TRINIDAD - TOBAGO

SOLIDARITY

USA

Building a World Wide Movement for Peoples Power
1988
Solidarity

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

November 13 - December 1, 1988
Tim Hector
Antiguan Liberation Movement

p. 2 Council of Progressive Trade Unions

p. 13 Names
Forouz Dhandy (India-UK)
Sonya Sanchez (USA)
CLR James (Trinidad)
Daniel Howe (Trinidad-UK)
Abdul Alkahmat (USA)
Daniel Abdullah (Trinidad)
Kole Omotoso (Nigeria)

p. 33 Drop picture w/ Ambassador
(add ASC 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:


Comrade Errol McLeod,
President General,
OWTU.

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 Abdullah (Committee for Labor Solidarity, Trinidad-Tobago), Don Rojas (Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement, Grenada), Keith Looklóy (Committee for Labor Solidarity, Trinidad-Tobago), Tim Hecot (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 opportunist incompetent 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.
**POPULATION**
1,079,800

**LABOUR FORCE**

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<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td><strong>UNEMPLOYED</strong></td>
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**BALANCE OF TRADE** :

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**FOOD IMPORTS**
833,400

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<td>GNP PER CAPITA</td>
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<td>GROSS PUBLIC DEBT</td>
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**ECONOMIC ACTIVITY**

**PRODUCTION**

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<tr>
<td>FERTILIZER</td>
<td>1,842,000 Tonnes</td>
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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 Britain 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 FNM

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


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
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


"Let Those Who Labor Hold the Reigns"
Main GWTU Slogan
"Towards A New Democracy"
CLS Slogan

VANGUARD PUBLISHING COMPANY

6. David Abdullah, The IMF/World Bank and Trinidad and Tobago: Statement to the Permanent Peo-ple's Tribunal on behalf of the GWTU, Berlin West Germany, September 27, 1988. 25pp. $5.00


10. George Wanas, The President General's Address to the 47th Annual Conference of Delegates of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (1986). 31pp. $2.00

11. GWTU, 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. Lennox Pierre, The Ideology of the Working Class Lectures and Discussion Papers of the GWTU Leadership Seminars (October 1975). 50pp. $2.00

13. Muntor Bishop, Fascism - A Caribbean Reality? Lectures and Discussion Papers of the GWTU Leadership Seminars (October 1975). 60pp. $3.00

14. Errol E. McLeod, The President General's Address to the 47th Annual Conference of Delegates of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (1986). 31pp. $2.00

15. Errol McLeod, Role of Labor (2 speeches) (June 1987). 10pp. $2.00

16. GWTU, Memorandum to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (November 1987). 12pp. $5.00

17. VANGUARD: Monthly Newspaper of the Oilfields Workers Trade Union $1.00

NEW BEACON BOOKS


19. Susan Craig, Sales and Blood: The Ruling Class Response to the Workers' Rebellion in Trinidad and Tobago (1988). 75pp. $9.95


TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOOKS


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 1989 tour of David Abdullah to six cities in the USA. He is a leader of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (GWTU 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 GWTU 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

GWTU
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
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.

Reprinted from the 7th International Bookfair of Radical Black and Third World Books souvenir programme.
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
Co-sponsored by NATIONAL BLACK UNITED FRONT FACTS
FOR INFORMATION CALL: 312/538-2188

NOV 15th
Tuesday
7:30 pm
New World Resource Center
1476 W Irving Park Rd
Co-sponsored by NEW WORLD RESOURCE CENTER TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOOKS

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

Trinidad is an island nation in the easternmost 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 Errol McLeod.

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 Abdullah 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 Grenada 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.

Bush urged to adopt new Caribbean economic policy

by Nicholas Thompson

Deploring 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 owned $15 million in back pay, and fired workers are also owned $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 dance to the music of Syd Brown, directed by Syd 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 increase 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).


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 Bill 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 Worrell, 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 Abdullah, 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.

