

The Impact of the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis
on Trinidad, 1934-1937

By

Brian L. Friday

c

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts (History)

at

Dalhousie University

Halifax, Nova Scotia

April 10, 1986

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	v
Introduction: New World Black Response to the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis	1
Chapter I Trinidad in the 1930's: The Socio-Economic and Political Context of the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis	17
Chapter II The Italo-Ethiopian Crisis: Public Opinion and Organizational Responses in Trinidad, July- September 1935	69
Chapter III The Italo-Ethiopian War, October 1935 to May 1936: Organizational and Popular Reactions	97
Chapter IV The Italo-Ethiopian War: The Legacy	139
Conclusion	163
Bibliography	168

Abstract

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the sole surviving independent black nation (Haiti and Liberia notwithstanding), created a new wave of Ethiopianism - a sense of fraternity, of racial brotherhood, of a common history of oppression and exploitation among all people of African descent - among Afro-Trinidadians who identified Ethiopia as the symbol of black nationhood. Thus, in response to the war, new race organizations were formed and the black working class and petit-bourgeoisie gave both material and moral support to the Ethiopian resistance against Italian aggression. Under the impact of the Depression, moreover, the war provided both an international context and stimulus to the ideological and organizational struggles of the blacks against colonial exploitation; Afro-Trinidadian responses to the war became interwoven with the existing economic and political grievances of the black working class and petit bourgeoisie, and Ethiopianism became a vehicle for working-class politicization and radicalization which was manifested in strikes, demonstrations and mass violence in June 1937.

INTRODUCTION

New World Black Response to the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis

The term Ethiopia, first used by Europeans to refer to Africa or "the land of the blacks", signified for New World blacks freedom and emancipation from white domination.¹ The Christianization of black slaves in the United States and the West Indies led to their discovery of the Biblical Ethiopia which promised dignity and prophesied freedom for all Africans:

Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

(Ps. 68)

This was interpreted as a divine pledge that the African race would one day be delivered from slavery. It also generated concern for the redemption of Africa; black Christians who accepted the view of Africa as the Dark Continent and were inspired by this new found Ethiopian, or African consciousness, expressed the desire to preach the Gospel to their brothers, to civilize them, and to lift them from "their fallen state".²

In the late eighteenth century, in response to white racism in the church, black converts began to establish separate churches and placed their "nationality" ahead of the denominations to which they were affiliated. For example, the first Baptist church organized by Afro-Americans in the South in 1788 was named the First African Baptist Church.³ This appellation, says Leonard Barrett, who has studied the

emergence of Ethiopianism in Afro-America and Jamaica, "became the norm throughout the United States, whatever the denomination".⁴ He also states that:

By the time of the emergence of the Black Churches, Africa (as a geographical entity) was just about obliterated from [the] minds [of Afro-Americans]. Their only vision of a homeland was the biblical Ethiopia. It was a vision of a golden past - and the promise that Ethiopia should stretch forth its hands to God - revitalized the hope of an oppressed people. Ethiopia to the Blacks in America was like Zion or Jerusalem to the Jews. As the Black Church developed in America the spirit of missions developed.⁵

Early Afro-American churches interpreted the biblical prophecy (Ps. 68) mainly as a prediction of black spiritual redemption and were inspired to convert their African brethren.⁶ Consequently, Afro-American missionary activity focused mainly on Africa, particularly West Africa during most of the 19th century. The dominant personality of this redemption movement was Rev. Edward Wilmot Blyden who was sent to Liberia in 1850 by the American Colonization Society.⁷

Blyden, more than any other 19th century figure, developed Afro-American identification with Ethiopia into an ideology of Black liberation. Blyden supplemented his biblical knowledge of Ethiopia, which he interpreted as Africa, by studying Greek, Roman and Arabic sources where he discovered that Africa was not the barbaric, inferior culture projected by whites, but the founder of all civilizations. His books and articles founded an intellectual tradition among Afro-Americans which traced African history from ancient Ethiopian civilization, affirmed the

distinctive cultural attributes of African people, and advocated the return of Afro-Americans to Africa to help to create a united African nation free from European domination.⁸

Identification with Ethiopia as a racial, religious and political symbol among Africans was not restricted to West Africa where Blyden's influence was strongest. In southern Africa, the escalation of racial tension between European missionaries and Africans in the late 19th century gave rise to an Ethiopian church movement from the white-controlled missionary churches,⁹ and Ethiopianism became the term used to describe the establishment and operation of independent churches "according to African ideals, methods and objectives, by and for Africans".¹⁰

The 1896 defeat of the Italians at Adowa, lent political reality to the symbolic importance of Ethiopia for blacks in the United States.¹¹ The defeat of a European power by the only surviving independent African nation inspired racial pride among blacks and strengthened their determination to be free: "Ethiopia became emblematic of African valour and resistance, the shrine enclosing the last sacred spark of African political freedom ... a living symbol, an incarnation of African independence."¹²

Afro-American and Afro-West Indian interest in Ethiopia assumed a new dimension after World War I under the influence of Marcus Garvey and the Harlem based Back-to-Africa movement.¹³ Garvey, by birth a Jamaican, popularized the doctrine of "Africa for the Africans, at home and abroad", and advocated the return of race conscious blacks to assist in Africa's liberation and development.¹⁴ He often used the terms Africa

and Ethiopia synonymously and reaffirmed, through his writings and speeches, Ethiopia as a symbol of black pride, self-determination and self-reliance among his followers. Concerning the image of God and the black man's racial identity, for example, he wrote:

We, as Negroes, have found a new ideal. Whilst our God has no colour, yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have now started to see our God through our own spectacles. The God of Isaac and the God of Jacob let him exist for the race that believe in the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia ...¹⁵

Even though Garvey rejected the God of the Hebrews, the style of his speeches and writings were those of a prophet of Israel. Religious language was used to inspire his followers, and the Biblical prophesy that "Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall stretch forth its hands unto God" was Garvey's constant reminder to the people that their struggle for black liberation was righteous and just. Not surprisingly, in the eyes of many of his Jamaican followers, particularly the peasants with a Christian background, Garvey assumed a messianic personality and is said to have told his people to "Look to Africa, when a black King shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near."¹⁶

No evidence has so far been found to show that Garvey ever made the statement, but in the early 1930s the messianic/millenarian dimension of Garveyism gave birth to the Ras Tafari movement in Jamaica. When Ras Tafari, the ruler of Ethiopia, was crowned Emperor in 1930 and took the name Haile Selassie (which in Amharic means Power of the Trinity) to

which was added the biblical titles "King of Kings", "Lord of Lords" and "Lion of the Tribe of Judah", many supporters of Garveyism interpreted the event as a divine revelation (Revelations 5:2-5) and became convinced of the divinity of Haile Selassie. This community of believers identified themselves as Ras Tafari, hence the terms Rastafarian and Rastafarianism. In addition to the divinity of Haile Selassie, the Rastafarians believe that all black men are Ethiopians and that New World blacks must repatriate themselves to Africa, preferably to Ethiopia. Like the Black Jews of Harlem, the Rastafarians also believe that the ancient (biblical) Israelites were black people.¹⁷

It is in the context of this long established identification with Ethiopia that Afro-Americans and Afro-West Indians, reacted to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis.

Afro-American reactions have been the subject of a growing body of research; William R. Scott's pioneer "The American Negro and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1934-1936" was followed by the work of Robert Weisbord, Rod Ross, and S.K.B. Asante.¹⁸ These studies viewed the Afro-American reaction to Italian imperialism in Ethiopia within the context of Black Nationalist and pan-Africanist thought. Weisbord, for example, suggests that "Perhaps no single event in the twentieth century more clearly illuminated the nexus between diaspora blacks and continental blacks than the Italian-Ethiopian war ... New World Negroes at a critical moment made a strong racial identification with their beleaguered brothers in Ethiopia."¹⁹ Scott, moreover, claimed that "Afro-American identification with the Ethiopian cause not only represent[ed] an important development in black political thought, but also contradicts the thesis that the

proliferation of black nationalist movements and ideologies in the 1920's (particularly those motivated by Garveyism) was immediately followed by a thirty-year period in which nationalism as a significant theme in black thought virtually disappeared.²⁰ Such studies suggest that, at the height of the Depression, "elements of the nationalist creed, especially racial pride and patriotism, remained an influential and dynamic force in black life."²¹

It is clear that throughout 1935 and 1936, the Afro-American press followed the events in Ethiopia with unabated attention: "News reports, special features, editorials, letters to the editor, and photographs concerning the conflict appeared abundantly in the pages of the nation's leading black publications"²² including the Pittsburgh Courier, the New York Age, the Chicago Defender and the Baltimore Afro-American. Black newspapers universally supported the Ethiopian position, condemned the Italian fascists and called on the League of Nations to ensure Ethiopia's sovereignty and independence. The black press was joined in its condemnation of Italy by black political leaders and intellectuals. The pan-Africanist Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, for example, saw the conflict as confirmation of his theory that economic exploitation and racism were "the program of the white world"²³ and that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line."²⁴ Indeed he concluded that Mussolini had "killed the faith of all black folk in white men" and that Italian expansion and imperialism in Ethiopia "would increase racial antagonism throughout the globe."²⁵ Carter G. Woodson, the "father of the Negro History movement" and founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, argued that Ethiopians were "Negroes" and for this

reason Afro-Americans were obligated to give them all possible assistance.²⁶

Afro-American reaction was nation-wide, but its focal points were Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. In Harlem, "the Negro Capital of the Nation", a number of black organizations, some new, some old, were involved in mobilizing black financial and other support for the Ethiopians. Among them was the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.), whose leader, A.L. King, emerged as a central figure in New York's Ethiopia's defense campaign.²⁷ He was the Chairman of the Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia (P.C.D.E.), an alliance of diverse political and social groups, including black communists, black nationalists and churchmen, established March 1935.²⁸ The P.C.D.E. held mass meetings and rallies to raise funds and moral support for Ethiopia. Similar efforts were made by the International Council of Friends of Ethiopia, the United Aid for Ethiopia and the Ethiopian World Federation.

Afro-Americans also advocated a military involvement in the Italo-Ethiopian War and in the major cities efforts were made to recruit black volunteers of the Ethiopian War Front. An expeditionary force never materialised, but determined individuals such as the Trinidadian born Harlemite Hubert F. Julian, a Garveyite, and John C. Robinson, both aeroplane pilots, went to Ethiopia and were given high commands in the Ethiopian Royal Air Force.²⁹

Black churchmen were equally concerned about Italy's aggression against Ethiopia, both in the name of "racial solidarity" and because Ethiopia was a Christian country.³⁰ Many church leaders viewed the crisis as a challenge to white Christendom in Africa and the Diaspora,

and predicted that Mussolini's conquest of Ethiopia and the ambivalent attitude of the Vatican - which was widely accused of being supportive of Mussolini's designs - would shatter the blackman's confidence in the white man's concept of Christianity. Black congregations were also asked to support the fund raising drives which were being organized to aid the defence of the Fatherland.³¹

Finally, as was almost inevitable in this atmosphere of heightened racial tension and consciousness, a series of violent confrontations between Afro-Americans and Italian Americans took place. In August 1935 the first major riot occurred in New Jersey and on October 4, 1935, the day after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia began, serious rioting broke out in Brooklyn and Harlem.³²

Afro-American reaction to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, manifested by black intellectuals, the press and the church and by a range of organizations for the defense of Ethiopia indicates, Weisbord concludes, "that New World Negroes had the will but not the power to stem the tide of fascist aggression".³³ The question arises to what extent was this response shared by Afro-West Indians and what forms did that response take?

Afro-West Indian reactions to the Italo-Ethiopian war outside Jamaica have not yet been subjected to in-depth historical investigation. A preliminary survey done by Robert G. Weisbord, however, suggests that in the British colonies of St. Kitts, St. Lucia, Barbados and British Guiana (Guyana), Afro-West Indians expressed solidarity with Ethiopia, and efforts were made to mobilize financial assistance for the beleaguered African nation.³⁴ Post's analysis of the Jamaican reaction

makes it clear that racial sympathies with Ethiopia were overwhelming, particularly among the Rastafarians and Garveyites.³⁵

Post's massively detailed study establishes that popular interest in the Ethiopian cause was stimulated, as in the United States, by the Jamaican press, particularly by the race conscious Plain Talk edited by the Garveyite Alfred Mends, which enjoyed wide circulation particularly among the black working class and petit-bourgeois in Kingston.³⁶ Under the title "In Defense of Abyssinia and Its History", Plain Talk published an extensive series of articles written by a pro-Ethiopian supporter, L.F.C. Mantle; it also published articles from Afro-American newspapers which heightened Afro-Jamaican awareness of Ethiopian and African history.³⁷ An attempt was also made by Plain Talk to launch in January 1936 an Ethiopian Medical Aid Fund; its readers, however, apparently proved too impoverished to contribute.³⁸ The Garveyites, led by Amy Jacques Garvey attempted to recruit soldiers for Ethiopia; at a rally held in October 1935 1,400 persons petitioned the King to allow Jamaicans to enlist in the Ethiopian army "to fight to preserve the glories of our ancient and beloved Empire".³⁹

Afro-Jamaicans evidently shared Afro-American sentiments as to the significance of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, but Post does not provide any detailed documentation of the actual activities undertaken by the local organizations to assist Ethiopia. Post's study of the Jamaican experience, however, inspired by his larger concern with the role of ideology in the development of working class consciousness and the dynamics of class conflict, views the impact of the Ethiopian crisis within the framework of Jamaican Ethiopianism.

He defines this Ethiopianism as it emerged in the Rastafarian movement of the early 1930's as "a general view of the relationship between the black man and the white, its past, present and future, which in its most political form had implications akin to those of 'Africa for the Africans'".⁴⁰ The identification between race and socio-economic status had not changed significantly in Jamaica since Abolition; to be black meant to be poor without much hope of betterment. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and its betrayal by white allies, heightened the perception of the world as a place of suffering for the black man, "and changes as a necessary precondition for ending that suffering".⁴¹ In that sense, Post says, "Ethiopianism could serve as a vehicle for some sort of radicalism."⁴² Strong anti-white feelings coupled with the anticipation that the Italo-Ethiopian war would escalate into a major international conflict and lead to the collapse of white domination - an expectation which, Post claims, informed even some middle class and petty bourgeois elements' perception of the crisis - suggested that "a campaign might be launched against British colonial rule in Jamaica".⁴³

When serious labour disturbances erupted in 1938, however, Post argues that Ethiopianist groups such as the Rastafarians played no significant role because Black Nationalism or Ethiopianism, articulated reality "only as a projection of that most generalised of Jamaica's basic contradictions [i.e., race] and not of its class contradictions".⁴⁴ With specific reference to Rastafarianism, moreover, he asserts that "because of [the] religious elements involved, Jamaican cognitive practice tended to expect the world to be changed by some sort of divine intervention, in a flight from the real world into an imaginary, often fantastic one,

which precluded effective political action" particularly among the urban and rural poor.⁴⁵ Finally, class differences within the black population, Post contends, prevented black consciousness, or Ethiopianism "becoming an incentive to organisation which cut across peasants, workers and intermediate classes".⁴⁶

Trinidadian historians, by contrast, have perceived the Italo-Ethiopian war and the failure of the western democracies to support Ethiopia, as stimulating black nationalism and heightening the popular discontent which led to the 1937 labour strikes.⁴⁷ Brereton quotes Calder-Marshall, a contemporary observer who claimed that "Britain's betrayal of Abyssinia was nearly as much to blame for the riots in Trinidad and Jamaica as the high cost of living".⁴⁸ Basdeo's study of labour organization and labour reform in Trinidad, 1919-1939,⁴⁹ did not investigate Calder-Marshall's thesis, but agrees that Afro-Trinidadian support for Ethiopia was overwhelming. He cites as evidence the fact that a number of organizations "suddenly mushroomed" to protest the Italian invasion of Ethiopia; these included the Negro Welfare Social and Cultural Association; the Citizens Committee; the Afro-West Indian League; the Friends of Ethiopia and the West Indian Youth Welfare League.⁵⁰

To this point, however, no work has been done to investigate in any detail Afro-Trinidadian responses to the war, or to establish the relationship between these responses and the upheavals of 1937. This study undertakes this task. It will focus primarily on political groups and parties, paying particular attention to groups associated with the Ethiopian cause. These organizations will be examined to determine their

ideological and leadership content, their social class composition and how they sought to mobilize political and material support for the Ethiopian cause. This study will also attempt to establish the interconnections between the rise of black consciousness and the intensification of popular struggle against economic deprivation and powerlessness.

Chapter 1 examines the historical, economic and political forces which determined class and race relationships within colonial Trinidad, the economic and social impact of the Depression and the development of labour and black nationalist movements during the early 1930's. These conditions, it will be argued, determined to a significant extent Afro-Trinidadian reactions to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. Chapter 2 discusses the development of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis which erupted in December 1934, the attitudes of the British and French governments and the League of Nations towards Italian aggression in Ethiopia, and the manifestation of popular and organized reactions in Trinidad between May and September 1935. Chapter 3 begins with the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war in October 1935 and examines Trinidadian efforts to assist Ethiopia during the war which ended in June 1936. The final chapter undertakes to assess the political importance of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict to the labour disturbances which occurred in June 1937.

Notes

Introduction

¹William Scott, "'And Ethiopia shall stretch forth its hands': The Origins of Ethiopianism in Afro-American Thought 1767-1896", Umoja, 11, 1 (Spring, 1978), pp. 1-14; Ken Post, 'The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica 1930-1938', C.H. Allen and R.W. Johnson (eds.), African Perspectives (London: 1970), p. 191); St. Clair Drake, The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion (Chicago: Third World Press, 1970), p. 10.

²Drake, The Redemption of Africa, p. 50.

³Ibid., p. 26.

⁴Leonard E. Barrett, The Rastafarians (Kingston: Heinemann, 1977), p. 77.

⁵Ibid., p. 79.

⁶Drake, The Redemption of Africa, pp. 41-53.

⁷Hollis Lynch, Edward Wilmot Blyden 1832-1912. Pan-Negro Patriot (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁸See Edward Wilmot Blyden, Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race (1887; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967). Blyden asserted that "Every race ... has a soul, and the soul of the race finds expression in its institutions, and to kill those institutions is to kill the soul." Quoted in Robert W. July, 'Nineteenth-Century Negritude: Edward W. Blyden', Journal of African History, V, 1 (1964), p. 76.

⁹George Shepperson, 'Ethiopianism and African Nationalism', Phylon, XIV (Spring 1953), p. 9.

¹⁰S.K.B. Asante, 'The Afro-American and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1934-1936', Race, XV, 2 (October 1973), p. 168.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 168-169.

¹²Ibid., p. 170.

¹³William A. Shack, 'Ethiopia and Afro-Americans: Some Historical Notes, 1920-1970', Phylon, XXXIII, 1 (Spring 1972), p. 146.

¹⁴Tony Martin, Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1976).

¹⁵Amy Jacques Garvey (ed.), Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey Vol. 1 (1923; New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 44.

¹⁶M.G. Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettleford, The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica. (Kingston: Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of the West Indies, 1960).

¹⁷A detailed account of Rastafarian beliefs is found in Barrett, The Rastafarians, pp. 103-155.

¹⁸William R. Scott, 'The American Negro and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1934-1936' (M.A. thesis, Howard University, 1966); idem, 'Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict, 1934-1936', Journal of Negro History, LXIII, 2 (April 1978), pp. 118-134; Robert Weisbord, Ebony Kinship (Westport and London: Greenwood Press Inc., 1973), pp. 89-114; Rod Ross, 'Black Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian Relief 1935-1936', Ethiopian Observer, XV, 2 (1972), pp. 122-131; Asante, 'The Afro-American and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis', pp. 167-183.

¹⁹Weisbord, Ebony Kinship, p. 89.

²⁰For example, John H. Bracey Jr., 'Black Nationalism Since Garvey' in Nathan Huggins, Martin Kilson, Daniel M. Fox (eds.), Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience, Vol. 2 (New York, 1971), pp. 262-263.

²¹Scott, 'The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict', p. 119.

²²Ibid., p. 120.

²³Ibid., p. 122.

²⁴W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1973), Forethought, p. vii.

²⁵Scott, 'The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict', p. 122.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 129.

³⁰Ibid., p. 121.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., pp. 129-130; Asante, 'The Italo-Ethiopian Crisis', p. 178.

³³Weisbord, Ebony Kinship, p. 110.

³⁴Robert G. Weisbord, 'British West Indian Reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War: An Episode in Pan-Africanism', Caribbean Studies, 10, 1 (April 1970), pp. 34-41.

³⁵Ken Post, Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), pp. 159-201; idem, 'The Bible as Ideology'.

³⁶Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 209.

³⁷Ibid., p. 168.

³⁸Weisbord, "British West Indian Reaction", p. 36. Such attempts to recruit Afro-West Indian soldiers were duplicated in British Guiana (Guyana), Grenada and Trinidad but were all unsuccessful. British law prohibited colonial subjects to join foreign armies. Furthermore, were Afro-West Indians free to enlist in the Ethiopian army, it is doubtful whether they could have gone to Ethiopia without financial assistance of either the British or Ethiopian government.

³⁹Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 168.

⁴⁰Post, 'The Bible as Ideology', p. 188.

⁴¹Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 194.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Bridget Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962 (Port-of-Spain: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 174-175.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 174.

⁴⁹Sahadeo Basdeo, Labour Organisation and Labour Reform in Trinidad 1919-1939 (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1983).

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 130.

CHAPTER 1

Trinidad in the 1930's: The Socio-Economic and Political Context of the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis

The impact of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis was felt in Trinidad in a period of economic stress and political conflict. In response to objective conditions - high unemployment and underemployment, low wages, repressive legislation and a generally low standard of living for the majority of the black and East Indian people, and the exacerbation of these conditions in the Great Depression - class and race conflict intensified. This manifested itself in spontaneous demonstrations of the unemployed, the emergence of militant working-class leaders and organizations, nation-wide strikes and riots in 1937, and the development of an eager and vibrant trade union movement in the late 1930's. This chapter establishes, first, the broader social, economic and political context within which these developments unfolded, and secondly, analyzes developments within the labour and black nationalist movements up to 1935, as a prelude to social and political protest during and after the Italo-Ethiopian war.

The Social Structure

Trinidad's social structure in the 1930's contained elements of both a caste and class nature. At the top of the social pyramid was a white ruling class which consisted of two main groups: British officials, English and Scottish merchants, planters and professionals, and the

predominantly French-speaking Creoles who had substantial interests in real estate and commerce.¹ Race was a critical factor in determining access to this class since people of European origin (whites) constituted "not merely an upper class, but a caste apart, the common denominator of which was whiteness. Regardless of cultural and educational status, provided one was white, entry was permitted."² The Portuguese, Syrians and Lebanese, however, were not included in this caste. They constituted a petit bourgeois element involved in the petty trades: retail stores, groceries, rum shops and itinerant huckstering, which, as Ryan suggests, "did not rate inclusion among those associated with whiteness."³ The white-minority ruling class dominated the economic, political, religious and social life of Trinidad society in the 1930's.

