of Grenada, Elizabeth Mafekeng of South Africa, George Jackson of the U.S., and hundreds more.

"We hear again the struggles of the giants; Paul Robeson, Angela Davis, and Walter Rodney, and the rising tide of Black workers engaged in their struggle for liberation. And their voices are on time for us, still working in this disturbing present."

—Sonia Sanchez, author of *Homegirls and Handgranades* and *Under a Soprano Sky*
416 pages, eleven original illustrations, 5-1/2 x 8-1/2 trim, perfect bound, \$10.

Asante Publications • Box 19864 • San Diego, CA 92119

Twenty-First Century Books and Publications
Post Office Box 803351
Chicago, Illinois 60680 USA

312/538-2188