All Chicago City News
EVANS DECLARES:
One More Mountain!
April showdown set with Dukay Re Evans and New Harold Washington Party

KEEP IT OPEN NEWS
UNION WINS CONTRACT GAINS!!
STRONGER JOB SECURITY LANGUAGE WON

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 Abdullah, 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.
Political gains of independents in the 1988 elections
pp. 14-15

An interview with David Abdullah
Trinidadian Oilfields Workers' Union
p. 12

The origin of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union in Trinidad
p. 13

Highlights of the Week
pp. 16-17
Building solidarity across the sea

David Abdullah is the head of the Education and Research Department of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union in Trinidad and Tobago. He was elected to the union in 1983 as part of a slate of progressives. The OWTU is the largest trade union in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Mr. Abdullah 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 Giocano, correspondent for the People's Daily World.

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

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 completely change 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 vacations, 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, it 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 movements that we must build.

WORLD MAGAZINE: What is the Committee for Labor Solidarity?

DAVID ABDULLAH: The Committee was formed in October 1981. It is a 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, 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?

ABDULLAH: 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?

ABDULLAH: 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 is to Mobil, with a majority 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 we 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?

ABDULLAH: It's role is more political than economic. Trinidad and Tobago have never had a formal agreement with the IMF, but it 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.

Davidson Budho, a Grenadian economist who worked with the World Bank for seven years and IMF for 12 years, worked in Trinidad and Tobago in 1985, '66 and '72 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 Budho, persevered 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 like wages 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./$5.60 TT in 1983.

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 100 percent.

Budho 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 be eliminated 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 imposed constitute interference in the independence of our country.

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

ABDULLAH: 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.

WORLD MAGAZINE: What is the Committee for Labor Solidarity?
The origin of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union

I n 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 and long, and the bosses with their 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 attitude of 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 oilfields during the period 1936-37. The response was nothing short of tremendous. 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 able to enlist 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 laboring in Port of Spain. The workers were struggling to improve their very quality of life — better wages, improved housing, proper provisions for health, a workers' compensation ordinance and unemployment compensation were all 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, at which time armed forces of the capitalists had killed 14 people and left hundreds of others wounded. A temporary lull 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 in a room at 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 was held on July 25, with representatives from most of the fields attending. Immediately after, the union wrote its first letter to the employers.

In the next few weeks a flood of workers signed membership forms and paid their first dues. Organizers went into the fields to explain the reasons for joining and to enlist them as members. Every night, the Executive travelled to another part of the oilfield giving stirring speeches and encouraging people to join. In all of these meetings, the support was overwhelming, and the crowds could hardly be accommodated in the premises, which had been rented or borrowed for the meeting.

One newspaper reported that in a meeting in Barcaccipe "Over 600 men and women came to the meeting. More than 100 new members were enrolled, and so anxious were workers to join the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union that they were almost fighting to reach the table where the Secretary-General sat, to sign up.

Membership reached 1,250 within three weeks of the founding, and continued to multiply. What was significant too was that many meetings were held under the auspices of the OWTU and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factories 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 led 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 government 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 organization of collective bargaining through which the claims and necessities 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 Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (Vanguard Publications San Fernando, Trinidad, W.I., 1988).
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 from page 9).

On Grenada's Revolution

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 OWITU.

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 which 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 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 OWITU 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, if those institutions were vested with real power, it would have reinforced 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 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. Abdulah 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.
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.
Union leader: Trinidad suffering for opposition to Grenada invasion

By Rose Enew

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 Abdulia, 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, Abdulia 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 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 affected 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 is 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 oilfields 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 Abdullah 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.
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 Abdullah for a talk. They had participated in the 2nd Caribbean Bookfair by distributing their newspapers and two documents, and advertising in the program.

Shaw University has an International Center. Abdullah 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.
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 Trinadadian/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.
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 Abdullah 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 Abdullah

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
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.