The middle class consisted mainly of coloureds, some of whom were descendants of wealthy coloured planters and slave-owners and still owned family estates, and to a lesser extent blacks who had risen in the social scale through education.⁴ Most persons of middle class status were employed in white-collar occupations as teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, druggists, civil servants and clerks.⁵ The aim of the coloured middle class was "to penetrate as far as possible into white society. They disparaged their ancestral past and strove to eliminate or conceal all evidence of their negroid origin. They accepted and internalized all the myths about black inferiority, and imitated with exaggerated fidelity the cultural patterns of the Europeans"⁶. Yet, the limiting barrier of race often prompted a tendency to race consciousness.⁷ Educated blacks resented discrimination against them in the civil service, especially the appointment of expatriates and local whites to medical,

legal and teaching posts. They also presumed that their education qualified them to participate in the political process.⁸ This educated middle class became increasingly politicized and was to eventually oppose the colonial system.

At the bottom of the social system was the black working class, and East Indians who constituted a distinct socio-cultural and racial group. The majority of working-class blacks lived in the rural areas as small cultivators, field labourers in cocoa and sugar, while skilled workers found employment in the oil and asphalt industries.⁹ A significant and growing number of working-class blacks, however, lived in towns, particularly Port-of-Spain the capital, in the north, and San Fernando in the south. Black urban workers were mainly employed as domestics, washer-women, messengers, and skilled and unskilled labourers in the government public works and railways.¹⁰ A large number of blacks were habitually unemployed, "part of the floating population of petty criminals, prostitutes and so-called vagrants".¹¹

This black working class exhibited ambivalent attitudes towards the dominant white oriented cultural mainstream. On the one hand, it accepted the superiority of European traditions and institutions and on the other hand, retained and practised elements of its own African cultural forms in music (the Calypso), art (Carnival), religion (Shango and spiritual Baptists), diet and, to a lesser extent, dress.¹² These African retentions, which were often fused with European adaptations, provided a sense of community and a source of strength and inspiration to a people whose living conditions were generally wretched.

The East Indians were essentially agricultural workers employed on the sugar plantations; some were peasant cultivators growing sugar, cocoa and rice, and a very small number were employed in the oil and asphalt industries.¹³ Most East Indians lived in the rural areas and practised their traditional religions (Hinduism and Islam) and other customs and, in contrast to the blacks, were not integrated into the cultural mainstream.¹⁴ Cultural differences between Blacks and East Indians were reinforced by stereotypes of each other which had emerged in the nineteenth century. Blacks who were hostile towards East Indian indenture-ship, which they viewed as a threat to their economic position,¹⁵ regarded the unwesternized East Indians as "pagans" and "heathens"; the East Indians reciprocated by referring to the blacks as "savages" "awkward and vulgar in manners".¹⁶ This hostility between both races, Basdeo suggests, "considerably weakened what could otherwise have been an effective working class alliance between both black and East Indian workers in the inter-war years".¹⁷

The Chinese occupied a unique position within the social hierarchy. Originally, they constituted "a marginal part of the lower strata"¹⁸ but quickly established themselves in the retail and service trades.¹⁹ Because their pigmentation approximated that of the whites, the Chinese were regarded "as a sort of buffer against the tide of black radicalism",²⁰ a presumption the Chinese exploited to achieve rapid social mobility.

Race and colour, therefore, were main determinants of social class though there was an increasing divorce between racial and economic factors such as education, income and occupation. Blacks and East Indians

were poor and institutionally powerless, while the whites were rich, powerful and socially dominant.

The Colonial Economy

Trinidad's colonial economy in the 1930's formed a peripheral and dependent unit within the superordinate system of world capitalism.²¹ This relationship took root as Trinidad emerged as a sugar plantation economy in the late 18th and 19th century; the production and export of agricultural commodities, which were controlled by British and French planters, were totally dependent on foreign, mainly British markets and capital.²² The economic life of the colony was thus dominated by its external relations with British capitalism; a century after Emancipation, metropolitan dominance remained a dominant feature of the colonial economy.

British and foreign capital owned and controlled two of the three major export industries, oil and sugar; local capitalists, mainly French Creoles, were dominant only in the cocoa industry. In 1937 ten British-owned companies operated in the sugar industry which, between 1932 and 1937, produced an average of 118, 629 tons per year at the average value of \$5,383,586 per annum.²³ Available data, however, does not indicate the percentage of sugar exports to total domestic exports. The importance of the sugar industry to the colonial economy, however, is underlined by its role as the major employer of labour, some 23,797 workers in 1938.²⁴ Twenty foreign owned, mainly British companies, operated in the oil industry.²⁵ Between 1933 and 1937 the value of exports of crude oil and petroleum products increased from \$10,819,464 to \$18,896,422; the

percentage of petroleum exports to total domestic exports also increased from 52.1 percent to 59.93 percent.²⁶ The oil industry employed 14,307 workers (including labourers employed by contractors) making it the third largest employer after sugar and cocoa, which accounted for 17,523, in 1938.²⁷ Moreover, as the largest producer of refined oil in the British Empire and the source of 25 percent of the aviation fuel required by the British Royal Air Force, it was strategically important to Britain.²⁸

Trinidad's dependence on foreign markets made it susceptible to the vagaries of world trade, and the Great Depression induced a significant fall in exports further compounded by a drastic fall in world commodity prices.²⁹ This was particularly the case in sugar and cocoa, which had already begun to feel the effects of world overproduction and large scale surpluses that forced down prices throughout the 1920's.³⁰ Sugar prices for the entire British West Indies plummeted from 33s 3d in 1923 to 10s 1½d in 1929, further declined to 5s 3d in 1935, recovered slightly in 1937 and had fallen to 5s 4½d by mid-1938.³¹ Sugar production in Trinidad followed closely the pattern of rise and fall until the mid-1930's; it rose from a low of 85,956 tons in 1932 to 108,517 in 1933 and declined to 93,513 in 1934.³² Thereafter, production steadily recovered to reach some 115,000 tons in 1938-9.³³ This increase was made possible by a combination of two factors; a significant reduction in production cost and substantial preferential assistance from Great Britain and Canada.³⁴

The cocoa industry experienced tremendous dislocation and decline during the 1920's and 1930's as a result of overproduction, competition from Gold Coast and South American cocoa, Witch Broom disease and a

severe fall in prices.³⁵ For example, cocoa prices collapsed from \$23.90 per fanega* in 1919-1920 to \$9.50 in 1920-21, recovered somewhat in 1924 and 1930 to average between \$19 and \$23 per bag, and then declined to \$5.77 per fanega in 1933; the average price between 1932 and 1935 was only \$6.35 per fanega.³⁶ The combined effect of low prices and crop disease was reflected in declining production figures between 1932 and 1937 except for 1933 and 1935. Production fell from 51,311,274 lbs. in 1933 to 26,803,149 lbs. in 1934, recovered to 44,387,836 lbs. in 1935 and thereafter declined to 26,258,622 lbs. in 1937.³⁷

To restore profit margins, new technology and better management were introduced into the sugar and cocoa industry and, at the same time, both the colonial and imperial governments offered favourable trading and financial agreements to the companies.³⁸ The chief economy effected, however, was in labour costs.

The West India Royal Commission (1938/9) established that in the sugar industry, "the big reduction in the costs of production which has enabled the industry to supply a steadily increasing quantity of sugar to the British consumer at a falling price has necessarily entailed a reduction in the amount of labour employed per ton of sugar".³⁹ Labourers were laid off, or offered only temporary employment and tasks were arbitrarily increased while minimum wages were paid.⁴⁰ Field labourers received from 2 cents to 8 cents per hour and a skilled factory worker up to 12 cents per hour for an 8 to 12 hour day, depending on the season.⁴¹ Cane

*Prices were quoted per fanega (110 lb) and sometimes per bag (165 lb., i.e., 1½ fanega).

farmers, many of whom worked part-time for the sugar companies, received low wages as well as low prices for their cane.⁴²

Wages were marginally better in the cocoa industry. Daily paid workers received from 5 cents to 8 cents per hour for an 8-hour work day in 1937.⁴³ The wage scale in the oil industry, which was not adversely affected by the economic depression, bore some relation to the wage structure established by the traditional plantocracy; wages varied from 9 cents per hour for most to 24 cents for highly skilled workers such as rigmen.⁴⁴ Government wages followed closely the pattern established in the private sector. Unskilled labour in the Government Railways and Public Works Department, for example, received from 6 cents to 7½ cents per hour (women, 4 cents to 6 cents), while skilled workers received from 7 cents to 25 cents for an 8-hour day.⁴⁵ Domestic servants were, perhaps, the lowest paid workers receiving 20 cents to 50 cents a day (\$4 to \$10 per month).⁴⁶

Low wages were further aggravated by intermittent employment, both in towns and in the country, as was the case for the entire British West Indies during the 1930's.⁴⁷ Moreover, a large disparity existed between wage rates in the towns and those in the country for similar work.⁴⁸ The increase in rural unemployment and underemployment, and the comparatively higher urban wage rates, intensified the drift to the towns.⁴⁹ An underlying cause of this dynamic was the decline of the peasant sector, particularly the small cocoa planters.

For most peasants, low commodity prices increased the difficulty of getting an adequate cash income from the cultivation of export crops. Consequently, thousands of small peasant producers were forced to abandon

their land and become full time wage workers in an already overcrowded labour market; those who remained in production sought part-time employment to supplement their incomes.⁵⁰ This process was particularly evident in the cocoa industry; between 1932 and 1938 some 28,000 acres of peasant lands were abandoned.⁵¹ In 1937, 10,000 small farmers shared only 36,370 (or less than 20 percent) out of a total of 208,954 acres under production; the rest was owned by the French Creoles.⁵²

Significantly, it was the white cocoa plantocracy that benefited from government intervention. Money given to cocoa producers between 1920 and 1940 went to the larger planters and not to the thousands of peasant proprietors, many of whom were part-time employees on the plantations.⁵³ Moreover, the government did nothing to stop the planters reducing wages and laying off workers during these years.⁵⁴

The social consequences of high unemployment, underemployment and low wages among the working class were vividly apparent in the areas of health, housing and education.⁵⁵ Malnutrition, due to an imbalanced diet, lowered resistance to diseases, particularly among infants and young children, and the elderly. The infant mortality rate, for example, averaged 121 deaths per 1,000 between 1928 and 1937 as compared with the overall death rate which averaged 18 per 1,000.⁵⁶ Ill health was further aggravated by poor housing and unsanitary conditions which facilitated the spread of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, leprosy and yaws.⁵⁷ The Moyne Commission described the housing conditions of the large majority of the working people in the West Indian colonies as "deplorable", and admitted that in some areas "the conditions are such that any human habitation of buildings now occupied by large families

must be seen [as] impossible to a newcomer from Europe".⁵⁸

Malnutrition and ill-health were an obstacle to productive efficiency among the working class as well as a deterrent to learning among school children. Also, although considerable primary education was provided, many children, particularly in the rural areas, were unable to attend school because of poverty and were forced to seek employment at exploitative wage rates.⁵⁹ One consequence of this was the high illiteracy rate which existed in the rural areas. In the county of Caroni, the largest sugar growing area, 63.9 percent of the population could not read or write; the figure varied from 17.6 percent to 21.3 percent for Port-of-Spain in the north and San Fernando in the south, respectively.⁶⁰ These, however, were the main urban centers where education played a more important role in determining employment opportunities.

The socio-economic position of the black and East Indian working class was, generally, one of abject poverty due to unemployment and employment at low wages. The poor relief statistics for 1935 revealed that a total of 31,388 pauper and poverty certificates were issued in Port-of-Spain by the health authorities; another 36,341 were issued for the rest of the island. In the southern county of Victoria, which included a large sugar growing area, and San Fernando, the second major town, 22,021 persons were relieved as paupers in 1935 as compared with 14,947 in 1934.⁶¹ Insofar as government resources were to be used for improving economic conditions, it was with the view of propping up the traditional plantation structure by rendering financial assistance to the planters in times of low prices. The needs of labour were to be met on terms "consonant with the requirements of the economic structure"⁶² from which

the white-minority ruling class derived its traditional dominance over the society.

The Political Structure and Black Working-Class Protest

Trinidad was a Crown colony; this system of government as established in 1797, made the governor - the Crown's representative - the chief lawmaker. He administered the colony with the assistance of a Council of Government, or Legislative Council, which consisted of the governor as president, six official and six unofficial members nominated by the governor.⁶³ Minor changes in 1898 increased the number of official and unofficial members to eleven respectively; it did not, however, alter the basic theory of Crown colony government, that the governor had final authority, subject only to the Crown.⁶⁴

Constitutional reforms were introduced in 1924 as the result of black working-class pressure fuelled by the hardships of post-war depression and organized by the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (T.W.A.), the sole existing working-class organization.⁶⁵ Under this new system, the Legislative Council comprised seven elected councillors, six nominated unofficials and twelve officials, and the governor who exercised both an original and a casting vote. The Councillors, however, were to be elected on a franchise limited to 6 percent of the population while qualifications for election ensured that members would come from the planter and managerial class.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the first elections in 1925 allowed Captain Andrew Cipriani, the president of the T.W.A., to become a Legislative Council member.⁶⁷

Cipriani's rise to prominence within the T.W.A. and the labour movement was somewhat paradoxical. He was a white French Creole cocoa planter and race horse owner, which made him a member of the upper class,⁶⁸ and thus far removed from the rank and file black working-class members of the T.W.A. Cipriani, however, had openly opposed the racist treatment of black soldiers at home and in Europe during the war.⁶⁹ On his return to Trinidad in 1919, he immediately joined the TWA and openly articulated the grievances of the poor, thereby gaining the respect of black workers and the unemployed.⁷⁰ The fact that Cipriani was white, yet displayed "a highly accessible, fraternal mode of interaction"⁷¹ with working-class blacks, may have enhanced his charisma and strong populist appeal.

Cipriani proclaimed himself leader of "the barefooted man" in the Legislative Council and eloquently argued the workers' demands for the enactment of minimum wage legislation, a trade union law, workmen's compensation, old age pension, an eight hour day and a health insurance scheme.⁷² He also raised issues which were of vital importance to the coloured and black middle class: the introduction of competitive examinations for entry and promotion in the Civil Service, better wages and more jobs for teachers and the broadening of the franchise to allow greater participation of the middle class in the political process.⁷³

In order to strengthen the movement for constitutional reform at home Cipriani developed close links with the British Labour Party (B.L.P.) which later came to power in 1929.⁷⁴ The B.L.P. supported constitutional reform within the imperial framework as well as moderation in industrial matters. Regarding the role of trade unions in the struggle to end

economic exploitation, the B.L.P. suggested one of "defence and not defiance".⁷⁵ Industrial disputes, moreover, should be settled by "pacific measures, by calm and deliberate consideration round a table" rather than through "the bitterness of an industrial struggle".⁷⁶ Significantly, the B.L.P. gave credence to Cipriani's reformist political approach and after two visits to London in 1925 and 1928 respectively, Cipriani was confident of its commitment to the cause of the colonial masses.⁷⁷

Cipriani's hopes and optimism were widely shared by workers and the unemployed "in the belief that the dawn of a new era was at hand".⁷⁸ The Labour government (1929-1930) did little, however, to advance labour and political reform in the colonies, and when it fell in 1931, the Trinidadian masses were left with broken promises. Cipriani's policy of linking the objectives of the T.W.A. to the political successes of the B.L.P., and his emphasis on constitutional reform, had failed to win for workers their right to trade union organization, both a minimum wage and workmen's compensation bill, and an 8-hour work day.⁷⁹ Significantly, this failure occurred against the backdrop of reduced wages, shorter working hours, rising unemployment and a high cost of living resultant upon the economic depression which began in 1929.

By 1930, therefore, socio-economic and political forces were already at work which would undermine Cipriani's leadership among black workers and the unemployed.

These developments at the national level were cast within the broader international context of black struggle for economic, social and political liberation which intensified during the Depression of the late

1920's and 1930's. Black radicalism in this period was influenced by two competing ideological currents, Marxism and Black Nationalism. The historical roots of this debate can be traced to the immediate post-war years with the emergence of the Communist and Garveyite movements in the United States.⁸⁰ The tenacity of Garveyism among Afro-Americans and West Indians living in the United States, and the failure of the communists to gain widespread support within the black community, led the Communist Party of the United States of America (C.P.U.S.A.) and the Communist International to reconsider its approach to the race question.⁸¹

The Comintern maintained that class and not race was the primary factor in the revolutionary struggle against world capitalism and imperialism, but began to view the "Negro Question" in more than economic terms. The Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928 declared that

The Negro Question in the United States must be considered in relation to the Negro question and struggles in other parts of the world. The Negro is an oppressed race. Whether he is in a minority (U.S.A.), majority (South Africa) or inhabits a so-called independent state (Liberia, etc.) the Negroes are oppressed by imperialism. Thus a common tie of interest is established for the revolutionary struggle of race and national liberation from imperialist domination of Negroes in various parts of the world. A strong Negro Revolutionary movement in the U.S.A. will be able to influence and direct the revolutionary movements in all those parts of the world where the Negroes are oppressed by imperialism.⁸²

The significance of this resolution for the Communist movement among blacks was two-fold.

Firstly, with respect to the Negro Question in the United States, the "Black Republic" thesis was advanced.⁸³ Because blacks were an oppressed people with a common background and tradition, and were situated in a relatively contiguous geographic area [the Black Belt], they constituted a nation within the United States, and thus had a right to self-determination. The "Negro" national liberation movement, if necessary, would first take the form of a bourgeois-nationalist movement, "but as it progressed the Negro proletariat would play an increasingly important role and ultimately obtain control of it".⁸⁴ In other words, the Communists sought to use Black Nationalism to advance the cause of the class struggle.

Secondly, as part of the reorientation of the revolutionary program of the Communist International towards the black liberation movement in Africa and the West Indies, "Negro" institutions were established such as the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (I.T.U.C.-N.W.) and The Negro Worker, the organ of the I.T.U.C.-N.W., in 1930.⁸⁵ The I.T.U.C.-N.W. was defined in The Negro Worker as "a class organization, organizing and leading the fight in the interest of Negro workers in Africa, the West Indies and other colonies".⁸⁶ The question arises, to what extent was the black working-class struggle in Trinidad influenced by these external developments which had far reaching implications for international alliances?

Significantly, George Padmore, a black Trinidadian communist, was secretary and editor of the I.T.U.C.-N.W. and The Negro Worker respectively.⁸⁷ Padmore, whose father was a school teacher, attended the prestigious College of the Immaculate Conception and had a brief career

as a journalist with the Trinidad Weekly Guardian. His early political development was influenced by Garveyism but within three years of his arrival in the United States in 1924, Padmore was actively involved in the C.P.U.S.A. He had, by 1929, so distinguished himself as an ideologue and activist that he was elected as a member of the U.S. delegation to the Second Congress of the League Against Imperialism (L.A.I.) in Frankfurt, Germany. The following year Padmore attended the First International Conference of Negro Workers in Hamburg, Germany, which was organized by the Red International of Labour Unions (R.I.L.U.). Black delegates at this Conference founded the I.T.U.C.-N.W. and Padmore, being the foremost intellectual among the black communists, was elected Secretary of the I.T.U.C.-N.W.⁸⁸

Padmore wrote extensively on the anti-colonial and race/class questions in the West Indies and Africa. In 1931, for example, he published the "Life and Struggle of Negro Toilers" in which he argued that "race" coincided with "class", and racism thus was a product of capitalism:

The oppression of Negroes assumes two distinct forms: on the one hand they are oppressed as a class and on the other as a nation. This national [race] oppression has its basis in the social-economic relation of the negro under capitalism.⁸⁹

Padmore sought to develop race consciousness into class consciousness among Afro-West Indians and Africans. This was particularly so in Trinidad where he considered the labour movement the most advanced in the West Indies.⁹⁰

Padmore, and the I.T.U.C.-N.W., opposed the ideology of Labour Socialism, the anti-Marxist, reformist resolution to the class struggle which dictated the policies of the British trade unions and B.L.P.⁹¹ Consequently, the T.W.A.'s failure to achieve its industrial objectives under the Labour Government [1929-30] prompted a propaganda campaign against Cipriani's leadership in The Negro Worker. Padmore, in his dual capacity as Secretary of the I.T.U.C.-N.W. and editor of The Negro Worker accused Cipriani of being a "reformist misleader" and argued that the working-class struggle against colonialism and imperialism should center around "a real revolutionary trade union movement".⁹² The "left wing opposition" to Cipriani was advised to "immediately begin a wide campaign among the rank and file in the various unions as well as the unorganized on the basis of concrete everyday demands which should be linked up with the ultimate demands of [their] class interests".⁹³

Padmore did not identify the left wing opposition to Cipriani, but his reference to "various unions" may indicate elements within the Seamen and Waterfront, and Railway 'Unions' affiliated to the T.W.A.⁹⁴ Waterfront workers, in particular, formed a disciplined, and politically aware group by virtue of contacts made with foreign seamen which exposed them to new ideas and opinions through discussions, pamphlets and newspapers. At least one member of the Seamen and Waterfront union, Charles Alexander, was a correspondent for The Negro Worker. Alexander claimed that the T.W.A. had become nothing more than a mouthpiece of the British Labour Party whose policy was to placate the workers with promises designed "to make them docile slaves to their British rulers".⁹⁵ He argued also that in the absence of a working-class political party

committed to revolutionary class struggle, it was the duty of the I.T.U.C.-N.W. not only to make contact with the workers, but to enter the field as an organizer and leader of the masses.⁹⁶

The I.T.U.C.-N.W.'s attempt to motivate the development of a revolutionary trade union movement in Trinidad coincided, significantly, with the decision of the colonial government, in response to pressure from the colonial office, to concede trade union legislation.⁹⁷ In view of the fact that the governor intended to grant only limited rights to workers,⁹⁸ the government considered communist propaganda as a threat to industrial and social peace. Consequently, The Negro Worker was banned in February 1932, four months before the Trade Union Ordinance was introduced. Six months later the ban was extended to all publications of the C.P.U.S.A.⁹⁹

West Indian governments in this period were commonly hostile towards communist literature. The Jamaican government, for example, banned The Negro Worker and other communist publications, and imprisoned the editor of a working class paper, T. Barnes, for eighteen months for republishing an editorial from The Daily Worker, the organ of the C.P.U.S.A.¹⁰⁰

The Negro Worker continued, however, to be circulated by West Indian and foreign seamen who served as an international distribution network,¹⁰¹ and the ban itself became useful propaganda. The Negro Worker attributed the ban to the fact that the rank and file members of the T.W.A. whose leaders "have been fooled by all kinds of promises by the British reformist labor politicians like J.H. Thomas, Lord Passfield, Arthur Henderson" were beginning to realise that the British Labour Party, "despite its name 'labour' is as imperialistic as the Tories, and thus it

will never support the struggles of the colonial peoples for self-government".¹⁰² Charles Alexander suggested that The Negro Worker had brought the Trinidadian masses,

a correct picture of the misery and squalor surrounding their lives, and the path they must pursue not only to alleviate these unbearable conditions but to put a final end to their exploitation and oppression by the imperialist parasites.¹⁰³

He claimed also that the ban was imposed because the colonial government had realized "the great interest" which was being manifested in The Negro Worker, particularly among dock workers who had begun "to follow the suggestion [sic] and teachings" of the I.T.U.C.-N.W.¹⁰⁴

The ban on The Negro Worker conceivably cleared the way for the introduction of the Trade Union Law in June 1932. In contrast to the I.T.U.C.-N.W.'s support for militant trade unions, the colonial government intended to ensure that the legislative conditions introduced would limit the growth of trade unions.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the trade union ordinance granted the government the power to register (or refuse to register and thereby make illegal) trade unions. Moreover, unions were denied the rights of peaceful picketing and immunity against actions in tort;¹⁰⁶ these conditions effectively restricted the growth of trade unions until the late 1930's, as we shall see.

While the government did not concede the workers real bargaining power, the Act opened the way for Cipriani, who had championed the cause of peaceful and constitutional change, to register the T.W.A. and then agitate for amendments leading to greater trade union rights. This

proposal was debated within the T.W.A. and received widespread support, specifically from the left-wing faction.¹⁰⁷ Cipriani, however, recognizing the shortcomings in the Act, consulted the British Trade Union Congress which advised the T.W.A. to press for the inclusion of such provisions as the rights to peaceful picketing and immunity against tort.¹⁰⁸ Cipriani accepted this advice, but failed to achieve any revisions to the 1932 act. After two years of fruitless agitation in the Legislative Council, the T.W.A. was dissolved and became the colony's first political party, the Trinidad Labour Party.¹⁰⁹

The decision not to register the T.W.A. as a trade union was motivated largely by Cipriani's belief that "fundamental reforms had to be secured at the political level before the working class could successfully demand improvement in living standards".¹¹⁰ This position, however, was interpreted as a retreat from the trade union struggle and resulted in a significant loss of support for the T.L.P.¹¹¹ Thereafter, Cipriani's ascendancy over the Trinidad labour movement began to decline and gradually give way to a younger and more militant leadership committed to the day to day struggles of workers and the unemployed.

The most fundamental cause of the gradual erosion of Cipriani's appeal was the growing conviction among the black workers and unemployed that his policies had not resulted in the anticipated improvement of their economic conditions. Perhaps the most general and concrete manifestation of this in the early 1930's was the tendency of the most oppressed of the black masses--the unemployed--to resort to Hunger and Unemployment Marches.¹¹² These events demonstrated the frustration and desperation among the masses and underlined the issues which were of

paramount importance to them. Hunger and unemployment marches represented, however, spontaneous acts of protest and they lacked a defined leadership to articulate and forward their demands.

Cipriani, for example, dissociated himself from the hunger marches and, indeed, tried to dissuade the unemployed from demonstrating against the government. Cipriani acknowledged that the unemployed and semi-employed "had been tried almost to breaking point", yet called for "still more patience" and claimed that "constitutional agitation and that alone can enable you to win".¹¹³

The organization of the unemployed to secure economic relief was, nevertheless, one of international concern in the 1930's, particularly within radical circles. In Europe and the United States, communist groups spearheaded the formation of Unemployed Councils to assist the jobless and the destitute.¹¹⁴ The I.T.U.C.-N.W., whose constituents were the black masses in the United States, Africa and the Caribbean, recommended the formation of Unemployed Councils or Committees and government relief for the unemployed, and advertised in The Negro Worker the establishment of Unemployed Councils in the United States and Europe.¹¹⁵ It was against this backdrop that the first attempt was made to organize the unemployed in Trinidad.

The Trinidad Unemployed League was formed in September 1933 by Jim Headley, a seaman and a colleague of George Padmore in the United States where Headley had been active in the Young Communist League and the National Maritime Union.¹¹⁶ According to Jim Barrat, a member of the Trinidad Unemployed League, the influence of West Indian seamen based in the United States on the working class struggle in Trinidad was extremely

important and Headley was one such example.¹¹⁷ The League also included Elma Francois, Dudley Mahon and Clement Payne, who, like Barrat, were former members of the T.W.A.;¹¹⁸ by 1934 the League was widely known as the National Unemployed Movement (N.U.M.).

The N.U.M. headquarters were in Port-of-Spain, the center of unemployment in the island, and a political campaign was launched. Public meetings analyzed the causes of unemployment, pamphlets demonstrated the methods of struggle used by workers and the unemployed world-wide, and an extensive drive to register the unemployed was organized; within two weeks of its founding, the League registered 1,200 in Port-of-Spain.¹¹⁹ The objective of the N.U.M. was to secure government relief in the form of free rent, no taxes and temporary employment on public works.¹²⁰

The government response to the N.U.M.'s demands was "to disbelieve all that [it] said about the large amounts of unemployed"¹²¹ but it agreed to set up "special works" such as cleaning drains, building bridges and painting.¹²² These did not, however, remove the problem of unemployment since they were of a temporary nature and involved few additions to the work force already involved in public works.

The N.U.M. continued to grow and by mid 1934 mass demonstrations in the urban centers extended to jobless East Indian sugar estate workers. Unemployment, aggravated by drought, caused such a depression in living standards that thousands of unemployed took to the streets in June and July 1934 and were joined by those fortunate enough to have jobs, but who laboured for less than subsistence wages.¹²³

Over 15,000 workers demonstrated and labour disruptions on the sugar estates threatened to paralyse the entire industry.¹²⁴ Certain categories of workers were offered wage increases, but the majority were forced into submission: were beaten, arrested, and fined or imprisoned.¹²⁵ The 1934 East Indian agitation however,

fully propelled the Indian agricultural worker into the mainstream of labour relations and labour politics in Trinidad. Moreover, it set in motion the sweeping tide of labour radicalism which was to become a predominant feature in West Indian society in the latter part of the 1930's.¹²⁶

African and East Indian worker responses to similar labour conditions, moreover, clearly indicate that given the correct leadership and organizational framework, Indian-African working class unity could be achieved despite traditional divisions.¹²⁷

The N.U.M., however, was evidently unable to capitalize on this potential. An unidentified member of the N.U.M. informed George Padmore in September 1934 that the organization had collapsed "as a result of a lack of support".¹²⁸ He/she was at the time replying to a direct inquiry from the secretary of the I.T.U.C.-N.W. requesting information on what was being done to organize the unemployed in Trinidad.

The main reason for the decline of the N.U.M. appears to have been the increase in police harassment in the aftermath of the East Indian labour disturbances.¹²⁹ Arthur Calder-Marshall, the British socialist who visited Trinidad in 1938, recorded the relationship between the police and the most oppressed segment of the urban-working class in the capital Port-of-Spain:

... down St. Vincent Street marches the relieving squad of the police. Black uniforms, black faces and white belts. A single file of vultures, marching in step, waking the street with the noise of heavy boots.

The black squad marches as soldiers not police. Their discipline is military. On duty they live in barracks like a regiment. They must be trained, isolated from the public they are drawn from. Even at mid-night they must march.

At the corner of St. Vincent and Queen's they wheel. They are the enemies of the sleepers in the open. To have no roof, a bed of newspaper beneath the trees or on a doorstep is an offence against the law. Awake they are paupers but criminals when they sleep.¹³⁰

According to Bukka Rennie, Jim Headley, leader of the N.U.M., was forced to leave Trinidad in late 1934 largely because of police harassment, which may have been motivated by Headley's socialist beliefs.¹³¹

Headley's departure and dwindling support convinced remaining N.U.M. organizers that the unemployment issue was too narrow a basis for effective working class organization: a wider political platform was required. It was suggested to Padmore, "a sound revolutionary organization" was needed "to school the masses along well-defined and scientific lines".¹³¹ This need Rupert Gittens, a Trinidadian Communist who returned in July 1934, was to fill.

Gittens (1907-1985) like Padmore had his secondary education at the prestigious St. Mary's College of the Immaculate Conception. While in his early twenties, he left Trinidad for the United States where he became involved in the U.S. Communist League.¹³² From the United States, Gittens went as a seaman to France where he married a French woman, and later became a member of the Young Bolshevik Federation of France.¹³³ He was expelled in 1934 for participation in a communist-inspired strike and

returned to Trinidad at the height of labour and unemployment unrest on the sugar estates. Gittens was detained immediately on his arrival by the colonial authorities and charged with possession of seditious literature.¹³⁴ According to the Assistant Crown Solicitor's report, a number of communist books and pamphlets including copies of the International Press Correspondence and the Communist International were seized.¹³⁵ Gitten's arrest and subsequent conviction created much interest among working class militants and it was not long before the N.U.M. leaders contacted him.¹³⁶

Gittens became an influential intellectual within the local left providing ideological and organizational direction.¹³⁷ Communist cells were established, particularly among the waterfront workers,¹³⁸ and marxist concepts occasionally surfaced in newspaper articles. A "youth leader" writing in The People, for example, averred:

It must be the task of my generation to produce real freedom. The power of private individuals must be destroyed by the popular ownership of capital and industry ... and establishing the classless society.

The next few years are going to be decisive ones in the history of country. Developments in Italy and Germany show the lengths to which capitalism is prepared to go to preserve its rights and emphasise the need for a strong and determined working class movement, Socialist in word and deed, and led by men to whom Socialism is not a career, but a faith.¹³⁹

It was the erosion of working-class support for the T.L.P. and the need for an alternative organization to give direction to heightening worker militancy that provided the spark for the emergence of a new political formation in 1935. This need was dramatized in March 1935

when oil workers led by T.U.B. Butler in South Trinidad, struck for higher wages and better working conditions.¹⁴⁰ Two hundred workers were dismissed and Cipriani was asked to intervene on their behalf. He, instead, denounced the workers' action as unconstitutional and abandoned their cause.¹⁴¹ As a result the T.L.P. suffered a further loss of support,¹⁴² and the decision was made by Gittens and the N.U.M. members to form a new political organization, the Negro Welfare, Social and Cultural Association (N.W.S.C.A.) to challenge Cipriani's T.L.P.¹⁴³

The N.W.S.C.A. was established in March-April 1935; Gittens' subsequent involvement in the organization, however, remains somewhat obscure, although it is certain he was a member at least until 1937. He may have elected, in view of his prior confrontation with the colonial authorities, to assume a backroom role.¹⁴⁴ The spokesman and general organiser of the N.W.S.C.A. was Jim Barrat.

Barrat (b.1900)¹⁴⁵ unlike Gittens, came from a working class family; his father was a part-time tailor and labourer and his mother a domestic servant. When he was five years old he left Port-of-Spain and went to live with his father, who was separated from his mother, in Caparo, Central Trinidad and attended the Roman Catholic elementary school in nearby Chaguanas. He was an attentive and intelligent student, but being black and poor it was almost impossible for him to attain any form of post-elementary education.

Barrat, aged fifteen during the first year of the World War, worked first in the oilfields and then on sugar estates as a loader. This was a time when East Indian contract workers provided the bulk of the labour force in the sugar industry and Barrat gained first hand experience of

their oppressive conditions.

By 1919 Barrat was back in Port-of-Spain in time to witness the militant strikes led by dockworkers against foreign shipping companies and their local agents. Following the strikes he got a job as a tally clerk with the English Customs, a position which brought him access, through foreign seamen, to foreign newspapers such as Garvey's Negro World, The Messenger edited by two Afro-American socialists, A Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, and other radical publications. Indeed, as Barrat himself admits, the waterfront provided a veritable school of political and working class education.

Working conditions on the waterfront were among the worst in Trinidad; workers were subjected to long and irregular hours, unsanitary and unsafe conditions, low wages, part-time employment and instant dismissal by both white employers and black foremen. Men and women suffered alike. African and East Indian women were employed to carry coal blocks which weighed approximately twenty-eight pounds each.¹⁴⁶ They were paid forty cents for a nine hour day and, according to Barrat, were constantly subjected to sexual harassment from their bosses - getting jobs often depended on giving in to the sexual demands of their superiors.¹⁴⁷

The waterfront was the hub of economic activity in north Trinidad. It was an area of concentration not only for those directly involved in the import-export trade, but for hundreds of marginalized workers who Calder Marshall described as "the undesirable urban types, touts pimps, prostitutes, contrabandists, sell-outs and tricksters".¹⁴⁸ While the place of these lumpenproletarian elements in the structure of class relations and of their possible consciousness and

action in any given political situation remains a topic of debate,¹⁴⁹ in the Trinidad context, it was out of this social group that a vibrant cultural movement led by calypsonians emerged. As one Calypsonian stated in 1951:

The calypso singer comes from the lowest strata of society and can be found in places like George Street, Prince Street, and Nelson Street [where lower class 'night-clubs' were situated]. He is not a habitu  of select clubs. If he goes there the dogs will be let loose on him. But he gets his information and proceeds ... to inform his public that he is showing up the behaviour of these people whom we have above us¹⁵⁰

The calypsonians reflected in their verses what was happening within the environment; they sang about unemployment, poverty, racism, local scandals, and in 1935 they were to sing about Mussolini, Haile Selassie and the invasion of Ethiopia.¹⁵¹ It is not surprising that the colonial government exercised a rigid censorship which often meant the banning of calypso records and restricting calypso performances.¹⁵²

These were the socio-economic conditions which moulded young Barrat's political development. He went among the workers and discussed their problems with them; he spoke with foreign seamen who brought news of events in the outer world, particularly those concerning trade unions and radical political organizations; and he read voraciously. Marxist classics: the Communist Manifesto, V.I. Lenin's Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism as well as George Padmore's Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers, Negro Workers and the Imperialist War - Intervention in the Soviet Union, and other left wing publications gave him a firm

historical grasp of the exploitation and class struggle he had experienced as a productive worker. Although Barrat values the contribution that Garveyism made to the awakening of black consciousness, black pride and black self-determination, he did not support Garvey's 'back-to-Africa' program and the promotion (in his terms) of black capitalism. He fought first for organised labour and subsequently for an organised and revolutionary labour movement.

At first he joined the Seamen and Waterfront Workers' section of the T.W.A. Cipriani's timidity towards trade union activity and his fidelity to Fabian or Labour Socialism, however, alienated Barrat who drew closer and closer to the revolutionary program advocated by the I.T.U.C.-N.W. He left the T.W.A. about 1931 and, in 1933, helped to form the Trinidad Unemployed Workers League. When Gittens was arrested on his arrival in 1934 it was Barrat and other leaders of the League who got in contact with him. Out of this meeting emerged the N.W.S.C.A.

The aims and objectives of the N.W.S.C.A. were: to foster the development of revolutionary trade unions; to organise the unemployed; to strengthen working-class unity between the blacks and East Indians, and to broaden the education of the masses about capitalism and imperialism.¹⁵³ The N.W.S.C.A. was organised as a central core with cells or sub-groups connected to each other and to the central core to form a well-coordinated movement. The core functioned as "a policy making and research committee"; much emphasis was placed on the collection and organization of information for propaganda purposes as well as for the formulation of policy on national and international issues.¹⁵⁴

The cells or sub-groups were of two types: those based in the industries and factories, and community cells. The former functioned as trained cadres "to explore, collect information, and keep their fingers on the pulse of their area of operation ... to study, develop theory in conjunction with practice ... to organise and give leadership to the area in which it operated."¹⁵⁵ These cells comprised the nuclei of many trade unions which emerged in the mid and late thirties, for example, the Amalgamated Building and Woodworkers Union which was registered in 1936, the first union to do so under the Trade Union Ordinance of 1932; the Federated Workers' Trade Union and the Public Works and Public Service Workers' Trade Union.¹⁵⁶

The community cells were involved in "social work", as Christina King, who was in charge of this section, describes it.¹⁵⁷ The objective was to encourage and develop the artistic and creative potentialities of working class children. The N.W.S.C.A. wrote plays, organised concerts, often featuring calypsonians and held children's treats on special occasions like Christmas, Easter and Carnival.¹⁵⁸

Since most East Indians lived in the central and southern parts of the island there was only minimal contact between them and the urban-based black population. In an attempt to break down the barrier of ignorance which restricted united action between the two races the community cells also organised "country" tours to the sugar estates and factories, and to the Carnera Islands where the East Indians were taken when they were brought from India.¹⁵⁹

From its foundation in 1935 the N.W.S.C.A. persistently attacked the capitalist system: the economic and political framework within which the colonial society functioned and sought to heighten worker consciousness within an ideological, anti-capitalist framework. Marxist literature, for example, the Negro Worker and the Daily Worker were sold at its public meetings at Woodford Square, the People's Parliament which was symbolically situated opposite the Red (Government) House.¹⁶⁰

The N.W.S.C.A. in 1935 strongly challenged Cipriani's claim to the leadership of "the barefooted man" and his reformist policies were considered responsible for the failure to win minimum wage agreements, an eight hour day and an adequate Workmen's Compensation Act. Cipriani, by this stage, not only rejected trade unionism, but had become a well respected functionary of the colonial establishment both as a legislative member and mayor of Port-of-Spain.¹⁶¹ The N.W.S.C.A. in contrast, advocated trade union activity and suffered for their commitment and fidelity to the workers' struggle. Albert Gomes, a contemporary who served his political apprenticeship with the N.W.S.C.A. in the 1930's has stated that the leaders were all "miserably poor ... facing permanent insecurity and often actual hunger for their ideals".¹⁶²

By April 1935 Cipriani considered the N.W.S.C.A. a threat to his leadership to the extent that he sought to deny its leaders access to Woodford Square and thus remove the platform and medium through which they reached the people.¹⁶³ He stipulated, as mayor of Port-of-Spain, that use of the Square was conditional on permission granted by the City Council. This strategy, however, failed; the N.W.S.C.A. established that the Square was public property and ignored the City Council.¹⁶⁴

The first major confrontation between N.W.S.C.A. and Cipriani, however, occurred on May 1st, 1935 the day of international workers' solidarity. The occasion was the electric franchise issue which was being disputed between the Trinidad Electric Company, which had a monopoly to supply electricity to run the tram-way service, and the City Council which sought control of the franchise.¹⁶⁵ Cipriani, as leader of the T.L.P., took up the issue and threatened to march to the Company and demand the keys on May 1st. It was also rumoured that Cipriani vowed to dig up the tramcar tracks should this demand not be met.¹⁶⁶

The N.W.S.C.A. had popularised the electric franchise issue as a case of foreign capital exploiting the workers who were paid low wages, and were determined, if Cipriani was not, to demand the takeover of the company. Moreover, they doubted Cipriani's sincerity and saw his move as an attempt to restore his credibility with the people. Consequently, a counter march was organized and N.W.S.C.A. supporters marched to the Electric Company's premises.¹⁶⁷

Cipriani met with company officials, but when no concessions resulted an angry crowd of N.W.S.C.A. and T.L.P. supporters began to uproot the tram tracks. Cipriani immediately called on the police to arrest the offenders, "saying that such was never his intention". The N.W.S.C.A. leaders Barrat and Francois then led an angry, frustrated and definitely anti-Cipriani crowd back to the "People's Parliament" where they sang:

We will hang Cipriani on the sour apple tree
When the red workers' revolution comes.¹⁶⁸

May 1, 1935 signified that the N.W.S.C.A. had begun to play an important role in developing the political consciousness of the black urban proletariat, particularly among waterfront and commercial workers. The N.W.S.C.A., furthermore, represented a success for the international communist movement although by 1935, George Padmore, Secretary and editor of the I.T.U.C.-N.W. and The Negro Worker respectively, had broken with the Comintern.¹⁶⁹ The fusion of black consciousness and the class struggle within the ideological framework of the N.W.S.C.A. followed closely Padmore's earlier contention that race oppression had its basis in the socio-economic relation of blacks under capitalism and imperialism.

By April 1935 organized political action was, therefore, dominated by two northern-based formations which stood in contradistinction to each other. It is undeniable that Cipriani's T.L.P. enjoyed significant support among the workers and unemployed but, in contrast to the N.W.S.C.A., it had long given up the industrial struggle of the working class. The years between 1925 and 1935 had brought no significant change in Cipriani's mode of representation; issues of vital importance to workers and the unemployed were raised in the rather ineffectual form of questions¹⁷⁰ and pleadings in the Legislative Council which was controlled by a very unsympathetic and hostile colonial governor, Sir Claud Hollis. There was a tendency, therefore, for some of his working class supporters to identify the T.L.P. with middle class objectives which had no immediate relevance to their daily struggle against low wages, hunger and poverty.¹⁷¹

Moreover, by the early 1930's race consciousness had begun to penetrate segments of the black middle class.¹⁷² This development "partly manifested itself in debate about the Negro's intellectual capacity compared with the whites",¹⁷³ a debate that was intensified by the contention of Professor Sidney Harland that it was "accepted by all competent biologists that the Negro race is inferior in intelligence to the white race".¹⁷⁴ This claim of black inferiority provoked replies by individuals such as C.L.R. James, a leading black intellectual, and Ralph Mentor, a journalist, who claimed equality between blacks and whites. Cipriani, however, never addressed the question of racial discrimination and oppression which was inherent to the colonial system.¹⁷⁵ As a result, the wave of black consciousness which swept through in the 1930's took in its wake individuals who considered the racial question of primary importance to the socio-economic and political welfare of black Trinidadians.

Black Nationalism and the Economic Crisis

Although the Garveyite movement in Trinidad declined in the 1920s,¹⁷⁶ a few branches remained active in the 1930's and individual Garveyites continued to foster black nationalist consciousness. Two important manifestations of this were The People and the West Indian Youth Welfare League (W.I.Y.W.L.).

The People was founded by Leonard Fitzgerald Walcott, a former member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) in Harlem, New York, who returned to Trinidad in March 1933 and almost immediately began publication.¹⁷⁷ The People was a radical innovation in the range

of Trinidadian newspapers which included the Trinidad Guardian and the Port-of-Spain Gazette owned by the white business and planter interests respectively. It was, like the Jamaican Plain Talk founded later in 1935,¹⁷⁸ a black nationalist and labour-oriented newspaper and judged by its journalistic style and content, as well as its pan-African perspective, The People was patterned closely after Garvey's Negro World. It carried reprints from Garvey's contemporary the Blackman and acted as the unofficial organ of the U.N.I.A. (Trinidad). Walcott himself was popular among the workers and progressive intellectuals and through its correspondence columns The People became a major medium reflecting the views of black workers and petit-bourgeoisie.

The People identified the key political problem confronting blacks as their "lack of unity ... and in this lies their terrible weaknesses",¹⁷⁹ and condemned the tendency for middle class blacks and coloureds to dissociate themselves from the main stratum of lower class blacks while at the same time seeking acceptance by the white-dominated European-oriented upper crust:

When a [black] man attains to a certain position in the community enabling him to be reckoned as a man of some substance he no longer wishes to associate with members of his own race and will not attend a function promoted by [black] people but will do anything possible to appear amongst the whites.¹⁸⁰

This was the case especially with the mulatto element who were historically socialized into thinking that they were superior to blacks and shunned any form of identification or socialization with them.¹⁸¹

The adverse developments in the world economy and the apparent abandonment of the colonized by those who claimed sovereignty over them,

The People further argued, had taught black Trinidadians an important lesson: only through race unity and co-operation would the Blackman escape the opprobrium of being the world's "hewers of wood and drawers of water".¹⁸²

These comments reflected Garvey's teachings, the economic aspect of which was being critically tested during the Depression years. Black economic nationalism - the development of industrial and commercial businesses owned and controlled by blackmen and women based on the cooperative model - had been popularized by Garvey during the 1920's.¹⁸³ Garvey believed that in the struggle for black liberation, economics was primary, and that successful political action could only be achieved after blacks had established an independent economic base.