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### WDCU-FM

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

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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)
... at *Monthly Review* with Paul Sweezy and Harry Magoff

... 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'

BY JAMES HARRIS AND DON ROJAS

Trinidad and Tobago is in the midst of a deepening economic, social, and political crisis. That was the clear conclusion from our visit to that country of 1.2 million people, a country we have visited many times. The state-owned oil industry is the basis of the country's economy, and the government is heavily dependent on oil revenues. The IMF, which has imposed austerity measures, has imposed further hardships on the people. The situation is worsening, and the people are rising up against it.

Interview with leader of Oilfields Workers' Trade Union

Don Rojas, the well-known Trinidadian journalist and political activist, was interviewed by the author of this article. Rojas discussed the current situation in Trinidad and Tobago, the workers' struggle, and the challenges faced by the movement.

Direct quotes from Don Rojas:

"The IMF is imposing austerity measures that will disproportionately affect working people. On top of these austerity measures, protests are being organized to seek redress for the workers. The IMF has imposed a series of stringent conditions on the government.

The government has responded by reducing public sector wages, imposing new taxes, and cutting social services.

The big companies have been operating profitably, but the ordinary people are suffering.

The situation is worsening, and the people are rising up against it. The workers are organizing, and the movement is growing."

Don Rojas also discussed the role of the trade unions and the need for solidarity with the workers in other countries.

"The trade unions are leading the workers in the struggle. They are organizing strikes and protests, and they are demanding better wages and working conditions.

The workers are also demanding an end to the austerity measures imposed by the IMF. They are demanding a fairer distribution of oil wealth and an end to corruption.

The workers are determined to fight for their rights and to improve their living standards."

Don Rojas also talked about the importance of international solidarity in the workers' struggle.

"We need the support of our friends abroad. The workers in other countries are facing similar struggles, and they need our solidarity. The workers in Trinidad and Tobago are not alone in their struggle."

Don Rojas ended by saying that the workers are determined to fight for their rights and that the movement is growing. The situation is worsening, and the people are rising up against the austerity measures imposed by the IMF.
to be in the ownership and control of our states. We cannot, 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 all felt 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. As 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 interests that the political party in power will represent. And the people, then, understand that 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 1982.

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 businessmen, 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 working people throughout the Caribbean region. Many of its 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 imposed on the people... And I remember that Maurice and Unisson Whitten taking their shirts off to show us all the scars on their backs from the beatings by the Morganro Gange.

The OWTU was at its high point because of the revolutionary development in Grenada," explained McLeod. "Grenada presented to the Caribbean an alternative that we had been talking about for a very long time, but which were not able to put in place, as Maurice was able to do."

In October 1983 the Bishop-led People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada was overthrown by a coup organized by Dep- uty 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," 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 a hell of a lot 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 cuts. "The main demands of the proposed action are to withdraw the budget and to convene a national conference where 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 they are in for some very, very serious and exciting times.

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 Cuéllar issued an "explanatory statement" February 10 regarding UN forces for Namibia. The secretary general's aim was to offset a January 24 report of the Security Council that proposed reducing the number of UN peacekeeping forces bound 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 southwestern 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 necessary."

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. This 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 Hinsangwe Asbee, Chair of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) Observer Mission to the UN. Asbee termed this "inaequate 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 students at Cuba's Isle of Youth, President Fidel Castro criticized the secretary general's report. "This 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. 'It is only by the time it will be, 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... prepared, organized, and disciplined. I think it is possible that SWAPO may need some of you there later.

Apartheid-trained police force

Namibia would be returned to Namibia from 300 to 500, he reaffirmed, adding that the police force should include "primary responsibility for maintaining law and order in Namibia" during the transition period shall rest with the "existing police forces."

The report requires that the secretary general's Special Representative to Namibia "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-
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

Brown-Bag Lunch
Monday Nov 28
- 1:00 PM -

Room 454
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. I am 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 fascists whenever it rears its head.

I am also the convener of the working 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 – a collective of trade unions, political activists, cultural activists, community activists. On November 12 we held a mass 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 explain 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 benefited in a real way from that production because the oil production was controlled by multinational corporations: British Petroleum, Shell, Texaco, and so on.