These views influenced the West Indian Youth Welfare League (W.I.Y.W.L.), founded in May 1935 by a group of Afro-Trinidadians, which included Garveyites. The League aimed to foster a self-help movement among the blacks, especially the unemployed who lived in the city (Port-of-Spain) slums. The League's leaders formed themselves into a shadow cabinet. Vernon Canterbury, president; T. Leslie, minister of economics; P. Codallo, minister of industry; Clement Payne, minister of propaganda; Godfrey Philip, general secretary and field organizer; and Cecil Cobham, the Dictator. Most of these men were self-employed tradesman who suffered from the vagaries of economic depression and were often unable to support themselves. Payne, Canterbury and Cobham had been popular activists in the local Garveyite branches.¹⁸⁴

The 'Back to the Land Movement', as the W.I.Y.W.L. was popularly known, was based on the idea that the eradication of unemployment and poverty and the development of a strong and independent black economic base could only be achieved through agriculture and agriculture-related industries. In the short-term, the cultivation of the land would provide immediate employment for the jobless and at the same time satisfy the great demand for cheap and nutritious food.¹⁸⁵ The people, therefore, would be the producers as well as the consumers: "plant the food you eat and eat what you plant",¹⁸⁶ was a favourite slogan of the W.I.Y.W.L.

For the long term, it was envisaged that agricultural production would inevitably lead to the development of an industrial base.¹⁸⁷ Because Trinidad was an agricultural country the focus should be placed on agriculture as the safest and soundest pillar upon which the economic security of black people could be established. Economic depression, said Godfrey A. Philip, general secretary and field organizer,

... compels us to consider not only the obvious issues of wages, hours, prices and management of public utilities, but the deeper issues of security in the nature of the development of the national resources of the country and the expansion of our agriculture and industrial activities.

In Trinidad we are suffering from an industrial famine among the people who can gain directly from industry. Neglect of Agriculture and disregard for the fruits of agriculture have created this famine. Food is the only remedy for a famine and agriculture does not only mean food but economic fuel for rotating the wheels of industry.¹⁸⁸

It followed from this that W.I.Y.W.L.'s economic program urged urban workers to return to agricultural labour. The realities of rural life

in Trinidad from the slave plantations to the 1930's, however, equated agricultural labour with abject poverty, and it was the attempt to escape this poverty which contributed to making Port-of-Spain, by the early twentieth century, contain 25 percent of Trinidad's population.¹⁸⁹ The people who left the rural areas meant to burn their bridges behind them as did the immigrants from Grenada, St. Vincent and Barbados who sought work in Trinidad.¹⁹⁰

The League's support came from those urban unemployed and under-employed workers who were concentrated in the depressed south-eastern section of the capital called, appropriately, New Harlem since it was a main locale of West Indian immigrants. The League enrolled in this section of the city "all kinds of men and women, all sorts of artisans and workers, skilled and unskilled; the motor mechanic, the carpenter, the mason, baker, butler, cook, labourer, painter, porter ..."¹⁹¹ and aimed to convince this constituency that the solution to their problems was to return to the land. Its policy was encapsulated in a verse by Cecil Cobham, the Dictator:

There is no one men recognize as Great
 But that did prize an honest labour's sweat
 Nor hold the gardener in low estate
 But praise the earth and all it gives to eat.
 Back to the land! She is as free as you
 As are the ever food-providing showers;
 The land which gave you birth appeals anew
 Back to the land. Let's go - The Land is Ours.¹⁹²

Such efforts ignored not only the urban worker's unwillingness to go back to the land but, more fundamentally, the fact that there was no land

to go back to. Foreign owned oil and sugar companies and local white planters and businessmen owned most of the arable land in Trinidad, while the bulk of the people were still "a landless proletariat".¹⁹³ The economic depression of the late 1920's and 1930's had forced a significant number of the small-scale sugar and peasant cultivators out of production, and many suffered loss of their properties which were mortgaged to the banks, or which they had leased from the foreign companies, or large plantation owners.¹⁹⁴

The League also claimed to be non-political,¹⁹⁵ perhaps, to distance itself from the marxist N.W.S.C.A., but continued to stress the need for black consciousness and unity. Thus, when the Italo-Ethiopian crisis developed, the League played its role in fostering Afro-Trinidadian identity with Ethiopia and its peoples and joined with other organizations to mobilize local support for the Ethiopian cause.

Conclusion

The socio-economic and political framework of Trinidad in the 1930's presented a distinctly differential relationship between the black and East Indian working class and peasants on the one hand, and the foreign and local white, managerial/capitalist and governing class, on the other. By the early 1930's, the adverse effects of the world economic depression on the living (and working) standards of the black working class and peasants, and the failure of the T.W.A./T.L.P. to win for workers their industrial and economic objectives through constitutional change, heightened black working class consciousness of alienation from the economic and political power structure, which they came to view, increasingly,

as oppressive and exploitive.

It was in this context that new forms of social protest and ideological influences emerged, sharpened class and racial conflicts and challenged the colonial status quo through anti-government agitation, mass demonstrations and newspaper propaganda. The most important formations in this respect were the marxist N.W.S.C.A. and the black nationalist newspaper, The People. The N.W.S.C.A. represented the most radical section of the urban, black working class who responded to both local and external impulses towards change. Significantly, it advocated working class struggle along the lines established by the Communist I.T.U.C.-N.W. and The Negro Worker as opposed to Cipriani's constitutional reformism. The People was, essentially, an institution of political education for the black workers and race-conscious lower middle class or petit-bourgeoisie. It sought to develop race consciousness into a concrete manifestation of black economic self-reliance, such as the W.I.Y.W.L.'s "Back to the Land" movement represented.

Thus economic and racial tensions, combined with political alienation, generated new organizations representing both Marxist and black nationalist doctrines. When the Italo-Ethiopian crisis erupted, these organizations together with the Trinidad Labour Party (T.L.P.) and the Afro-West Indian League, which emerged as a response to the crisis, made the Ethiopian struggle a popular issue which roused the racial sympathies of Afro-Trinidadians. Popular responses to the diplomatic manoeuvrings of the Great Powers and the war itself will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Notes

Chapter I

¹Bridget Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962, (Port-of-Spain: Heineman, 1981), pp. 117-135; Selwyn Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 19. Lloyd Braithwaite, Social Stratification in Trinidad. (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1974).

²Ryan, Race and Nationalism, p. 19.

³Ibid.

⁴Braithwaite, Social Stratification in Trinidad, p. 187.

⁵Ibid., p. 89; Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 128.

⁶Ryan, Race and Nationalism, p. 20.

⁷Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 129; Brereton cites the development of race consciousness among educated blacks, in the late 19th century, who protested against racial discrimination.

⁸Ibid., p. 128.

⁹Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 135.

¹³Sahadeo Basdeo, Labour Organisation and Labour Reform in Trinidad, 1919-1939. (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1983), p. 7.

¹⁴Ibid.; Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 21.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 7.

¹⁸Ryan, Race and Nationalism, p. 23.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 24.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Richard Jacobs, "Politics of Protest in Trinidad: The Strikes and Disturbances of 1937". Paper read at Conference of West Indian Historians Held at St. Augustine Campus of U.W.I., April 1973, pp. 1-12.

²²In 1935, 42 percent of Trinidad's exports were destined for U.K. markets; in 1937 it had increased to 48 percent. Imports from British markets for the same years were 44 percent and 36 percent of total imports, respectively, Trinidad and Tobago Annual Colonial Reports, 1937, p. 23.

²³Ibid., p. 21.

²⁴Report by Major G. St. J. Orde Browne, on Labour Conditions in The West Indies (The Orde Browne Report) (London: H.M.S.O. 1939), p. 125.

²⁵Trinidad and Tobago Annual Colonial Reports, 1937, p. 20.

²⁶Ibid., p. 21.

²⁷The Orde Browne Report, p. 125.

²⁸Howard Johnson, "Oil, Imperial Policy and the Trinidad Disturbances, 1937", The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, IV (October, 1975), pp. 29-54.

²⁹Report of the West India Royal Commission (London: H.M.S.O., 1945), p. 41.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Cited in Joseph Engwenyu, "The Great Depression and Labour Protest: Some Caribbean and West African Dimensions 1930-1939". Paper presented to South-South Conference, African, Latin American and Caribbean Connections, McGill University, Montreal, May 15-17, 1985, p. 14.

³²Trinidad and Tobago Colonial Reports, 1937, pp. 12-13.

³³Report of the West India Royal Commission, 1945, p. 25.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, pp. 207-209.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Trinidad and Tobago Colonial Reports, 1937, pp. 12-13.

³⁸Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 208.

³⁹Report of West India Royal Commission, p. 27.

⁴⁰Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 208.

⁴¹Trinidad and Tobago Colonial Reports, 1937, p. 29.

⁴²According to Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 207.

⁴³Trinidad and Tobago Colonial Reports, 1937, p. 29.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Report of West India Royal Commission, p. 193.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Jacobs, "Politics of Protest," p. 8.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 208.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵This was another feature observed by the West India Royal Commission, pp. 134-174.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 137.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 139.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 174.

⁵⁹C.L.R. James, The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies. (Nelson, Lancs: Coulton & Co. Ltd., 1932), p. 42. James cites an instance when this condition among the rural Indians was discussed in the Legislative Council, pp. 41-46.

⁶⁰Trinidad and Tobago Colonial Annual Reports, 1932, pp. 9-10.

⁶¹Kelvin Singh, "Economy and Polity in Trinidad, 1917-38", Ph.D. U.W.I., 1975, p. 298.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 33.

⁶⁵Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 8.

⁶⁶"Only men literate in English who possessed considerable real estate or earned a fairly high income could be candidates for election. This mean, of course, that working-class or even lower middle-class men (such as made up TWA's membership) could not be candidates, and many could not even qualify to vote." Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 166.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁸C.L.R. James, The Life of Captain Cipriani, pp. 20-21.

⁶⁹Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 17.

⁷⁰Ibid.; Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, pp. 135-138.

⁷¹I. Oxaal, Black Intellectuals Come to Power. (Cambridge, Mass.: 1968), p. 54.

⁷²James, The Life of Captain Cipriani, pp. 65-68.

⁷³Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, pp. 72-73.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 80.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 95.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 88-90.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Tony Martin, Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. (London: Greenwood Press, 1976).

⁸¹Wilson Record, The Negro and the Communist Party. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), p. 34.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁸⁶The Negro Worker, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1931, p. 1.

⁸⁷James Hooker, Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path From Communism to Pan-Africanism (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), p. 18.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 1-38.

⁸⁹Cited in John La Guerre, The Social and Political Thought of the Colonial Intelligentsia. (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1982), p. 52.

⁹⁰The Negro Worker, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1931, p. 18.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Richard Hart, "Aspects of Early Caribbean Workers' Struggles". Collected Seminar Papers No. 29, Caribbean Societies, Vol. I. (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1982), p. 44.

⁹⁵The Negro Worker, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1932, pp. 17-18.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 18.

⁹⁷Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 105.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 104.

⁹⁹The Negro Worker, Vol. 2, No. 8, 1932, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. .

¹⁰¹James Hooker, Black Revolutionary, p. 18.

¹⁰²The Negro Worker, Vol. 2, No. 6, 1932.

¹⁰³Ibid., Vol. 2, No. 8, 1932, p. 9.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵The governor was, in fact, supported by the Colonial Office which advised the enactment of "legislation of the simple and non-committal character" if only to "meet the international obligations of His Majesty's Government" under the ILO agreements. Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 37.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Basdeo, Labour Organisation and Labour Reform, p. 105.

¹¹⁰Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 37.

¹¹¹Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 174; Basdeo, Labour Organisation and Labour Reform, p. 105.

¹¹²Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 175.

¹¹³The People, May 20, 1933, p. 2.

¹¹⁴Record, The Negro and the Communist Party, p. 89.

¹¹⁵The Negro Worker, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1932, p. 1.

¹¹⁶Elizabeth Reddock, "Women, Labour and Struggle In 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago, 1898-1960." Ph.D., (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1978), p. 390. Bukka Rennie, History of the Working-Class in the 20th Century - Trinidad and Tobago. (Toronto: New Beginning Movement, 1974), p. 45.

¹¹⁷Interview with Jim Barrat, member of the Unemployed League. Port-of-Spain, March 21, 1985.

¹¹⁸Ibid., Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 45.

¹¹⁹Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 45.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 Sahadeo Basdeo, "The 1934 Indian Labour Disturbances in Trinidad: A Case Study in Colonial Labour Relations", East Indians in the Caribbean: Papers presented to a symposium of the University of the West Indies, June 1975. (London: Kraus International Publications, 1982), pp. 49-70.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid., p. 69.

127 Walter Rodney examines this possibility in the Guyanese context where East Indian-African relations were similar, in A History of the Guyanese Working People 1881-1905. (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 174-189.

128 The Negro Worker, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1932, p. 1.

129 Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 45. Reddock, "Women Labour and Struggle in 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago", p. 390.

130 Arthur Calder-Marshall, Glory Dead. (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1939), p. 24.

131 The Negro Worker, Vol. 4, No. 5, 1934, p. 28.

132 Trinidad Guardian, April 17, 1985.

133 CO 295/586, Assistant Crown Solicitor to Colonial Secretary, September 14, 1934.

134 Ibid.

135 CO 299/116, Governor Hollis to Colonial Secretary, February 22, 1935.

¹³⁶ Interview with Jim Barratt, Port-of-Spain, March 21, 1985.

¹³⁷ Interview with Lloyd Braithwaite, former member of the N.W.S.C.A., Port-of-Spain, May 7, 1985.

¹³⁸ Interview with Jim Barrat, Port-of-Spain, March 21, 1985; Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 67.

¹³⁹ The People, September 30, 1934.

¹⁴⁰ Basdeo, Labour Organisation and Labour Reform, p. 135.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁴² Ibid. Butler will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁴³ Trinidadian historians have incorrectly referred to the N.W.S.C.A. as the Negro Welfare Association or the Negro Welfare and Cultural League. See Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 46; Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 173, and Selwyn Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 49.

¹⁴⁴ Gittens, however, surface in the late 1930's and 1940's to play a significant role in the trade union movement. Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 188.

¹⁴⁵ Biographical data on Barrat were obtained in interviews with him between March and May 1985.

¹⁴⁶ Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 21.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Barrat, May 15, 1985.

¹⁴⁸ Calder-Marshall, Glory Dead, p. 18.

¹⁴⁹ Ken Post, Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and Its Aftermath. (The Hague: Martin Nijhoff, 1978), p. 105.

¹⁵⁰ Raymond Quevedo, Atilla's Kaiso, A Short History of Trinidad Calypso (St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies, Department of Extra Mural Studies, 1983), p. 60.

¹⁵¹ ibid., p. 108.

152 Ibid.

153 Interview with Barrat, March 21, 1985; see also Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 46.

154 Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 67.

155 Ibid.

156 Ron Ramdin, From Chattel Slave to Wage Earner. (London: Martin Brian K. O'Keefe, 1982), pp. 142-143.

157 Trinidad Express, March 2, 1985, p. 24.

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Interview with Barrat, March 21, 1985. The N.W.S.C.A. corresponded with the Communist Party of the U.S.A. which, according to Barrat, "would advise [us] on methods of protest [and] agitation". Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 72.

161 Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p.

162 Cited in Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 173. Barrat claims that the N.W.S.C.A. was constantly harassed by police. Interview with Jim Barrat, Port-of-Spain, March 21, 1985.

163 Rennie, History of the Working-Class, p. 48.

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid., p. 54.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

168 Ibid.

169 Hooker, Black Revolutionary, pp. 39-50.

- 170 Singh., "Economy and Polity in Trinidad, 1917-38", p. 341.
- 171 Ibid.
- 172 Ibid., p. 386.
- 173 Ibid.
- 174 Cited in Ibid.
- 175 Ibid.
- 176 Tony Martin, Race First, p. 45.
- 177 The People began publication on April 15, 1933.
- 178 Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 168.
- 179 The People, August 12, 1933.
- 180 Ibid.
- 181 Braithwaite, Social Stratification in Trinidad, pp. 87-94.
- 182 The People, August 12, 1933.
- 183 Martin, Race First, p. 35. Garvey's U.N.I.A. founded the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation and the Negro Factories Corporation, which operated a number of subsidiaries.
- 184 The People, May 18, 1935, p. 111.
- 185 Ibid.,
- 186 Ibid., June 1, 1935, p. 11.
- 187 Ibid. In early 1936 the W.I.Y.W.L. unsuccessfully tried to obtain Government's support for the establishment of a chocolate industry.
- 188 The People, June 1, 1938, p. 11.

¹⁸⁹Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 131.

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

¹⁹¹The People, May 18, 1935, p. 11.

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad, p. 205.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

¹⁹⁵As Godfrey Philip stated: "No one must expect politics in the League or the preaching of hatred between classes, creeds or nationalities. Its activities are directed along one channel - economics". The People, May 18, 1935, p. 11.

CHAPTER II

The Italo-Ethiopian Crisis: Public Opinion and Organizational Responses in Trinidad, July-September 1935

Popular reaction in Trinidad to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis was manifested from mid-1935; as the relationship between the belligerent countries deteriorated and the international diplomatic machinery failed to resolve the dispute, public opinion and organizational responses were aroused and intensified. In this chapter we shall review the historical and diplomatic background of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis and examine the nature and scope of Trinidadian reaction between July and September 1935.

Italy's interest in Ethiopia, which was part of the European colonial expansion into Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century, dates from 1869 when the Suez Canal was opened and an Italian shipping firm leased the port of Assab on the Red Sea. This became an Italian possession in 1882, the first in Africa since the days of the Caesars. By 1890 Italy had consolidated her Red Sea possessions into the colony of Eritrea, an area of 45,374 square miles. Italian colonialism in East Africa spread southwards and Ethiopia, rich in natural resources and enjoying a temperate climate, became a prime target for annexation. The Italians twice invaded Ethiopia in 1887 and 1888 but were soundly defeated. In 1889, however, Ethiopia and Italy signed the Treaty of Wichale (Ucciali in Italian) which sought to normalize relations between the two countries.¹

This treaty laid the foundation of future conflict. Italy claimed that Article 17 committed Ethiopia to conduct all negotiations with other powers through her, thus making Ethiopia an Italian protectorate. Ethiopia rejected this claim and, between 1892 and 1894, made treaties with Russia, Germany and Turkey to which Italy objected. Finally, Ethiopia repudiated the whole treaty, and this led to war in 1895-1896 and Italy's defeat at the battle of Adowa.²

The defeat at Adowa aroused much anger and humiliation in Italy and remained a source of conflict between the two nations. However, the Treaty of Addis Ababa, signed after Adowa, abrogated the Wichale agreement³ and recognized "the absolute and unreserved independence of the Ethiopian Empire as a sovereign and independent state".⁴ In the three and a half decades following this agreement, Ethiopia experienced a period of political stability and economic growth. Under the enlightened dictatorship of Ras Tafari MaKonnen (Haile Selassie), Ethiopia undertook a modernization programme, joined the League of Nations and signed with Italy a Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration in 1923 and 1928 respectively.⁵

The adverse effects of the world economic depression in Italy, opposition to government's financial and economic policies, and the threat posed by the rise of Nazism in Germany to Italy's national security, revived Italy's colonial ambitions. The conquest of Ethiopia was expected to provide economic resources, a market for Italian goods, an event to divert the Italian people from the economic crisis and political repression, and pre-empt the possibility that a modernized Ethiopia might become a centre for African nationalist resistance to colonial rule.

Nationalist sentiments were skillfully played on by the Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini to secure support for this aggressive policy.⁶

This combination of motives and fears led Mussolini to seize upon the now famous Wal Wal incident as a pretext for his war of conquest against Ethiopia. On December 5, 1934, fighting broke out between an Italian contingent and Ethiopian troops who were escorting an Anglo-Ethiopian boundary commission at Wal Wal, an oasis in southeastern Ethiopia in the province of Ogaden; both sides suffered casualties.⁷ Mussolini, however, demanded an official apology and reparation for Italy's loss and recognition of Italian sovereignty over Wal Wal. Instead, Ethiopia suggested arbitration in accordance with the Italo-Ethiopian treaty of 1928. In January 1935, Ethiopia reported to the League of Nations continuing Italian aggression after Wal Wal and requested its intervention, as well as the assistance of its allies, Britain and France.⁸

Both Britain and France, however, were concerned with the balance of power and the maintenance of peace in Europe, considerations which dictated an alliance with Italy against Nazi Germany.⁹ Consequently, they adopted a policy of appeasement towards Italy and tried unsuccessfully to pressure Ethiopia into accommodating Italy's territorial claims.¹⁰ Perhaps the most fatal aspect of this policy, from Ethiopia's perspective, was the decision to impose an arms embargo on Ethiopia which was almost entirely dependent on imported arms to equip its armies.¹¹ An equivalent embargo placed on Italy was nullified by the fact that Mussolini's arsenal was quite capable of supplying his requirements in East Africa.¹² Thus, while Ethiopia's efforts to secure a negotiated peace, either directly with Italy, or through the intervention of Britain and France, proved

futile, Italian troops were being mobilized and shipped to East Africa as early as February 1935.¹³

The Anglo-French policy of appeasement towards Italy, Mussolini's war preparations, and the apparent abandonment of the last remaining independent black nation in Africa by Britain and France, provided a combination of circumstances which aroused Trinidadian interest in the Italo-Ethiopian dispute, manifested and reflected both in the press and by a number of working-class and petit-bourgeois organizations.

The Italo-Ethiopian dispute was followed closely by The People which enjoyed wide support among the black urban working class and petit-bourgeoisie. The People was published and edited by Fitzgerald Walcott, a former member of Garvey's Harlem-based Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.). The editorials demonstrated a strong sense of identification with Ethiopia's cause and numerous pro-Ethiopian articles, poems, special features and correspondence, strongly influenced by the Afro-American press, were published. As early as March 1935, for example, The People carried reprints from the Pittsburg Courier, the New York Amsterdam News and the Chicago Defender¹⁴ which provided important background information on the dispute, the nature and extent of Italian imperialism in East Africa, as well as on the history and society of Ethiopia, intended to foster identification between Afro-Americans in general (including Afro-Trinidadians) and Africa.

One of the most influential of the Afro-American journalists and scholars whose writings appeared in The People was J.A. Rogers who worked as a special correspondent for the Pittsburg Courier in Ethiopia during the Italo-Ethiopian War. Upon his return to the United States in 1936,

Rogers incorporated his experiences in a booklet entitled The Real Facts About Ethiopia which included a concise account of Ethiopian history and of Italian aggression in Ethiopia up to the 1935 crisis; he addressed such issues as the racial identity of the Ethiopians, who refused to be called Negroes, a term they regarded as derogatory, and briefly explored the historical ties between Ethiopia and Afro-America.¹⁵ These themes also informed reprints of Roger's newspaper articles.

The People combatted the influence of the white-owned Trinidad Guardian whose columns not only justified Mussolini's planned invasion, but were often indifferent, even hostile to black consciousness and Afro-Trinidadian identification with Ethiopia. The Trinidad Guardian, for example, justified Mussolini's intended conquest of Ethiopia on the grounds that Italy needed economic resources and that Ethiopia was "a semi-barbarous nation" which Italy intended to teach "a lesson in natural justice".¹⁶ Such comments evoked responses in The People which advised that all people of African descent should "protest against the threat that's aimed at the sovereignty of Abyssinia ... which ... mean[s] a great lot to Negroes scattered as we are over all the countries of the earth, with no spot ... to call our own except this one."¹⁷

Its pro-Ethiopia position evidently made The People, as one reader expressed it, "a most instructive and intellectual organ" which "set the Blackman to know what he was, what he is and what he can be if he will only stand shoulder to shoulder".¹⁸ Its circulation rapidly expanded and by September 1935 its weekly quota had become "a bit short".¹⁹ The People's declaration of Afro-West Indian racial identity with Ethiopians and the symbolic importance of Ethiopia - the sole remaining independent

African nation - was echoed in the following months by organizations and individuals who responded to the call for protest action.

Organizational responses to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, however, were not motivated by racial sentiments alone. The economic depression of the 1930's had drastically lowered the standard of living for the majority of black West Indians.²⁰ In response to widespread poverty, unemployment, low wages and upper class unresponsiveness to working-class grievances, labour organizations were already agitating for economic and political change. Anti-Italian protest and demonstrations in British Guiana (Guyana), Grenada and Barbados, as The People reported, were spearheaded by labour organizations,²¹ and as Weisbord suggests, "The Italian aggression and unemployment problem were merged."²²

Trinidadian reactions to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis were manifested along established class and ideological lines. The front rank of the organized protest was the N.W.S.C.A., a black working-class organization which was influenced by the marxist George Padmore and the I.T.U.C.-N.W.,²³ followed by the petit-bourgeois, black nationalist Afro-West Indian League, formed in July 1935, and the W.I.Y.W.L. Finally, in late August, 1935, the T.L.P. became actively involved.

The N.W.S.C.A., according to Jim Barrat, its leader and political organizer, was sensitive to and supportive of feelings of racial affinity with the Ethiopians; it stressed, however, that the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was more than a question of white versus black.²⁴ The conflict was analyzed and discussed in a manner intended to link the struggle of the oppressed at home against colonial capitalism with the impending struggle of the Ethiopian peasants and workers against fascism. Guided

by Lenin's study of colonial expansion in the 19th century, the N.W.S.C.A. concluded that Italy's claim to territorial expansion in Ethiopia was essentially an instance of Imperialism's search for areas of economic exploitation.²⁵

From this perspective, the N.W.S.C.A. argued that the depressed economic conditions of blacks under British colonialism would be no different from those of the Ethiopians under Italian Fascism: both countries were part of an international system of control and exploitation of subject peoples.²⁶ In Barrat's recollection, the N.W.S.C.A.'s protest against the impending Italian invasion of Ethiopia converged with its struggle for working-class rights in Trinidad.

There is some evidence to substantiate this analysis. The N.W.S.C.A., for example, held a mass meeting to capitalize on the Electric Franchise issue [infra p. 48] which had won it popular support, by readdressing the problem of organizing the unemployed, and seized the opportunity to link Trinidad's unemployed with the Ethiopian victims of imperialism.²⁷ The meeting first asserted the right to work; a Central Committee for Action of the Unemployed under the chairmanship of A.N. Porter was formed "with full powers to lead and guide the unemployed workers in this struggle in order to secure a guarantee from the government on behalf of the unemployed, either for work or full maintenance".²⁸ It then turned to the Ethiopian question. A resolution addressed to the League of Nations condemned "the policy of World Imperialism for the dividing up of Abyssinia", and demanded the unconditional withdrawal of Italian troops from Ethiopian soil.²⁹

The N.W.S.C.A., therefore, merged the struggles of the black working class and unemployed at home and that of the Ethiopian people against fascism, within its operational and ideological framework. This implied, moreover, a fusion of race and class conflicts within a national and international context, an assumption which was not shared by the black nationalists who formed the Afro-West Indian League (A.W.I.L.) in direct response to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis.

The A.W.I.L. was a black middle class organization founded by Hugo Mentor who had worked as assistant editor of The People in 1933.³⁰ Its objectives were to heighten African race consciousness among Afro-Trinidadians and to make support for the Ethiopian cause "the sacred duty of Ham's scattered offspring in the Caribbean"³¹ - a duty derived from the African identity of Ethiopians and Afro-West Indians and their historical links. The A.W.I.L. attracted a wide cross-section of individuals and organizations: a member of the Legislative Council, the Deputy mayor of Port-of-Spain, municipal councillors, lawyers, the editor of The People, Fitz-Gerald Walcott, and representatives from the W.I.Y.W.L., the N.W.S.C.A. and the T.L.P.³²

One of the main issues of debate among educated Africans and Afro-Americans during the Italo-Ethiopian crisis was the question of the racial identity of the Ethiopians. This dispute was provoked by Mussolini himself and pro-Italian journalists who argued that the Ethiopians were not "Negroes" and, hence, had no racial links with the Negroid peoples of the rest of Africa and the New World. Those who held this view were understandably inclined to disparage Afro-American and Afro-West Indian expressions of racial solidarity with Ethiopia as baseless. In response

to the Italian racist propaganda, the A.W.I.L. cited W.E.B. DuBois' The Negro which stated that the Atlantic slave trade drew upon every part of Africa including "the west coast, the western and Egyptian Sudan, the Congo, Abyssinia, the lake regions, the east coast and Madagascar".³³ DuBois also claimed that the slaves included Nubians and people from the Nile region. Afro-West Indians and Afro-Americans, therefore, were of direct Nubian and Ethiopian descent.

The A.W.I.L.'s reference to DuBois, an Afro-American historian, reflected the black nationalist's quest to legitimize African, or Ethiopian, identity on sound historical grounds. Garvey had undoubtedly planted the seed of an African historical awareness in the minds of Afro-West Indians, but he did so generally in a religious language aimed to inspire black workers and peasants.³⁴ The Italo-Ethiopian conflict, however, stimulated research and a renewed interest in African, particularly Ethiopian history, and Ethiopianism assumed an intellectual dimension which appealed to the educated black middle-class represented by A.W.I.L.

A similar development was evident in Jamaica where, prior to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, Ethiopianism had been associated with the Rastafarian movement whose support came mainly from the black peasant and working-class population. Italian aggression against Ethiopia, however, intensified Afro-Jamaican interest in Ethiopian affairs and black nationalist ideological doctrines, Post says, "affected individuals from all classes save the capitalists and the top stratum of the middle-class".³⁵

The black nationalists were vitally concerned with the diplomatic role of France and Britain in the Italo-Ethiopian dispute. The A.W.I.L. assumed that France and Britain, as the major colonial powers in Africa and the West Indies, would not allow an independent black nation, a fellow member of the League of Nations, to be attacked by Italy. It was felt, moreover, that determination to protect their respective national interests should make France and Britain sensitive to the interests of their black colonial subjects. Because Afro-West Indians were political dependents of the British Crown, they were directly affected by British foreign policy; Britain, the A.W.I.L. argued, should take cognizance of that relationship and of the tenor of black public opinion in the colonies.³⁶

These sentiments were subsequently conveyed to the Colonial Office in a resolution which claimed that Afro-Trinidadians viewed "with grave concern the efforts of the Italian Government to violate the sovereignty of Ethiopia and, as African subjects of His Majesty's Empire, appeal to His Majesty's Government to do all in its power ... to ensure that the independence and sovereignty of the Ancient Empire remain inviolate and respected."³⁷

The A.W.I.L.'s agitational approach underlined the institutional powerlessness of Afro-Trinidadians, a condition Hugo Mentor himself admitted by his comment that as "self-respecting coloured [black] people, we would like to enjoy a status vis-a-vis England similar to that enjoyed by Australia and Canada."³⁸ The denial of political equality with whites was, perhaps, the greatest hurt felt by black colonials who were schooled in the doctrines of imperial trusteeship and British humanitarianism, and

had obtained acceptable levels of education and social standing. The educated black middle class believed that racial discrimination was a barrier to entry and promotion in the Civil Service and teaching profession as well as a determining factor in denying most blacks the political franchise. The Italo-Ethiopian dispute, therefore, became an issue with which to test Britain's commitment to equality and justice towards her black subjects.

There was, therefore, a tendency among political groups, notably the N.W.S.C.A. and the A.W.I.L., to link the Italo-Ethiopian dispute with local grievances. Support for Ethiopia, however, did not always dictate harmony among those opposed to Italian aggression, from different class and, more importantly, ideological backgrounds. Inter-group conflict surfaced, for example, when the N.W.S.C.A. presented an anti-imperialist resolution on the Italo-Ethiopian issue at the A.W.I.L.'s meeting on July 31st.³⁹ Godfrey Philips of the W.I.Y.W.L., a black petit-bourgeois organization which promoted the "Back to the Land" movement and claimed to be non-political (see *infra*, Chap. 1, p. 55) opposed the N.W.S.C.A.'s resolution on the grounds that it was not "constitutionally proper" and violated "the spirit of international peace".⁴⁰ Another dissenter, A.A. Burkett (whose name appeared on the Port-of-Spain Gazette's list of those present, perhaps, because he was a member of the respected middle class), felt that local groups and individuals should not condemn any nation, nor petition the League of Nations; they should support Britain "in her mission for peace."⁴¹

Although the resolution was passed, these criticisms highlighted political differences between the N.W.S.C.A. and the other organizations present. Both the A.W.I.L. and the W.I.Y.W.L. believed that British military power would be used, if necessary, to dispel the war clouds over Ethiopia. Consequently, they were content to hold public meetings and petition the imperial government to impress their concern upon its policy makers. This approach, however, assumed an identity of interest between colonial subjects and their British rulers,⁴² an assumption which the N.W.S.C.A. did not share.

The N.W.S.C.A., in contrast, sought to dispel belief in the British "gospel of equity and fair play" and refused to protest to the British government against Italy's involvement in Ethiopia on the premise that to do so would give the impression that Britain was without blame, or that she was genuinely interested in resolving the Italo-Ethiopian conflict.⁴³ The N.W.S.C.A. underlined its stance by protesting to the League of Nations and condemned the policy of world imperialism as the fundamental cause of the Ethiopian struggle.⁴⁴

The N.W.S.C.A.'s activities among the unemployed, however, had repercussions which removed it from the Trinidad scene at the outbreak of the war. The protest march organized at the July 31 mass meeting⁴⁵ took place on August 1; it attracted the support of a comparatively small number of unemployed.⁴⁶ Some two hundred jobless workers carrying placards on which such slogans as "We Want Work" and "There is plenty to eat in Trinidad and We are Starving" were written,⁴⁷ marched to Government House.

The governor, Sir Claud Hollis, agreed to meet a delegation and the following day, August 2, discussed their demands. These included jobs for the unemployed; the establishment of Food Relief Depots; free milk and meals for the children of the unemployed; 3 shillings per day for all single unemployed men and women; 5 shillings per day for each unemployed family; the provision of shelter for the shelterless and the exemption of all taxes and rents for all unemployed workers.⁴⁸

These demands may reflect the N.W.S.C.A.'s response to suggestions in the I.T.U.C.-N.W.'s April 1935 Negro Worker which strongly advocated both the establishment of "Unemployed Councils", demonstrations to obtain relief and defined the demands which appeared in the petition.⁴⁹

The Governor attempted to co-opt the members of the Committee: he offered them jobs.⁵⁰ The Committee then returned to Woodford Square and informed the crowd, which had grown to some 500 workers and unemployed, of the governor's proposal. They rejected it because "they were fighting the people's case and until employment was given to them, they could not leave their followers without leaders".⁵¹ Moreover, they contrasted themselves to Captain Cipriani who gave the unemployed no support, and decided "to take matters into their own hands" and staged a further demonstration against the government.⁵²

What ensued was a demonstration which threatened to engulf the entire capital city and its outlying districts; it became clear that the 200 hard core followers of the Unemployed Committee commanded massive popular support. The demonstrators took to the streets, raided the Government's Ground Provisions Depot, small retail shops and road-side East Indian vendors in search of food. Business places closed as news

of the demonstration spread. In Laventille, an outlying district to the east of Port-of-Spain, the marchers invaded a Chinaman's shop and stole cakes, biscuits and bread.⁵³ These acts vividly dramatized the hunger and poverty of the unemployed. A.N. Porter and other members of the Unemployed Committee, however, called on the demonstrators not to steal from poor Indians,⁵⁴ themselves victims of economic exploitation.

The police did not hesitate to use force. The Port-of-Spain Gazette graphically described how at one stage a police contingent "dashed into the crowd and started using their long sticks"⁵⁵ as the demonstrators rushed helter skelter. A number of protestors were arrested and charged with offences such as disorderly behaviour, assisting others to escape, throwing missiles and theft.⁵⁶ By late afternoon, the situation had developed into such a serious crisis that the governor issued a proclamation effective for two months, forbidding assemblies of ten or more persons armed with sticks⁵⁷ - a standard weapon of the West Indian urban working-class - and other offensive instruments. All processions other than those of a religious character were banned. These measures were immediately effective in the counties of St. Georges, St. Andrew, Caroni, Victoria and St. Patrick, including the main urban centers, Port-of-Spain, the capital, and San Fernando in the south. Anyone found in breach of these regulations faced a fine of twenty pounds or six months hard labour.⁵⁸

This proclamation was renewed periodically throughout the rest of Sir Claude's administration which ended in September 1936. Strengthened by this so-called Peace Proclamation, the police intensified their efforts to break up the demonstration, and to isolate the leaders from

the protesting workers. That evening warrants were issued for the arrest of the "ring-leaders" including A.N. Porter, James Leader and Anthony Murray, members of the Central Committee of Action of the Unemployed who were accused of "inciting commission of a breach of the peace".⁵⁹

It was against this background of social unrest, brought on by chronic unemployment and hunger, and government's concentration on law and order to suppress economic and political discontent that news of the Anglo-French Agreement and the final report of the League of Nations' Commission for Conciliation and Arbitration reached the Trinidad public.

As a sequel to Britain's aborted attempt in June to have Mussolini agree to a negotiated settlement, a conference between France, Italy and Britain was convened in Paris on August 15 to consider a new set of peace proposals.⁶⁰ The Anglo-French Agreement which ensued, provided for the "economic development and administrative reorganization"⁶¹ of Ethiopia under a League mandate; France, Great Britain and Italy would lend the League their "collective assistance ... particular account being taken of the special interests of Italy, without prejudice to the recognized rights of France and the United Kingdom". The agreement, moreover, "did not exclude the possibility of territorial adjustments to which Italy and Ethiopia might agree".⁶²

Mussolini, however, rejected the Anglo-French Agreement; by then the Italians were mobilizing in preparation for war and Mussolini had already publicised his intention "to teach Ethiopia a lesson in natural justice". The breakdown of the Paris Conference, according to Toynbee, vanquished "the last hope of a peaceful settlement by negotiation";⁶³ developments

in the following weeks validated this judgement.

The report of the Commission for Conciliation and Arbitration, submitted to the League of Nations Council on September 4, was inconclusive and only served to delay the League from taking firm action against Italy.⁶⁴ On September 6, the League Council appointed a Committee of Five to investigate, once again, "the relations between Italy and Abyssinia".

The Committee of Five suggested Ethiopian concessions to Italy and provided for the imposition of a League Mandate over the strategic Lake Tsana area in which Britain had important interests.⁶⁵ Mussolini rejected the proposals, whereupon the League Council appointed another committee of thirteen, instead of five, members on September 26: seven days later Italy invaded Ethiopia.

Black nationalists began to appreciate the correctness of the N.W.S.C.A. initial analysis and expressed doubts that the League of Nations could safeguard the rights of black people. A.W.I.L., for example, condemned the League of Nations as "a mere European cabal to insure the perpetual subjection ... of the coloured races";⁶⁶ the "dilly-dallying" of the League of Nations and the procrastination of the British had taught the Afro-West Indian an important principle: there is "one code of international law ... to be observed when the white nations have a dispute and another when one of the parties is a [black] State".⁶⁷ The assumption of "British fairplay and justice" for all irrespective of race or creed, therefore, had proven unfounded and, moreover, the feelings and opinions of Britain's "African subjects" were ignored. Mentor, nevertheless, reminded Britain that the goodwill of Africans and Afro-West Indians was worth "the hostility of Italy" and insisted upon justice for

Ethiopia.⁶⁸

The N.W.S.C.A.'s analysis of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute as an aspect of imperialism and international working-class struggle against capitalist exploitation, was also reflected in The People. On August 3, for example, The People reprinted an article from The Tribune which was addressed "To the Toilers of the Metropolis and Colonies".⁶⁹ The article advocated the establishment of "Hands Off Abyssinia Committees" by working-class organizations and trade unions, the central tasks of which would be:

to raise the issue of war menace to Abyssinia ... connecting it up with the struggle against their own oppressors; to mobilise workers for united protest, demonstrations and actions; to link up the fight for Abyssinian [Ethiopian] independence ... against Fascism and War with the fight for the release of the Scottsboro boys and Angelo Herndon, with the fight for self-determination and independence of the colonial toilers. Only the International solidarity and United Action of the toilers can prevent the conquest and enslavement of Abyssinia. Only the fighting unity of the working class can defeat fascism and prevent another world war.⁷⁰

At the same time, the W.I.Y.W.L. made its own commitment clear by calling for a boycott of Italian goods and businesses in the event of war and demonstrated its allegiance to Haile Selassie with a ceremonial unveiling of his portrait.⁷¹ The portrait was unveiled by a member, A. Lewis, in full Garveyite regalia - the red, green and black colours of the U.N.I.A. - and to the strains of the Ethiopian Anthem.⁷² A eulogy followed in which Haile Selassie was hailed as "the inspiration of the [black] people of the world to strive for equality and due recognition."

It was "a sad moment ... one tinged with sorrow",⁷³ Lewis said, and urged the audience to "observe the portrait with reverence and solemnity".⁷⁴

Similar sentiments were reflected in The People where Haile Selassie was hailed as "the King of Kings, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah and descendant of Solomon", and celebrated in verse his invincibility and immortality:

Make fast, thy strength
 In Judah's name
 Fear not the ghastly hour;
 For He has said I am the same.⁷⁵
 Today, Thy Past - The Morrow.

Ethiopian consciousness in urban Trinidad, therefore, contained elements of Black Messianism similar to elements in the peasant-based Jamaican Rastafarian movement which centered around the doctrine of Haile Selassie's divinity.⁷⁶ The messianic aspect of Trinidad Ethiopianism, however, was limited to the Trinidadian working class and was strongly rivalled by secular ideologies more relevant to both the material needs of a landless proletariat and the impending struggle of the Ethiopian people against Italian imperialism.

The Labour and Socialist (Second) International's August meeting in Brussels gave an international dimension to local protest movements.⁷⁷ It resolved that its members "protest unceasingly" against fascism in Ethiopia, and the working class "to do everything in its power to save peace".⁷⁸ As a result of the T.L.P.'s affiliation with the Second International, the former passed a resolution which expressed "grave concern about the threatened outbreak of war between Fascist Italy and

Abyssinia",⁷⁹ and urged both the British Labour Party and the Socialist International "to do all in their power ... to arrest such a catastrophe".⁸⁰

Captain Cipriani did not sign the resolution, perhaps because he did not support the policy of direct working class action. What is certain, however, is that he did not evince the same urgent concern over the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. On the very eve of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Cipriani boasted that he had "too much faith in the British nation" to think that "she will allow such an atrocity to be perpetuated"; "I cannot believe it", he insisted, "and feel almost sure that the war clouds will be dispelled."⁸¹ Exactly four weeks later Italy invaded Ethiopia.

Cipriani's optimism, however, was not shared by the black nationalists. The A.W.I.L., for example, in anticipation of the Italo-Ethiopian War, convened a meeting on September 2, to which Cipriani, the Deputy Mayor Dr. T.P. Achong, Ms. Audrey Jeffers M.B.E. a social worker, and other professionals were invited.⁸² Hugo Mentor suggested the founding of a Friends of Ethiopia Committee "to coordinate the scattered efforts of all Ethiopian sympathizers in the colony and direct their energies in a common channel".⁸³ The meeting accepted this suggestion, made Cipriani chairman and defined the Committee's objectives: "to devise ways and means of assisting Ethiopia morally and otherwise"⁸⁴ and "to co-operate with other bodies in the West Indies and abroad that are pursuing similar aims".⁸⁵ The A.W.I.L., therefore, sought to widen the scope of protest across class lines and exert concerted pressure on the British government to act decisively to safeguard Ethiopia's independence. The Friends of Ethiopia Committee, however, did not meet until after the Italo-Ethiopian war began.

Neither the A.W.I.L. nor the W.I.Y.W.L. at this point revealed a clear appreciation of the full weight and implications of the international situation in which the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was being decided. They had responded to the racial contradiction of imperialist control in Africa, which also reflected racial oppression at home, and in that sense racial identity and solidarity with Ethiopia were validated.⁸⁶ Race, however, was a subsidiary and unimportant factor, at least for the two European powers capable of preventing Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. Although there were expressions of concern about racial antagonism in the West Indies and Africa, both the French and British governments did not doubt the stability of their colonial regimes. Matters of national security and the European balance of power were, however, of paramount importance to them.⁸⁷

The illusion under which the A.W.I.L., the W.I.Y.W.L. and the T.L.P. approached the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was well expressed by no less a person than the British Foreign Minister Sir Samuel Hoare to the House of Commons on December 19, 1935:

I have been terrified with the thought ... that we might lead Abyssinia on to think that the League could do more than it can do - (cheers), that in the end we should find a terrible moment of disillusionment in which it may be that Abyssinia would be destroyed altogether as an independent state I could not help thinking of the past, in which more than once in our history we have given, and rightly given, all our sympathies to some threatened and down-trodden race, but because we have been unable to implement and give effect to those sympathies all that we had done was to encourage them, with the result that in the end their fate was worse than it would have been without our sympathy.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The period July-September 1935 witnessed a range of organizational responses to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis which reflected both class and ideological differences within the black community. On the one hand the marxist working-class dominated N.W.S.C.A. considered the crisis as an aspect of imperialism and the international struggles of the working-class against world capitalism. Consequently, in late July and August 1935 the N.W.S.C.A. sought to mobilize working-class support for Ethiopia while at the same time it protested against the oppressive conditions of Britain's black subjects under colonial capitalism at home. On the other hand, the black nationalist, petit-bourgeois dominated Afro-West Indian League [A.W.I.L., which emerged in direct response to the crisis], and the W.I.Y.W.L., supported by The People, articulated the Italo-Ethiopian crisis as essentially a racial conflict, reaffirmed the symbolic significance of Ethiopia as the only remaining independent African nation of the black race, and sought, through the force of public opinion, British intervention in the crisis on Ethiopia's behalf. Black nationalist sentiments, moreover, were not intended to stimulate militant and "unconstitutional" protest against British colonialism; instead, the educated, race-conscious middle-class leadership seemed to assume an obligation on Britain's part to adopt an enlightened and just policy in safeguarding black interests, a position which was also shared by the upper middle class leadership of the T.L.P.

Thus, as the Italo-Ethiopian crisis worsened and approached the decisive month of October, pro-Ethiopian leaders remained divided and no political alliance had emerged to provide a united front capable of

mobilising the widest possible support for Ethiopia. A parallel development occurred in Jamaica where bourgeois rejection of working-class radicalism was an obstacle to organization, despite the fact that black nationalist doctrines were embraced by all classes save the capitalists and the top stratum of the middle-class.⁸⁹

The effectiveness of Afro-Trinidadian support to the Ethiopian cause, however, would be determined not by ideological and class differences, but by the objective conditions of imperialism which placed political power in the hands of foreign governments and economic wealth in the hands of the white metropolitan and local capitalists. Economic deprivation and political powerlessness were the social realities of the colonized and this was vividly manifested when Afro-Trinidadians attempted to defend Ethiopia between October 1935 and June 1936.

Notes

Chapter 2

¹Edward Ullendorf, The Ethiopians, An Introduction to Country and People, 3rd ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 84-89.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 89.

⁴Cited from S.K.B. Asante, Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941 (London: Longman, 1977), p. 40.

⁵Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), pp. 156-176; Ullendorf, The Ethiopians, pp. 91-99.

⁶Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, Vol. II, 1935 (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 12-31.