In the period of 1970 there was a massive swell 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 affected, even though it snow fell, 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 still 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

They raise up the taxi fare
No, Doctor, No
And the blasted milk gone up so dear
No, Doctor, No
But I 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 FNM 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 companies. 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 international corporations. This would mean that instead of Trinidad benefiting 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 mobilization for a progressive grassroots party to fight the multinationals appears to be in the making.

What makes the political scene in Trinidad so important is the future of the third world is this party’s stubbornness and unwillingness to sell their country to the multinationals and to pay 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 foreign control, 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 retained a British colony until it won its independence in 1962, the increased rate of the U.S. in the oil industry and in Caribbean affairs generally as the U.S. tested its ability to run things as "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 multinational oil companies. The,Objectors 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.

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 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 the oil boom.

The present government, the NAR, is seeking to reverse all of that by inviting foreign capital to come in and take back control of the oil industry. For the first time in several years some offshore 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 '60s and '70s to go to the North Sea because it was much more lucrative. We now have the multinationals that the governments 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 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, government 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 '60s and '70s 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 taking 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 dying. We still have to buy electricity, food, and things. We still have to buy everything else but we can't go on any longer selling anything, so we get 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. Government 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 jobs. This is too expensive. So, they get back their cheap labor markets.

Q: Can you tell us about the CLS program 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 pay off 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 the 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 "quality education was in danger" was ridiculed when, 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 national liberation movement that had made since the 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 emphasize 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 for 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. Literacy campaigns were drastically improved with the government building three state hospitals and totally restructured the health care system. Education, which was previously limited to the elite, was made universal by government, while the 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. . . ."
A Trinidad Labor Leader Speaks
Toward A Party of the Workers

David Abdullah 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 Abdullah 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 Abdullah visited Detroit in November 1988. This interview was conducted for Against the Current by David Finkel and Joanna Miskin.

David Abdullah: 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-cent 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 activists—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—organizations of workers 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 25% 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 sugar-cane 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. Davison 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 nationalistic 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 Abdullah 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 PNMs, 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 PNMs survived because of the petrodollars. In 1973, with only six weeks of foreign exchange in the treasury, Eric Williams announced his retirement at his PNMs' 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 PNMs' popularity collapsed. The popular struggle resumed and culminated with the PNMs' 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 Re constitution (ONR) of Carl Hudson-Phillips, who like Robinson is a former PNMs cabinet minister—indeed, 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 Rafique 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, Panday 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" (Rafique Shah, Race Relations in Trinidad: Some Aspects, CLS pamphlet, 1986).]

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 PNMs went from twenty-six seats down to three in the thirty-six-member Parliament.

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?

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-

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." Rafique 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 activ-
ist 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 Pandyas'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 Pandyas's
party, but given his politics that would
be a dead end. So there will be two new
parties, as well as NAR. And FNM 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 signif-
ificant role in 1970.

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

Our draft platform, which will be
presented at the founding convention of
our party, is called "Towards a New
Democracy and the Road to Full Employ-
ment." 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 ex-
perience 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 sec-
ond largest exporter of anhydrous am-
monia. We have been up against trans-
national 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 elec-
torial 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 work-
ers 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 op-
posed 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 Jew-
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 overthrow
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 sup-
port. 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 focus-
ing on Jamaica. But nothing fundamen-
tal 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 move-
ments. The main progressive trade-
union leaders are in the CLS. That wasn't
because we planted them there—they
were workers who developed radical
polities.

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

—

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 Looklo, Democ-
acy in Education (1987 or 1988); Rafighe
Shah, Race Relations in Trinidad: Some

The program of the Oil Field Work-
ers Trade Union can be found in
the union's Memorandum to the Govern-
ment of Trinidad and Tobago (Nov. 10,
1987); and in the collection of articles
Towards a New Peoples Order (1986); both published by
Vanguard Publishing Company, San
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