⁷Greenfield, Ethiopia, pp. 190-191.

⁸Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, pp. 137-139.

⁹Between January and June 1935, Britain and France, either bilaterally or collectively, signed no less than four military agreements with Italy; all three powers viewed the rise of Nazism as a common threat to national security. See Frank Hardie, The Abyssinian Crisis (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1974), pp. 247-248.

¹⁰Franklin D. Laurens, France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936 (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 50-51.

¹¹Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, p. 164. The actions of both France and Britain violated the 1930 Four Power Treaty 'regulating the importation into Ethiopia of arms, ammunition and implements of war'. In the preamble to the treaty, the four signatories, Ethiopia, Britain, France and Italy, declared themselves to be 'desirous of ensuring an effective supervision over the

trade in arms and munitions in Ethiopia and in the territories adjacent thereto, with the object of ... enabling His Majesty the Emperor of Ethiopia to obtain all the arms munitions necessary for the defence of his territories from external aggression and for the preservation of internal order ...', idem, p. 123.

¹²Ibid., p. 380.

¹³Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁴For example, The People, March 9, 1935, p. 6; idem, April 20, 1935, p. 3.

¹⁵J.A. Rogers, The Real Facts About Ethiopia (1936; London: African Publication Society, 1981).

¹⁶Trinidad Guardian, July 17, 1935.

¹⁷The People, July 20, 1935, p. 4.

¹⁸Ibid., September 7, 1935, p. 3. The author has no data on The People's circulation; however, its main concentration would have been in Port-of-Spain, the capital, and San Fernando.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Report of the West India Royal Commission, 1945, p. 195.

²¹The People, July 27, 1935, p. 6.

²²Robert G. Weisbord, Ebony Kinship, (London: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), p. 105.

²³Cf. Chapter I, pp. 40-42

²⁴Interview with Jim Barrat, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, March 21, 1985.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 2, 1935, p. 1; The People, August 3, 1935, p. 11.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 1, 1935; The People, August 3, 1935, p. 6. By 1935 Hugo Mentor had left The People, although he still wrote on behalf of the A.W.I.L. The author, however, was unable to find out his profession at the time of the founding of the A.W.I.L.

³¹Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 1, 1935.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴For a study of the religious aspects of Garvey's movement see Randall K. Burkett, Black Redemption Churchmen Speak for the Garvey Movement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978).

³⁵Ken Post, Arise Ye Starvelings. The Jamaica Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath (The Hague: Martin Nijhoff, 1978), p. 167.

³⁶Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 1, 1935.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰The People, August 3, 1935, p. 6.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²West African nationalists, for example, hoped that as "'Godmother of the African and coloured races' Britain would take up the mantle of the past and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of Ethiopia", S.K.B. Asante, Pan-African Protest, p. 75.

⁴³Interview with Jim Barrat, Port-of-Spain, March 21, 1985. Barrat's view of British and French complicity in Italy's plan of conquest is supported by a number of studies. See, for example, Laurens, France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-1936, Hardie, The Abyssinian Crisis.

⁴⁴The People, August 3, 1935, p. 6; Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 1, 1935.

⁴⁵Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 1, 1935; The People, August 3, 1935, p. 6.

⁴⁶Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 2, 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., August 3, 1935.

⁴⁹The Negro Worker, Vol. 5, April 1935.

⁵⁰Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 3, 1935.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, pp. 172-173.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 174.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., p. 175.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 170. The Commission for Conciliation and Arbitration concluded that neither Ethiopia nor Italy was responsible for the Wal Wal affair which "for the most part [was] not serious and of very ordinary occurrence ... in this respect ... no international responsibility need be involved". While the Wal Wal incident appeared trivial in the Commission's estimation, it had indeed set in motion, a chain of events of great magnitude, ultimately leading to war in October 1935. Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, p. 170.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶The People, August 31, 1935, p. 6.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid., August 3, 1935, p. 4.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹The People, August 31, 1935, p. 12; Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 31, 1935, p. 9.

⁷²The Ethiopian Anthem, composed by Marcus Garvey, was the official anthem of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and reflected Garvey's Ethiopianist/pan-Africanist orientation:

Ethiopia, thou land of our fathers,
 Thou land where the gods love to be,
 As storm cloud at night suddenly gathers
 Our armies come rushing to thee
 We must in the fight be victorious
 When swords are thrust outward to gleam;
 For us will the vict'ry be glorious
 When led by the red, black and green
 (1919)

⁷³Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 31, 1935, p. 9.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵The People, August 31, 1935, p. 11.

⁷⁶Leonard Barrett, The Rastafarians, (Kingston: Heinemann, 1977), p. 81.

⁷⁷Port-of-Spain Gazette, September 5, 1935, p. 8.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Trinidad Guardian, September 5, 1935, p. 3.

⁸²Port-of-Spain Gazette, September 3, 1935, p. 8.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Post makes the same point in reference to the Jamaican experience. Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 194.

⁸⁷This conclusion is based on Professor Toynbee's indepth analysis of European diplomacy during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. See Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, 1935.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 318.

⁸⁹Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 194.

CHAPTER III

The Italo-Ethiopian War, October 1935 to May 1936: Organizational and Popular Reactions

On the morning of October 3, without a formal declaration of war, Italy invaded Ethiopia; bombs and artillery fire hit Adigrat in the province of Adowa and events moved relatively swiftly and decisively in Italy's favour. Economic sanctions imposed by the League of Nations on November 18, 1935,¹ had no significant effect on Italy's military thrust into Ethiopia, and despite heroic resistance by the Ethiopians, Haile Selassie was forced to flee the capital, Addis Ababa, on May 3, 1936. Italian troops entered the capital on May 5, and two days later, Italy proclaimed the annexation of Ethiopia.²

Until the moment of invasion, the belief in the doctrine of collective security, the League of Nations, and the capacity of England and France to respond to colonial public opinion was reflected in the Trinidad Guardian, the resolutions passed by the Afro-West Indian League and West Indian Youth Welfare League, and the reassuring comments of Captain Cipriani. The People's prediction, however, had proved correct: the Great Powers had allowed "this onward rolling car or juggernaut to roll on and finally smother the Abyssinians".³

The outbreak of the war, while it did not immediately destroy faith in the League of Nations, nevertheless, had a significant impact on political responses in Trinidad. Popular anti-Italian demonstrations erupted, new organizations were formed, efforts were made to assist the

Ethiopian defence campaign and, the government itself, in line with League of Nations sanctions, assumed an anti-Italian posture.

Popular protest against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia was spontaneously manifested as "news of the fall of Adowa reached the city [Port-of-Spain] over the radio" on October 6; the immediate result was that a large and hostile crowd, which the Port-of-Spain Gazette described as "the street elements",⁴ marched to the business premises and residence of Theodore Laurencio, a Portuguese wine merchant, whose red and green Portuguese Republic flag was mistaken for the Italian. The flag was taken down and destroyed; however, before the demonstrators were able to inflict further damage, a party of policemen arrived, arrested the "ring-leaders" and dispersed the crowd.⁵

The N.W.S.C.A. took advantage of the fact that the ban on public meetings, imposed on Aug. 2 after the unemployment demonstration (infra, Ch. II, p. 82) had expired and immediately organized this protest movement. It distributed a handbill which called on the people to

SAVE ABYSSINIA

Negroes of Trinidad ... All out to-day ... at 2:30 p.m. Join a protest meeting ... Thousands of Abyssinian peasants--women and children are being slaughtered by the bombing of the Fascist butcher Mussolini Only the united action of all Negroes and oppressed people can stop this horrible mass murder; can stop world Imperialism from the pillage and plunder on the Abyssinian peoples. Voice your Protest ... Down with Mussolini. Down with the enemies of the Negro Peoples.⁶

Response was instantaneous and numerically larger than the response to their May Day call for protest against the colonial government (infra,

Chap. I., p. 48). More than 2,000 black workers and unemployed, many armed with sticks,⁷ assembled at Marine Square in downtown Port-of-Spain on October 10 and addressed the following resolution to the Italian government:

We the Negroes and other sympathizers of Trinidad and Tobago demand that a stop be put to this brutal mass slaughter of Abyssinians, and the complete evacuation of all Italian Fascists from Abyssinian territory. We condemn all Fascist civilisation as a Civilisation of bloodshed.⁸

The demonstrators bearing placards: "Down With Mussolini", "Away with Fascism", and "Down with the Enemies of the Negro", then marched to the Italian consulate, but were prevented from entering by a large police contingent. At their insistence, however, a representative of the N.W.S.C.A., Bertie Percival, met with the Italian consul and presented the people's resolution. Leaving the Italian consulate, the demonstrators invaded the Roman Catholic Cathedral, verbally abused the members of clergy and then march to Woodford Square chanting "we want to fight for Abyssinia".⁹

These events prompted the colonial authorities to reintroduce, for two months, the ban on public meetings which had expired the previous week.¹⁰ The Inspector-General of Constabulary stressed the need to keep the so-called Peace Proclamation in force in the present tense, political situation when "immediate action" might be necessary. There was, in his opinion, "no reason why anybody who chooses to do so can call a meeting of all the lowest elements in the town and parade the streets shouting

'down with this or that'".¹¹ Colonel Mavragordato warned the colonial government of "the mentality of the hooligan element", the excitability of the "crowd psychology", and secretly advised that all public meetings should be forbidden unless permission is obtained beforehand.¹²

The colonial authorities were fully supported by both the Port-of-Spain Gazette and the Trinidad Guardian. On October 8, the editor of the Port-of-Spain Gazette warned "the street elements" to curb their feelings of resentment against Italy, and threatened that any attempt to molest Italians or destroy their property "would only land the perpetrators in serious trouble".¹³ Following the N.W.S.C.A. demonstration on October 10, the Trinidad Guardian also warned that support for Ethiopia should not be made the excuse for hostile demonstrations against the Italian flag, or Italian nationals in Trinidad.

At a time when public feeling is stirred by the bloody events in East Africa, and the momentous decisions made at Geneva, no plea for calmness, prudence and considerable [sic] behaviour could be too forcefully urged. We hope that every British subject in this colony will remember that restraint and courtesy at such a time are in keeping with the finest traditions of the Empire and that any departure from a peaceful course of speech or conduct will serve merely to promote ill-feeling which will do no good to anyone but must rather injure the good name of our beloved Trinidad.¹⁴

The Trinidad Guardian, apparently, did not regard the right to assembly which had been suppressed as also "in keeping with the finest traditions of the Empire".¹⁵

The defence of civil liberties, however, was taken up by The People who shared popular sympathy with the Ethiopian people. Ralph Mentor, a journalist and literary writer whose brother Hugo Mentor was the president of the Afro-West Indian League (A.W.I.L.), accused the colonial administration of committing an invasion of the people's basic "civil and political liberties";¹⁶ it was, he insisted, "an abuse of power" at that critical juncture in their history.¹⁷ Mentor, however, did not lay all the blame at the feet of the Governor. The latter, he said, was being ill-advised by the electives who were "busy doing everything else but the job their constituents elected them to perform".¹⁸ Consequently, he defended the right of the disenfranchised and dispossessed to demonstrate as a legitimate medium for expressing their grievances and suffering. The colonial administration, Mentor argued, had ignored unemployment until they were "awakened from their slumber" by the hunger and unemployment marches which were led by the N.W.S.C.A. in July 1935.¹⁹

The People's concern over political repression was heightened by events in St. Vincent on October 21 where the right of assembly was restricted and press censorship imposed following labour disturbances which the governor of St. Vincent, Sir Selwyn Grier, attributed, in part, to anti-Italian feelings roused by the Italo-Ethiopian war.²⁰

Although the N.W.S.C.A.'s agitational thrust among workers and the unemployed was restricted by the government's ban on demonstrations and mass meetings, its call for organized working-class action against Italian imperialism was in line with the policy adopted by the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers.²¹ The latter advocated strike

action on Italian ships and advised its members to refuse to load war materials on Italian ships, or ships destined for Italian ports in East Africa.²² Consequently, the Stevedores and Longshore Workers Branch, which was affiliated to the T.L.P.,²³ immediately responded to this call and, on October 23, passed the following resolution:

Whereas the League of Nations have declared Italy the aggressor in the prevailing Italo-Ethiopian War. And whereas the International Congress of Seamen and Harbour Workers have resolved that their main task is to defend the economic interest of their members and seamen, dockers and fishermen, in general, and to stand unalterably opposed to Fascism and all aggression and imperialistic wars which are designed to hamper the interest of the working people of the Colony and oppressed peoples:-

Be it resolved that the members of the Stevedores and Longshoremen Workers' Branch ... pledge themselves to refuse to load and unload Italian steamers and ships calling at Trinidad and to adopt all other forms of protest as may be practicable towards assistance to [Ethiopia].²⁴

As a result of this decision, Port-of-Spain dockworkers, on November 12, refused to unload an Italian ship, the "Virgilio," which had arrived from Genoa.²⁵ The boycott, however, was defeated by the local merchants who hired scab workers under police protection.²⁶

There were, however, repercussions a few days later when members of the Stevedores and Longshore Workers Branch refused to work alongside one of the scab-workers involved in the aborted November 12 boycott of the "Virgilio". The workers accused him of being traitorous to the Ethiopian cause and "refused to drive a stroke" until they had discussed

their case with the president of the Branch, C.P. Alexander. After discussions between the workers and the shipping supervisor, the offending worker was dismissed and work on the docks resumed.²⁷

This victory for workers' solidarity, however, was achieved against the background of the League of Nations' October 19 decision to impose economic sanctions on Italy. Consequently, on November 18, the day sanctions were to come in force, the governor banned the export to Italy of arms, munitions and "instruments to be used in war", including "provisions or any sort of victuals which may be used as food for man" and the importation of goods "consigned from or grown, produced or manufactured in Italian territory" in compliance with Britain's legal obligations as a member of the League.²⁸ The colonial government, therefore, assumed an anti-Italian posture; this seems to explain the relative ease with which the dispute was resolved in the workers' favour.

Popular reaction to the Italo-Ethiopian war, however, demonstrated that support for Ethiopia was widespread. This, and the fact that the N.W.S.C.A. had been forced into the background, prompted other organizations and individuals to seize the political initiative. Two new organizations, representing different class and ideological backgrounds, emerged: The Trinidad Citizens Committee (T.C.C.) in San Fernando, South Trinidad, led by Adrian Cola Rienzi, a marxist and ex-T.L.P. member, and the Friends of Ethiopia Committee (F.E.C.), a multi-racial, mainly upper middle-class humanitarian group led by Captain Cipriani. The F.E.C., the T.L.P., the petit-bourgeois A.W.I.L. and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) were all active in mobilizing material support for the Ethiopian people.

The moving spirit behind the T.C.C., Adrian Cola Rienzi (1906-1972), was a well established political activist.²⁹ Educated at the Naparima College, San Fernando, he became at the age of eighteen, president of the San Fernando branch of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association and its chief organizer in the south. From this position he contacted S. Saklatava, the communist M.P. for Battersea, England, on whose advice he left Trinidad in the latter part of 1930 to study jurisprudence at Trinity College, Dublin. There he became involved in the illegal Sinn Fein movement and consequently, was forced to leave.³⁰ Rienzi's studies continued in England where he graduated from the Middle Temple in 1934. While in England he was elected (1933) to the Executive of the communist oriented Negro Welfare Association.³¹ On his return to Trinidad in 1934 he immediately renewed his association with the T.L.P. Rienzi, however, left the T.L.P. in early 1935 because of ideological conflicts with Cipriani,³² and together with Tubal Uriah Butler and other ex-T.L.P. members formed the Trinidad Citizen's Committee (T.C.C.) in October.³³

The timing of Rienzi's T.C.C. suggests a deliberate intention to take up the political struggle initiated by the N.W.S.C.A. in Port-of-Spain and establish a vanguard of the working-class to combat the influence of the T.L.P. in the south. The T.C.C. paralleled the N.W.S.C.A., and simultaneously addressed both the unemployment problem and the condition of the Ethiopian people under imperialism. This was evident at a public meeting held on October 28; it condemned the ban on public assemblies and demonstrations as "a direct attack upon the political rights of the working-class"³⁴ and an attempt "to suppress [the] expression of public indignation at the incompetence of the Government ... to solve

the unemployment problem".³⁵ On the Italo-Ethiopian question, the T.C.C. viewed the Italian invasion as a manifestation of capitalist imperialism in East Africa. It expressed "indignation" at "the unjustifiable invasion of Abyssinian territory, [the] shooting and bombing of thousands of defenceless men, women and children for the purpose of glorifying Italian Fascist Imperialism".³⁶ The immediate imposition of economic sanctions as well as armed military intervention were called for and the British government was urged to exert "its best influences" to have the League of Nations act accordingly.³⁷

Despite its defence of working-class rights and the Ethiopian sovereignty, the T.C.C. lacked effective mass support and functioned as a relatively small pressure group. By the end of 1935 it had declined, and Rienzi formed a new organization, the Trinidad Citizens' League, which, according to Basdeo, "became by mid-1936 the major political rival of the T.L.P."³⁸ A conflicting view, however, is presented by Jacobs who states that the T.C.L. "held private house meetings at which time a small group, rarely numbering over twenty, would meet and discuss the ideas of Karl Marx".³⁹ What is certain is that in 1937, both Rienzi and Butler in the south, and the N.W.S.C.A. in the north, seized the mantle of working-class leadership from Cipriani following the June labour disturbances.⁴⁰

At the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war, Cipriani's position as leader of the labour movement had already come under attack. The abortive oil-workers strike led by Butler in March 1935 (infra, Ch. I, p. 41) marked, according to Ryan, "the first major open challenge to [his] leadership".⁴¹ Further strikes in the oil and sugar industries, and the

public sector, and accompanying unemployment marches organized by the N.W.S.C.A. in 1935, demonstrated that "the workers [and unemployed] were growing more and more impatient with Cipriani's Fabianism, and were eager to take to the streets to dramatize their plight".⁴² It is against this background of rising socio-economic unrest and discontent with the policies of the T.L.P., that Cipriani identified with the Ethiopian cause which was widely supported by the black workers and unemployed.

Immediately after the N.W.S.C.A.'s demonstration on October 10 was suppressed, Cipriani launched the T.L.P.'s Ethiopia Ambulance Fund, to purchase an ambulance for the Ethiopian government.⁴³ A subscription list was opened in the conservative Trinidad Guardian which urged its readers that "no effort can be too great to put forth for suffering and dying humanity and as a gesture of support to a country whose frontiers have been rudely violated to make a Roman holiday".⁴⁴ Four hundred and sixty-three pounds were raised and sent to the Ethiopian ambassador, Dr. A. Workneh Martin, in London.⁴⁵

At the same time, the multi-racial Friends of Ethiopia Committee (F.E.C.), which had previously met in September at the instigation of the A.W.I.L. (infra, Ch. II, p. 87), was officially constituted with Cipriani as chairman and the following members: A.E. James and Hugo Mentor (black; A.W.I.L.); Councillor L.A. Pujadas (East Indian); George McD. Chambers (white); Alfred Richards (coloured, T.L.P.); Paul Louis (racial background and profession unknown); Alderman Murchison Rigsby (white); Audrey Jeffers M.B.E. (black, social worker) and Beatrice Greig (white; social worker).⁴⁶ The Committee supported the League of Nations'

decision to impose economic sanctions against Italy, and, at the same time, implored Britain to seek a conciliation between Italy and Ethiopia.⁴⁷

The Ethiopia Assistance Fund was launched and a subscription list was opened in the Port-of-Spain Gazette.⁴⁸ The F.E.C. also established an island-wide network of representatives and sub-committees to co-ordinate the fund-raising campaign, and held public meetings in Port-of-Spain, Arima and San Fernando where the issues surrounding the Italo-Ethiopian war were discussed and clarified. Appeals were made to government officials, Friendly Societies, the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations for donations. In addition, the Committee organized fund-raising events such as religious concerts, a fireworks display and flag-sales.⁴⁹

This humanitarian and liberal endeavour owed much of its success to the labours of both black and white middle-class women. The San Fernando Friends of Ethiopia, for example, was established by the South Philanthropic Workers,⁵⁰ and in Port-of-Spain a women's sub-committee was formed under the leadership of Audrey Jeffers O.B.E.⁵¹ Both groups were the main force behind the organization of Ethiopian Flag Days.

The Ethiopian Flag Day organized by the Port-of-Spain group was of great propaganda as well as financial value to the Assistance Fund. Under the direction of the two popular social workers, Ms. Jeffers and Beatrice Greig, a larger group of women became involved in the project. They went to the schools to enlist the services of school children as volunteers, and to the merchants seeking donations of cloth and pins.⁵² The first Flag Day was held on November 2, the fifth anniversary of the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie. One thousand, one hundred and ten

dollars were collected from the flag sale - the biggest and most successful fund raising event organized by the Friends of Ethiopia Committee.⁵³

The relative success of the T.L.P.'s Ethiopian Ambulance fund raising drives were indeed a personal victory for Captain Cipriani who had been criticized by The People for "misleading" the black members of the T.L.P. on the Italo-Ethiopian conflict.⁵⁴ Mass support for the Ethiopian Ambulance Fund implies that Cipriani had capitalized on the strong Ethiopianist feelings and once again, if only briefly, made the T.L.P. the focus of popular action. Consequently, Cipriani became more outspoken on the Italo-Ethiopian war, and openly sought to combat the racial and anti-British sentiments engendered by black nationalist propaganda.

Despite Hugo Mentor's association with the F.E.C., the chasm between Cipriani and the A.W.I.L. was such that the former accused the "enterprising would be politicians" - a reference to the black nationalists - of trying to make the war "a question of colour and creed".⁵⁵ What, Cipriani asked, "is the question of colour that arises when you find the powerful European nations, England and France, on the side of the Ethiopians?"⁵⁶ He claimed that his support for the Ethiopian cause was motivated by concern for the application of international law to protect the small from the big nations, the weak from the strong:

What is our concern [in the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict] and the answer is the simple one ... our concern is that the freedom and liberty of a small and weak country is at stake and we are members of a small and weak country, and our turn may come next.⁵⁷

Moreover, Cipriani believed that Britain would play the role of "the international policeman" to the point of declaring war on Italy to defend Ethiopia: "do you think that the British Nation would stand as she does in the Mediterranean merely looking on at the turn of events?"⁵⁸ he asked a crowd of supporters in San Fernando. If there was any doubt or anxiety, he said, "the calm and cool of the British Fleet is a most reassuring factor in this great world turmoil".⁵⁹

A veteran of the First World War, Cipriani was still captive to the notion of British invincibility. When his assurances were challenged on the grounds that the British fleet was "old and decrepit", he retorted, it was "the old story we heard in 1914, but if it ever comes to a show-down the Mediterranean will no longer be an Italian lake but a British mart (sic)."⁶⁰ Later events, however, proved him to be mistaken.

Cipriani's criticisms of the black nationalists provoked a reply from the A.W.I.L. which argued that race consciousness did not imply racial hatred, but racial pride, self-respect and affection for one's own race. That, however, did not exclude "having warm regards for other races"⁶¹ -- it was "family affection which did not exclude love and esteem for other persons".⁶² The A.W.I.L., nevertheless, was founded on the premise that "the leadership of the coloured race should come from the coloured race"⁶³ -- an indirect attack on Cipriani's leadership of the T.L.P. The A.W.I.L., Mentor firmly asserted,

Will not surrender its right to independence of action, will not lose its individuality or merge its identity in that of any other body. We are for co-operation [and] dead-set against fusion.⁶⁴

Mentor's boast was immediately backed by action, and he announced the formation of the A.W.I.L.'s Selassie Fund which received support from the black lower-class churches such as the Spiritual Baptists and the African Orthodox Church as well as East Indian Hindus and Muslims.⁶⁵ The A.W.I.L. also attracted support in foreign countries including Venezuela, Aruba and Curacao where many Trinidadian migrants lived. One hundred and sixty dollars were raised and sent to Emperor Haile Selassie in June 1936.⁶⁶

A.W.I.L.'s insistence on black self-help and self-reliance inspired the U.N.I.A., thus far conspicuously silent on the Italo-Ethiopian war, to establish its own fund raising campaign. The U.N.I.A., however, was only able to raise forty dollars, mainly through the efforts of its female members, Daughters of Ethiopia, who organized the sale of the red, black and green U.N.I.A. flag.⁶⁷ Economic hardships and distress of the period greatly affected the ability of the Afro-Trinidadian masses to contribute generously to the funds. The efforts of the black working-class to match feelings with deed, however, were such that Cipriani was moved to pay them the following compliment:

No one realizes more than I do how empty the pocket of the workingman is, but I take my hat off to him and to my barefooted friend for the manner in which he has so far subscribed.⁶⁸

Cipriani, indeed, had cause to be proud of "the workingman" whose efforts, as a sample of the subscription list shows, were responsible for the success of the T.L.P.'s Ethiopian Ambulance Fund.⁶⁹ He condemned, in

contrast, the manner in which "the aristocratic white man and the aristocratic coloured man", the members of the City Council, the Legislature and "those who filled the big and lucrative jobs" in the Civil Service, had subscribed to the Ethiopian cause. "When we look at the [subscription] list", he said, "not one of them has put up five dollars to the fund."⁷⁰

The attitude of the local bourgeoisie can best be illustrated in the case of J.T. Johnson, a prominent dry goods merchant who contributed one hundred dollars to the T.L.P. Ethiopian Ambulance Fund.⁷¹ Johnson, apparently, was not motivated by altruistic motives; seeking to exploit popular Ethiopianist sentiments for commercial profit, he offered a free photograph of Haile Selassie to any customer who bought merchandise valued one dollar or more.⁷² In view of the strong feelings of kinship and reverence for Selassie which were prevalent among Afro-Trinidadians, it is conceivable that J.T. Johnson's marketing and advertising schemes increased his sales. Another merchant, George F. Huggins and Company Ltd., advertised Tennent's Pilsener Beer in the Trinidad Guardian on Ethiopian camels and the caption "How Does Abyssinia Get Its Beer".⁷³

The failure of the T.L.P. and the Friends of Ethiopia Committee to make a significant impact on the local white bourgeoisie reveals the extent to which support for Ethiopia was primarily drawn from the black working and middle class professionals. Although liberal elements of the upper middle class openly participated in the fund raising campaigns organized by these two groups, the latter's identification with an issue which was widely articulated in racial terms, seems to have alienated significant segments of the white ruling class including the Catholic Church.

In Trinidad, religious ties cut across divisions of social class, but the organization and administration of the main Christian churches reflected both the system of racial stratification in the colonial society and the relationship of subordination and dependence existing between colony and metropole.⁷⁴ Most of the members of the ruling bourgeoisie and the upper-middle class were either Roman Catholic, or Anglican and both denominations were administered by a white clergy dominated by foreign prelates.⁷⁵ Affiliation with the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches was also a valued symbol of social advancement for lower and middle class blacks.⁷⁶ The prospects of a black man achieving ecclesiastical orders in the 1930's were, however, very slim,⁷⁷ particularly in the R.C. church which was strongly supported by the French Creole bourgeoisie;⁷⁸ the latter, more than any other white group, shunned social contact with the blacks, except in the relationship of employer and employee.⁷⁹

In September 1935 the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Port-of-Spain issued a statement outlining the policy of the Vatican and Church on the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. The archbishop stated that the church was "Catholic" and, therefore, could not be a partisan to any nation involved in the dispute.⁸⁰ Likewise, the Pope, as Vicar of Christ to whom "His whole flock was confided",⁸¹ could not be a partisan of Italy although he was an Italian and lived in Italy: "His thoughts are for peace, his prayers are for peace ... irrespective of colour, race or country ..."⁸² Anti-Roman Catholic sentiments displayed during the October 10 demonstrations, prompted the Archbishop to express his indignation at those who were "so ignorant or so foolish or so malicious as to confound for a

moment Rome with Italy, or the Pope with Italians".⁸³

Contrary to the Pope's stance of neutrality, the Italian clergy (with notable exceptions), was roused by nationalist sentiments, and supported the Fascist government.⁸⁴ It was felt that an Italian victory would open the gates of backward Ethiopia to the Catholic faith and Roman civilization; hence, all good Italian Catholics should unite in working for the success of Italian aims and objectives in Ethiopia. In many instances, bishop and archbishops organized collections of gold for the Italian government.⁸⁵

These actions received press coverage in The People which claimed that the Pope and the Roman Catholic church had created "an unedifying spectacle"⁸⁶ by their attitude towards the Italo-Ethiopian war. As a result, Roman Catholic blacks were "disappointed and in most cases bitterly resentful at His Holiness apparent lukewarmness on the side of right and justice in this war".⁸⁷

The actions of certain members of Trinidad's Roman Catholic Church were also openly pro-Italian and contributed to the anti-Catholic mood among race-conscious Afro-Trinidadians. There were, for example, reports that at the St. Joseph Convent in Port-of-Spain the students were asked to contribute to a fund intended to assist Italy, while at another Roman Catholic school they were made to pray for an Italian victory. A third case was the victimization of two teachers who had shown displeasure at their school's pro-Italian sympathies; in one instance the teacher was expelled, but later recalled and disciplined by the white school principal, and in the other the teacher was debarred from further promotion in Roman Catholic schools.⁸⁸

Generally, the behaviour of the clergy lent credence to the belief that there was a conspiracy between the Roman Catholic Church and the Italian state to conquer Ethiopia. As A.M. Cruickshank expressed it in verse:

Long have I listened, but in vain to hear,
 Some stern accusing voice ring loud and clear.
 Out of the Heavens denouncing Church and State
 Where Pope and King subserve the ends of hate.
 The centuries of Europe's saving creed
 Still leave the blackman prey to Europe's greed.⁸⁹

Such feelings prompted public renunciations of the Roman Catholic faith. In a short but very precise letter to the Port-of-Spain Gazette, an ex-Catholic, Rufus Garcia, declared:

In consequence of the conduct of His Holiness the Pope in connection with the Italo-Ethiopian War, I publicly and solemnly declare that from this day I cease to be a Roman Catholic. In my opinion all persons of [black] pigmentation who are followers of that church, should take the step I have taken.⁹⁰

This challenge of faith provoked mixed reactions among Catholics. One supporter who called himself Pro-Selassie, confessed that he had always identified the Roman Catholic Church as a Universal church "whose official policy was not dictated by geographical proximity to Fascism",⁹¹ but, like Garcia, he found that black people had in fact been adherents of an Italian church.⁹² There does not, however, seem to have been any significant exodus from the church. Although many Afro-Trinidadians may have shared the race conscious sentiments expressed by Pro-Selassie and

Garcia, most black Roman Catholics recognized the social importance of the church, particularly its influence within the educational system which provided an opportunity, however limited, for upward mobility.⁹³

Black churches, in contrast to the Roman Catholic church, were a source of popular protest against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and reaffirmed both Afro-Trinidadian identify with Ethiopia and the righteousness of its cause. The African Association of Orisha Workers, popularly known as Shango Worshippers, and the Spiritual Baptist Church whose members were of entirely lower-class origins,⁹⁴ mobilized support for the Ethiopian cause through elaborate religious ceremonies in working-class districts. On November 2, 1935, the Spiritual Baptists convened an open-air Divine Service conducted by Pastor Jackson, to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Haile Selassie's coronation and "to pray for his victory in war."⁹⁵ According to the Port-of-Spain Gazette, more than two thousand persons attended.⁹⁶ December 1935 was a particularly active period for the Shango Worshippers. Throughout the month the group held nightly vigils in Barataria on the eastern outskirts of Port-of-Spain, which involved drumming, singing, animal sacrifices, spirit possession and candlelight processions to secure Divine intervention on Ethiopia's behalf.⁹⁷

Ethiopianist sentiments were expressed by the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church which viewed the Italo-Ethiopian war as a "test of faith for one of the oldest Christian nations as well as for Ethiopians"⁹⁸ all over the world. Ethiopia, according to Rev. Mayhew of the A.M.E. Church, was a dynasty of Emperors who traced "their pedigree" back to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba from whose lineage, he

claimed, "the Immortal Selassie" was descended.⁹⁹ With respect to the Italo-Ethiopian war, Mayhew felt that the Ethiopian's powers of natural physique, indomitable courage and unswerving loyalty to the Emperor, his country and his God, would secure Ethiopia's victory.¹⁰⁰ Mayhew's comments, however, lacked historical validity and did not portray the reality of modern warfare in which Ethiopia was totally unprepared to meet the onslaught of the Italian army. Generally, all black churches, particularly the Shango and Baptist groups, displayed certain tendencies consistent with Ethiopianist phenomena whereby "cognitive practice tended to expect the world to be changed by some sort of divine intervention, in a flight from the real world into an imaginary, often fantastic one which precluded effective political action".¹⁰¹

Popular sympathy for Ethiopia, nevertheless, found sustenance and hope in the religious beliefs of Afro-Trinidadians. Black workers and the unemployed in particular, whose limited financial capacity and colonial status frustrated their fervent desire to defend the Fatherland, turned to religion for inspiration, to protest the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and to affirm their African identity; these also found expression in their cultural art forms.

The artistic, literary and musical creativity of Afro-Trinidadians during the period of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict expressed most fully support for the Ethiopian cause and condemnation of Italy. Through the portrayal of Carnival Bands¹⁰² and Calypsoes - the indigenous musical creation of Afro-Trinidadian workers and unemployed - the Black collective expressed its fears, its anger, its hope and its sorrows.

The February 1935 Carnival Festival was like any other of the preceding years; the Ethiopian cause had not as yet captured the imagination of bandleaders, costume designers and calypso composers. The following year, however, popular awareness and agitation on the Italo-Ethiopian war was so widespread that not only was there a strong manifestation of black nationalist themes, but an attempt by the governor to suppress the "People's festival" (as the Carnival is popularly known).

The governor's pretext was the recent death of King George V; it was deemed inappropriate for the colony to indulge in Carnival while the Empire mourned.¹⁰³ This argument was rejected by The People which drew the governor's attention to the fact that Queen Victoria's death on January 22, 1901 - "who was more beloved than Queen Victoria?" - had not prevented Carnival celebrations a month later.¹⁰⁴ The People, however, pointed out that even before the King's illness "there were adumbrations of a desire by certain people"¹⁰⁵ to have Carnival postponed, and identified Capt. Cipriani, mayor of Port-of-Spain, the Hon. M.A. Maillard of the Legislative Council and the Chamber of Commerce as those whose views the governor seemed to heed.¹⁰⁶ He reminded the governor that "there are views and views" and hoped that "those of the man in the street ... the common people, will be taken into account". These views he said "are unhesitatingly that we should have Carnival on the accustomed date".¹⁰⁷

It is possible that the colonial government was apprehensive about the eruption of social disorder. Unemployment and anti-Italian demonstrations led by the marxist N.W.S.C.A. had prompted restrictions on public assemblies, street parades, and individuals armed with sticks which would have to be waived for Carnival.¹⁰⁸ The potential for spontaneous or even

well planned acts of political protest was there.

These were, perhaps, the considerations which weighed more heavily with the colonial governor than concern that Trinidadians should mourn the death of their King. However, as the editor of The People advised:

Let the Carnival go on! Weeping may endure for
a night but joy cometh in the morning.¹⁰⁹

The governor eventually bowed to public opinion and Carnival 1936 was held on schedule, culminating with street parades and competitions on February 24 and 25.

Ethiopian and African themes were featured in many of the presentations performed at the numerous Carnival shows held over the island. In Arima, for example, the prize winners of a children's King and Queen competition were the portrayals of "Haile Selassie" and "Empress of Ethiopia" respectively.¹¹⁰ In Chaguanas, Central Trinidad, the winner of the Kings of the Bands competition on Carnival Sunday (Sunday before Lent) was the King of the band "Ethiopian Warriors".¹¹¹ On Carnival Monday (the 24th) and Tuesday (25th) two of the most popular bands were The Ethiopians and Heroes of the Dark Continent.¹¹²

It is difficult, however, to present the full impact of African or Ethiopian consciousness during the carnival festivities. The main reason is the scant newspaper coverage of these events since they were invariably associated with the "lower-class" and criminals. Carnival events in the rural areas, moreover, would have received even less attention. It is evident, nevertheless, that Ethiopian and African consciousness had widespread appeal among the masses, and was reflected in and inspired

carnival masquerades.

Calypsonians also led and reflected popular interest and opinion on the Italo-Ethiopian war; throughout the campaign to raise funds for the Ethiopian cause, they contributed freely of their time and talent.

Hubert Raphael (the Roaring Lion) for example, was arrested as "a ring-leader" of the anti-Italian demonstration on October 6.¹¹³ He was subsequently found guilty of disorderly behaviour and fined.¹¹⁴

Neville Marcano (the Growling Tiger), one of the great calypsonians of the nineteen thirties, forties and fifties, became nationally famous in 1935 when he sang:

The gold, the gold, the gold, the gold
The gold in Africa
Mussolini want from the Emperor. (Refrain)

Abyssinia appealed to the League for peace
Mussolini's actions were like a beast
A Villain, a thief, a highway robber
And a shameless dog for a dictator.¹¹⁵

The Growling Tiger also participated in "a drama in song" entitled "Mussolini The Bully" which was performed by a troupe of calypsonians in aid of the Ethiopian Assistance Fund organized by the Friends of Ethiopia Committee.¹¹⁶ The theme song portrays the humour, the interest and the confidence with which Afro-Trinidadians approached the Italo-Ethiopian conflict:

O what a bully is Mussolini!
Dat dictator of Italy.

.....

carnival masquerades.

Calypsonians also led and reflected popular interest and opinion on the Italo-Ethiopian war; throughout the campaign to raise funds for the Ethiopian cause, they contributed freely of their time and talent.

Hubert Raphael (the Roaring Lion) for example, was arrested as "a ring-leader" of the anti-Italian demonstration on October 6.¹¹³ He was subsequently found guilty of disorderly behaviour and fined.¹¹⁴

Neville Marcano (the Growling Tiger), one of the great calypsonians of the nineteen thirties, forties and fifties, became nationally famous in 1935 when he sang:

The gold, the gold, the gold, the gold
The gold in Africa
Mussolini want from the Emperor. (Refrain)

Abyssinia appealed to the League for peace
Mussolini's actions were like a beast
A Villain, a thief, a highway robber
And a shameless dog for a dictator.¹¹⁵

The Growling Tiger also participated in "a drama in song" entitled "Mussolini The Bully" which was performed by a troupe of calypsonians in aid of the Ethiopian Assistance Fund organized by the Friends of Ethiopia Committee.¹¹⁶ The theme song portrays the humour, the interest and the confidence with which Afro-Trinidadians approached the Italo-Ethiopian conflict:

O what a bully is Mussolini!
Dat dictator of Italy.

.....

He did everything to violate the League
 And that is why he is so fatigue
 But Selassie said: "'Tis best to die free
 Than to live in de world without libertee."

Mussolini's only playing de fool
 We know that Ethiopia will bring him cool
 It's the very country that give them licks,
 It was the year 1896

You know they altered them and they was so
 sore!
 And look at hell, they goin' back for more
 But this time what they'll have to do
 Is to hold Mussolini and alter him too.¹¹⁷

The dramatization in song was followed by a play entitled "Abyssinia on Trial" led by Phil Madison, a well-known comedian.¹ Calypsonians also assumed pseudonyms which portrayed their Ethiopianist sentiments; for example, a listing of the most popular calypsonians who performed at a Calypso "Tent" in 1936 included Ras Kassa.¹¹⁸

A final manifestation of popular support for the Ethiopian cause was the attempt to mobilize volunteers for military service. Afro-Trinidadians were well acquainted through the local press with the attempts of the Afro-Americans and West Indians to enlist in the Ethiopian army. The Ethiopian adventures of Colonel Hubert Fauntleroy Julian "the Black Eagle" of Harlem, in particular, aroused much interest in the Trinidad press.

Born of Trinidadian parents, Julian was appointed Chief of Aviation of the Ethiopian Royal Air Force in June 1935.¹¹⁹ According to The People, Colonel Julian was greeted with "the most favourable reception" by Haile Selassie.¹²⁰ The People entreated its readers to let Julian's experience be an inspiration "to many more in whom should be aroused a

strong sense of protest"¹²¹ against Mussolini "whose policy aims at the unlawful subjugation of a free and independent nation".¹²²

Consequently, residents in Curepe, East Trinidad, formed a committee which decided to request the colonial government to recruit men for military service in Ethiopia in the event of war, on the assumption that Britain would intervene militarily on Ethiopia's behalf. The committee also pledged to co-operate with other organizations which held similar views.¹²³

One such organization was the Ex-British West India Regiment Association which had branches in Jamaica, British Guiana (Guyana), Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago. In a resolution outlining its position on the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, the Trinidad branch expressed the view that "black peoples of the world cannot calmly view an unjustified attack by Italy ... nor countenance her unreasonable demands upon the matter".¹²⁴ At the same time, they reaffirmed their loyalty to Great Britain which they still considered to be a trusted defender of Ethiopia's rights, and pledged their services in the event of the Mother Country going to war with Italy.¹²⁵

Britain, however, had no intention of declaring war on Italy, and the West Indies' colonial relationship with Britain meant that the formation of a West Indian war contingent was the responsibility of the Imperial government.¹²⁶ Afro-West Indians, therefore, sought to circumvent such politico-legal obstacles by requesting permission to offer their services directly to the Ethiopian government. Since they had fought "to save white civilization", they could not be refused permission to fight for what was the symbol of their own.¹²⁷ The determination of Afro-West Indians to join the Ethiopian struggle against Italian imperialism was so

strong that, at a meeting of black organizations in British Guiana (Guyana), T.A. Wright suggested that Britain waive their obligations of British citizenship for three years!¹²⁸

None of the political organizations in Trinidad, however, gave much support to those sentiments. Cipriani, in particular, cast cold water on the idea of West Indians fighting for Ethiopia: "Until the British Empire was at war with Italy", he advised, "we in a British colony are not at war with Italy".¹²⁹ Furthermore, in October the Ethiopian ambassador to Britain announced a ban on foreign contingents because of his government's shortage of money, arms and ammunitions as well as the legal barriers which prohibited Ethiopia from employing foreigners as combatants.¹³⁰

The failure of Afro-West Indian and Afro-American workers to fulfill their desire to fight for the Fatherland, however, further highlighted the global extent of black economic deprivation and powerlessness. This feeling was well expressed by Carl Winston of Trinidad: "If we were free", he said in July 1935, "we shall [sic] have been trekking to Ethiopia by the millions to lay down our lives to defend her or to strengthen and develop her".¹³¹

Afro-Trinidadians, nevertheless, rallied to Haile Selassie's appeal for international support against Italian aggression. The tempo of protest intensified towards the end of 1935 and early 1936, when T.A. Marryshow, President General of the Grenada Workers' Association and Vice-President of the International Friends of Ethiopia Association of London,¹³² and Susan Lawrence, a member of the British Labour Party,¹³³ visited Trinidad and underlined the international dimension of the Ethiopian struggle.

The T.L.P. welcomed Marryshow who explained the activities of the International African Friends of Abyssinia (I.A.F.A.).¹³⁴ The latter was founded in July 1935 by C.L.R. James, a leading Trinidadian intellectual and political activist at the beginning of a distinguished career, to arouse the sympathy and support of the British public for Ethiopia, and "to assist by all means in their power in the maintenance of the territorial integrity and political independence of Abyssinia".¹³⁵ Associated with James and Marryshow were, Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Dr. Peter Milliard (British Guiana), Amy Ashwood Garvey (Jamaica), Sam Manning and George Padmore (Trinidad), J.B. Danquah, G.E. Moore and S.R. Wood (Gold Coast) and T. Ras Makonnen (British Guiana).¹³⁶

Marryshow's address focused on the need for Afro-West Indians to be taught "pride of race, legitimate pride in their ancestors".¹³⁷ He also appealed to middle class blacks to emulate the sacrifice of "the working people" who "were doing very well in subscribing" to the Ethiopian relief funds: "It would help Ethiopia to know" he said, "that throughout the whole wide world the hearts of people of African descent beat in unison with her in this matter".¹³⁸ Marryshow spent a very short time in Trinidad, probably in transit to Grenada; his very presence, however, stimulated interest in the I.A.F.A. and the activities of Afro-West Indians in England who supported the Ethiopian cause.¹³⁹

Susan Lawrence's visit in January 1936 was also under the auspices of the T.L.P. At a T.L.P. rally, on January 18, she spoke in detail about the Italo-Ethiopian war and the attitude of the British Government.¹⁴⁰ She advised that "the difference between the voice of England and the voice of the Government" be noted since the British people

supported the Ethiopian government. Such support, she argued, proved that the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was not a war of black against white, but one "against the ambitions of Mussolini".¹⁴¹ Lawrence also spoke on "Labour and Socialism" - underlining T.L.P.'s ideological links with the British Labour Party - as "the foreman of the Labour Movement and whose name will be written large when the history of labour comes to be written".¹⁴²

The above comments, most likely, boosted Cipriani in his ideological conflict with the Afro-West Indian League over the Italo-Ethiopian war and, however temporarily, his popularity among workers. The visits by Marryshow and Lawrence, however, broadened the international framework within which local protest against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia took place. This was particularly so with respect to the I.A.F.A. whose members were to take great interest in the struggles of the Trinidad working-class against economic and political deprivation in 1937.¹⁴³

Between January and May 1936, however, Italy moved relentlessly towards victory in Ethiopia. When the Italian conquest of Ethiopia was finally announced on May 9, The People concluded that Mussolini's victory was due not so much to his strength, but "the ineptitude of the League".¹⁴⁴ Black people, wrote the editor, should not indulge the hope that "this great body of intriguing units will stretch a hand towards the fallen victim when they refused to interfere save by minatory threats and ineffective resolutions when Ethiopia was still undefeated and in a position to strike in her own defence".¹⁴⁵

The failure of the League to take up arms against Italy, not to mention "the apologetic way" in which sanctions had been partially imposed on Italy, pointed to a conspiracy among the European nations to defeat the ends of justice:

The action of the bigger European Powers has been suspect for some time. Previous bargains to divide up Ethiopia have become public property. The man in the street is beginning to feel that there was never any real determination to uphold the League in spirit in the present conflict.¹⁴⁶

The opinion expressed by The People and the black nationalists was that the League failed because the war was racial in nature. Consequently, the war taught them, as Ralph Mentor, brother of Hugo Mentor, expressed it, "at least one salutary lesson ... the necessity of sticking together".¹⁴⁷ The Garveyites considered the Ethiopian defeat a vindication of Garvey's black nationalist teachings. Garvey himself had attributed Ethiopia's defeat, in part, to its failure to adhere to "a positive racial nationality" and to support the U.N.I.A.'s movement for the liberation and unification of Africa.¹⁴⁸ He also criticized Haile Selassie's reliance on the League of Nations, and asked rhetorically:

Would one imagine the cats advising the rats? [he asked]. Would one imagine the lions advising the sheep? Can you imagine the English advising the Japanese, or can you imagine the German advising the French? Yet Haile Selassie, having his hand in the lion's mouth, allowed the lion to advise him.¹⁴⁹

Garvey's comments were echoed subsequently by his Trinidadian followers who accused the League of Nations of practising "a double code of justice".¹⁵⁰ "What is right in principle and action for Nordics", it argued, "is only so for the Negro where it does not clash with their designs even though destructive of Negro interest".¹⁵¹ The U.N.I.A. mockingly praised the League for "educating the Negro, as never before, to [sic] the fallacy of white justice for Negroes"¹⁵² who have "now received enough incentive from the present turn of affairs in Ethiopia to go forward and build a new order of things for himself".¹⁵³

Conclusion

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 was widely condemned in Trinidad: Black workers and the unemployed spontaneously reacted in street protest; trade union action was taken against Italian ships as part of an international movement of seamen and dockworkers; ex-servicemen declared their desire to fight for the "Fatherland"; popular expressions of black pride in African history and culture were manifested and relief funds were established by the T.L.P., the F.E.C., the A.W.I.L. and the U.N.I.A., respectively. Two main factors, however, limited the achievements of their efforts. Firstly, widespread poverty and the economic depression of the 1930s ensured that black workers, the unemployed and the petit-bourgeoisie could only contribute an inconsequential fraction of Ethiopia's financial needs; neither the upper middle class nor the ruling white elites supported the Ethiopian assistance campaigns or openly condemned the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.

Secondly, black powerlessness under modified crown colony government was compounded by the existence of racial and ideological tensions among the organizations which supported the Ethiopian cause. Indeed, the Italo-Ethiopian war intensified tensions between, for example, the black nationalist A.W.I.L. and the upper middle-class multi-racial liberals led by Cipriani and the Friends of Ethiopia Committee. There were also profound differences between these groups and the marxist NWSCA which consistently linked the Ethiopian crisis to the international working class struggle against imperialism. These differences precluded a lasting political alliance to protest the Italian invasion as well as British rule in Trinidad.

Popular anti-Italian protest, however, heightened political and social consciousness, the most dominant feature of which was the deepening of race or Ethiopian consciousness among Afro-Trinidadians. Ethiopianism contained a strong religious element which often tended to expect change through divine intervention; in this sense, says Post in reference to the Jamaican experience, Ethiopianism was "false consciousness".¹⁵⁴ However, as the Italo-Ethiopian war progressed and it became clear that Ethiopia would be conquered, Ethiopianist doctrines provided for the more politically minded, race conscious middle class, a critique of imperialism which articulated colonial subordination and metropolitan rule as a racial issue. This phenomenon was also observed in Jamaica where "it did have some material basis in the contradiction of the island's place as a colony, and hence as part of a greater imperialist structure, which made it possible to see the world as a place of suffering

for the black man, and change as a necessary precondition for ending that suffering".¹⁵⁵ A similar process of political awakening, we suggest, was evident in Trinidad. Moreover, in view of the fact that racial differentiation between black and white broadly defined socio-economic inequality, the potential of Ethiopianist, or black nationalist doctrines becoming a vehicle for radicalism and anti-colonial protest was enhanced. The extent to which this was achieved in the immediate period following the Italo-Ethiopian war will be discussed in the following chapter.

NotesChapter III

¹Royal Institute of International Affairs, Survey of International Affairs, 1935, p. 532.

²Ibid., p. 535.

³The People, July 27, 1935, p. 6.

⁴Port-of-Spain Gazette, October 8, 1935, p. 7.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., October 11, 1935, p. 7; The People, October 12, 1935, p. 12; Trinidad Guardian, October 11, 1935, p. 11.

⁷CO 318/421/71062, Governor Hollis to J.M. Thomas, M.P., January 6, 1936, Despatch No. 4.

⁸Port-of-Spain Gazette, October 11, 1935, p. 7.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., Trinidad Guardian, October 12, 1935, p. 1.

¹¹CO 318/421/71062, Governor Hollis to J.M. Thomas, M.P., January 6, 1936, Despatch No. 4.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Port-of-Spain Gazette, October 8, 1935, p. 7.

¹⁴Trinidad Guardian, October 12, 1935, p. 8.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶The People, October 19, 1935, p. 5.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., October 26, 1935, p. 11.

²¹Port-of-Spain Gazette, October 30, 1935, p. 7.

²²Ibid.

²³Richard Hart, "Aspects of Early Caribbean Workers' Struggles", Collected Seminar Papers No. 29, Caribbean Societies Vol. 1 (London: University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1982), p. 81. The Stevedores and Longshore Workers Branch functioned as an autonomous unit and was a stronghold of the N.W.S.C.A. see Arthur Lewis, Labour in the West Indies: The Birth of a Workers Movement (1939; Port-of-Spain: New Beacon Books, 1977), pp. 31-32.

²⁴Trinidad Guardian, November 13, 1935, p. 1.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., November 15, 1935, p. 1.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Biographical data on Rienzi is found in Sahadeo Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform in Trinidad 1919-1939 (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1983), pp. 133-134.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹The People, August 19, 1933, p. 5.

³²Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 134. Cipriani accused Rienzi of being a communist, a charge which seems well-founded.

³³Port-of-Spain Gazette, October 30, 1935, p. 7.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 134.

³⁹W. Richard Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest: The Strikes and Disturbances of 1937." Paper read at Conference of West Indian Historians held at St. Augustine Campus of U.W.I., April 1973, p. 16.

⁴⁰Ibid., much more will be said about Butler in Chapter 4.

⁴¹Selwyn Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 40.

⁴²Ibid., p. 41.

⁴³Trinidad Guardian, October 12, 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Port-of-Spain Gazette, April 10, 1936, p. 7.

⁴⁶Ibid., October 17, 1935, p. 6.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., October 22, 1935, p. 6. Trinidad Guardian, October 20, 1935, p. 2.

⁵⁰Trinidad Guardian, October 19, 1935, p. 3.

⁵¹Port-of-Spain Gazette, October 23, 1935, p. 6.

⁵²Trinidad Guardian, October 26, 1935, p. 2.

⁵³Port-of-Spain Gazette, December 13, 1935, p. 2.

⁵⁴The People, July 27, 1935, p. 6.

⁵⁵Port-of-Spain Gazette, November 27, 1935, p. 7.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹The People, December 7, 1935, p. 8.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., December 12, 1935, p. 2.

⁶⁶Ibid., August 22, 1936, p. 2.

⁶⁷Ibid., March 7, 1936, p. 11.

⁶⁸Port-of-Spain Gazette, November 27, 1935, p. 6.

⁶⁹The following is a representative sample of the contributions to the Ethiopian Ambulance Fund: Workers of Guayvayare oilfields - \$9.55; Workers of the Public Works Department, San Fernando - \$2.88; G. Joseph - 24 cents; R. Collin - 24 cents; Tabaqvite section of the T.L.P. - \$5.00; Government Printing Office Staff - \$8.95; Quarry section of the T.L.P. - \$5.00; Oliviera George - \$20.69. Trinidad Guardian, October 26, 1935, p. 1; idem, October 27, 1935, p. 1.

⁷⁰Port-of-Spain Gazette, November 27, 1935, p. 6.

⁷¹Trinidad Guardian, October 13, 1935, p. 1.

⁷²Ibid., October 12, 1935, p. 3.

⁷³Ibid., September 9, 1935, p. 5.

⁷⁴Lloyd Braithwaite, Social Stratification in Trinidad (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1974), pp. 59-60.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Bridget Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962 (Port-of-Spain: Heinemann, 1981), p. 120.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 118.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Port-of-Spain Gazette, September 3, 1935, p. 10.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴S.K.B. Asante, Pan-African Protest; West Africa and The Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1934-1941. (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1974), pp. 71-93.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 90-91.

⁸⁶The People, October 19, 1935, p. 6.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., January 4, 1936, p. 4.

⁹⁰Port-of-Spain Gazette, November 17, 1935, p. 11.

⁹¹The People, November 23, 1935, p. 7.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Lloyd Braithwaite, Social Stratification in Trinidad. (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1974).

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Trinidad Guardian, November 6, 1935, p. 8.

"In Trinidad, the shouters or Spiritual Baptists ... are mainly of African descent, who belong to demonstrative, fundamentalist cult groups. The Shouters are more akin to the Negro Charismatic sects in the United States than to the general run of fundamentalists. Both in Shouters churches and in the American Negro charismatic sects, greater emphasis is placed on shouting, handclapping, trances, dancing and "rejoicing" than on formal worship The shouters represent a point of transition between African religion ... and undiluted European forms of worship", George E. Simpson, Religious Cults of the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti. Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1980, pp. 140-141.

⁹⁶Trinidad Guardian, November 6, 1935, p. 8.

⁹⁷Ibid., December 6, 1935, p. 12.

"The Shango Cult in Trinidad combines elements of Yoruba traditional religion, Catholicism and the Baptist faith. In its theology and rituals, it bears considerable resemblance to the Afro-Christian cults in the Catholic countries of Haiti (Vodun), Cuba (Santeria) and Brazil (Tango). All of these syncretistic cults retain the names of prominent African divinities, include animal sacrifices, feature drumming, dancing, and spirit possession, and utilize thunder stones and swords as ritual objects. Each of these groups believes in a total magico-religious complex which includes cosmological, theological, ceremonial, magical and medical aspects". Simpson, Religious Cults of the Caribbean, p. 11.

⁹⁸Port-of-Spain Gazette, November 29, 1935, p. 3.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ken Post, Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath (The Hague: Martin Nijhoff, 1978), p. 194.

¹⁰²The Trinidad Carnival is a synthesis of African and French cultural traditions. The African origins lie primarily in traditional dance, song and musical instruments, particularly of Yoruba origins. In the post-emancipation period, these African cultural forms fused with the French carnival, a pagan survival of pre-Christian Europe, a celebration defined as "a festive purging of vices" to introduce the holy season of Lent. In the 1930s Carnival bands were dominated by black workers, unemployed and some petit-bourgeois elements.

¹⁰³Port-of-Spain Gazette, January 30, 1936, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴The People, February 1, 1936, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Infra., Ch. II, p. 82.

¹⁰⁹The People, February 1, 1936, p. 6.

¹¹⁰Port-of-Spain Gazette, February 18, 1936, p. 8.

¹¹¹Ibid., February 26, 1936, p. 13.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., November 20, 1935, p. 6.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Raymond Quevedo, Atilla's Kaiso: A Short History of Trinidad Calypso (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1983), p. 108.

¹¹⁶Port-of-Spain Gazette, November 24, 1935, p. 4.

¹¹⁷Arthur Calder-Marshall, Glory Dead (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1939), p. 168.

¹¹⁸Port-of-Spain Gazette, February 13, 1936, p. 11. Ras Kassa was a military commander during the Italo-Ethiopian war. See Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History (New York, London and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 207.

¹¹⁹Born in Trinidad in 1897, Julian migrated to Canada about 1912 where he enlisted in the Canadian Air Corps during World War I. After the war he moved to New York and like many black ex-servicemen, joined the Garvey Movement. In 1930 Julian went to Ethiopia; he was invited by Haile Selassie to act as his personal pilot and to organize the Royal Ethiopian Air Force. It was not long before "the Black Eagle" vindicated the trust placed in him; he was given the rank of colonel and decorated with the Order of Menelik. It is not known when Julian returned to New York after his first sojourn in the Ethiopian army. He was granted Ethiopian citizenship, and appointed Military Governor of the province of Ambo. He returned to New York in December 1935. Robert G. Weisbord, Ebony Kinship (London: Greenwood Press Inc., 1973), pp. 94-96. Roi Ottley, New World A-Coming. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), pp. 107-109.

¹²⁰The People, July 20, 1935, p. 11.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., August 24, 1935, p. 9.

¹²⁴Trinidad Guardian, September 8, 1935, p. 10.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶The Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870 forbade British subjects to join armies of countries which maintained friendly relations with Britain. Asante, West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian War, p. 140.

¹²⁷Trinidad Guardian, October 6, 1935, p. 9.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Port-of-Spain Gazette, November 27, 1935, p. 6.

¹³⁰Trinidad Guardian, October 22, 1935, p. 10.

- ¹³¹The People, July 27, 1935, p. 5.
- ¹³²Port-of-Spain Gazette, December 11, 1935, p. 9.
- ¹³³Trinidad Guardian, January 18, 1936, p. 3.
- ¹³⁴George Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism (London: Dennis Dobson, 1956), p. 149.
- ¹³⁵Ibid.
- ¹³⁶Ibid.
- ¹³⁷Port-of-Spain Gazette, December 11, 1935, p. 9.
- ¹³⁸Ibid.
- ¹³⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁰Trinidad Guardian, January 18, 1936, p. 3.
- ¹⁴¹Ibid.
- ¹⁴²Ibid.
- ¹⁴³The People.
- ¹⁴⁴Ibid., June 20, 1936, p. 6.
- ¹⁴⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁷Ibid., November 30, 1935, p. 12.
- ¹⁴⁸John Henrik Clarke, ed. Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 359.
- ¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 365.
- ¹⁵⁰The People, June 6, 1935, p. 5.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Ibid., August 22, 1936, p. 11.

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴Ken Post, "The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica 1930-1938". C.H. Allen and R.W. Johnson (eds.), African Perspectives (London, 1970), p. 187.

¹⁵⁵Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 194.

CHAPTER IV

The Italo-Ethiopian War: The Legacy

Popular protest against the invasion of Ethiopia was paralleled and often merged with the ongoing struggles of the workers and unemployed against low wages and unemployment in Port-of-Spain. These struggles were associated with the T.L.P. and the N.W.S.C.A. The war provided the impetus for new organizations based in Port-of-Spain, and the Afro-West Indian League (A.W.I.L.), the Friends of Ethiopia Committee (F.G.C.) and the Trinidad Citizens Committee (T.C.C.) emerged. With the exception of the T.C.C., essentially an education group, these organizations did not address the immediate socio-economic grievances of the black working class; following Ethiopia's defeat in 1936, these issues focused national attention. The N.W.S.C.A. intensified its organizing and political activities in Port-of-Spain while Tubal Uriah Butler, an ex-T.L.P. and T.C.C. member, formed a new labour organization in the southern oilbelt where, in June 1937, strikes and mass violence signalled the start of a nationwide labour upheaval. This chapter examines the organizational and ideological struggles of the black working class in the aftermath of the Italo-Ethiopian war, and investigates the extent to which Ethiopianist consciousness - an interest in events in Ethiopia based on a racial identification with Ethiopians - became a vehicle for heightening working-class consciousness.

The impetus for militant industrial working-class action shifted in the mid-1930's from the north to the south as a result of the development of a modern oil industry centered in Fyzabad and Point Fortin.¹ The Depression had brought the workers to new levels of economic deprivation. Between 1935 and May 1937 the cost of living in the southern oilbelt increased by 17 percent;² wages, in contrast, reduced by 30 percent during the 1929-30 economic slump,³ had never recovered and in 1937 the wage differential between skilled and unskilled labour was estimated to be 150 percent compared to 33 percent among equivalent British workers.⁴

The oil industry, however, prospered; the combined profits of four companies (Apex, Leaseholds, United British and Petroleum Development) amounted to \$7,392,000 (£1,540,000) in 1936-37,⁵ almost four times the total wages (\$2,270,400 or £473,000) paid by the industry. Government revenue from the industry also increased from \$508,917 to \$726,552 in the same period.⁶ In 1936 the Apex Trinidad Oilfield and the Trinidad Leasehold Limited (which owned the largest refinery in the island) paid dividends of 35 percent and 25 percent respectively.⁷

Tension between employees and employers were exacerbated by discriminatory employment procedures. Black workers objected to the companies' policy of filling middle and top managerial and technical positions with local and foreign whites to the exclusion of qualified blacks.⁸ Moreover, workers were offended by the presence of white south Africans who, they claimed, displayed strong racial animosity towards blacks.⁹ Another grievance was the "Red Book, Blue Book" system which was closely associated with the white South African managers:

Anything a worker did that was considered adverse by management was categorized into degrees of seriousness. A very 'grave' act was entered into the Red Book, anything less according to category was entered into the 'Blue Book'. After a certain number of entries in the Red Book, a worker was fired, while Blue Book entries brought warning notices and eventual dismissal.¹⁰

Although the companies claimed that the procedure was to ensure a standard of pay for each worker" in accordance with his merits",¹¹ any worker who was dismissed from one company could not get another job in the oilbelt since the Red Book references were used against him.

These grievances, coupled with the high visibility of whites living in superior houses, driving cars and generally living well in close proximity to pauperized blacks, served to heighten the race-class antagonism in the oilbelt. There was no institutional machinery through which black workers could articulate their grievances and informal contacts between white managers and black employees scarcely existed.¹² The potential for organized industrial action among workers in a highly concentrated, capital intensive industry, which required a relatively high level of literacy, self-initiative and discipline, was enhanced as the contradiction between black labour and white capital grew. It was Butler who provided the leadership qualities needed to transform this potential into industrial and political struggle.

Butler's political background combined many diverse areas of experience. A Grenadian by origin, with an elementary school education, he emerged from obscurity as an ex-serviceman activist who, in 1919, formed the Grenada Representative Government Movement and the Grenada Union of

Returned Soldiers.¹³ Subsequently, as a Grenadian immigrant worker in Trinidad's rapidly-expanding oil industry, he established the Butlerite Moravian Baptist Church and made it a popular base from which he built a following as a political and trade union leader.¹⁴

He joined the La Brea branch of Cipriani's Trinidad Workingmen Association (T.W.A./T.L.P.) in 1929 and by 1935 had established himself as a militant leader of the oilworkers and the landless agro-proletariat.¹⁵ His strong personality and independent spirit, however, conflicted with the authoritarian leadership of Cipriani, who accused him of being a communist.¹⁶ Butler broke with the T.L.P. in March 1935 when Cipriani condemned the oilworkers strike and hunger march he organized at the Apex oilfield (cf. Chap. 1, p. 41).

As the Italo-Ethiopian crisis developed in 1935, Butler had to weigh the political options open to him. He attracted the attention of the N.W.S.C.A., for example, and attended their meetings in Port-of-Spain.¹⁷ This exposed Butler to communist and marxist literature, and in particular, the debate on the need for revolutionary trade unions to fight against the economic exploitation of workers. At the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war in October 1935, like other ex-T.L.P. members, he formed the Trinidad Citizens' Committee in San Fernando led by Adrian Cola Rienzi.¹⁸ The Committee protested the invasion of Ethiopia as Fascist and Imperialist and condemned the governor, Sir Claud Hollis, for imposing authoritarian restrictions on public assemblies.¹⁹ When the war ended Butler left the Trinidad Citizens' Committee and in July 1936 he founded the British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party (B.E.W. & C.H.R.P.) based in Fyzabad, the southern oilbelt town where he lived.²⁰

Butler's decision to form the B.E.W. & C.H.R.P. was hastened, perhaps, by working-class response to the Wages Advisory Board's Report (1936), popularly associated with Cipriani.²¹ The Board, of which Cipriani was a member, was appointed in 1935 to draw up a cost of living index following the introduction of a Minimum Wage Ordinance.²² The report, by using questionable indices for assessment, "gave the impression that few workers were being paid substandard wages".²³ A minimum wage was not recommended, and the erstwhile friend of the bare-footed man, Cipriani, supported the Board's findings. Workers were enraged; as Ryan noted "The failure of the minimum wage movement marked the end of an era wherein workers were prepared to accept arguments in favour of political moderation."²⁴ It was at this critical juncture that Butler formed the B.E.W. & C.H.R.P., which defined the following programme:

- To get proper trade union laws passed;
- To get Health Insurance laws passed;
- To establish the right of blacks to reach the highest position of thought and labour in the colony;
- To achieve security of tenure for all workers;
- To secure the passage of more liberal divorce laws;
- To provide facilities for the unemployed;
- To support social legislation for workers;²⁵

These objectives underlined the socio-economic, industrial, and racial issues which were of immediate concern to all workers and unemployed. There were no records of the B.E.W. & C.H.R.P.'s membership; Butler claimed, however, that "the vast majority of Fyzabad were unpaid members of the party. All over South Trinidad there are unpaid members of the party."²⁶ Most of Butler's supporters were either full or part

time oilworkers, or had relatives who worked on the oilfields; agricultural and Public Works labourers and the unemployed also supported the party.²⁷ The B.G.W. & C.H.R.P. was, therefore, a black working-class organization both in terms of its leadership and its supporters. The organization's name also reflected Butler's identification with the struggles of all black oppressed workers and citizens throughout the British colonial empire.²⁸ His ultimate goal was self-government (Home Rule) not only for Trinidad but for all colonies within the British Empire.

The B.G.W. & C.H.R.P. was affiliated with the N.W.S.C.A.,²⁹ an alliance, in some ways, of incompatibles. The Marxist N.W.S.C.A. was committed to careful organization and collective leadership; Butler, on the other hand, was a charismatic individualist whose religious beliefs must have been seen as backward and contradictory to his socialist friends. The alliance was cemented, however, both by their joint commitment to working-class struggle and by the anti-imperialist perspectives opened up by the experience of the Italo-Ethiopian war.

The release of the Wages Advisory Board's report in 1936 prompted the N.W.S.C.A. to petition the colonial authorities to assist the workers and the unemployed.³⁰ Butler also wrote to the governor in July 1936, calling for reduced food prices, increased wages and proper trade union laws (the right to strike and immunity from action in tort).³¹ He condemned racial discrimination against blacks, and the system of government wherein, contrary to the British constitution, "Justice and Fairplay are not enjoyed as by Right by Coloured Workers and Citizens".³² After repeated requests for discussions between the leaders representing

workers and the government, a joint delegation of the N.W.S.C.A. and Butler, as leader of the B.E.W. & C.H.R.P., met the governor on November 9, 1936.³³ No tangible results emerged; the governor promised only to visit the oilfields to hear first hand the workers' complaints and, at the same time, pronounced that "there was really no discrimination against coloured workers in [this] country".³⁴ No visit took place and the governor never met with either organization subsequently. Nevertheless, this joint action between the N.W.S.C.A. and Butler strengthened their organizational alliance, enhanced their legitimacy in the eyes of the workers, and contributed to the development of a national working class vanguard to rival Cipriani and the T.L.P. as leaders of the working people.

Equally important to the development of this alliance between the B.E.W. & C.H.R.P. and the N.W.S.C.A., was the internationalist and anti-imperialist perspective stand was first evidenced by a joint protest against the proposal to return mandated colonies to Germany.³⁵ The protest was prompted by the I.T.U.C.-N.W. which urged radical black organizations worldwide to register their opposition in resolutions to be sent to the League of Nations and to the French and British foreign ministers.³⁶ The N.W.S.C.A. in response, held a meeting on March 6 at San Juan with representatives from the B.E.W. & C.H.R.P., the Amalgamated Wood Workers Union³⁷ and the Public Works Workers' Union. The ex-German colonies were discussed and each organization sent a separate resolution to the League of Nations. In its letter of protest the N.W.S.C.A. said:

The people of Trinidad and the West Indies have not forgotten the extermination of the Herero in South West Africa; the bloody massacres of tens of thousands

of East African natives under German rule. We have not forgotten the sterilization of Negroes in Germany, and the attitudes of the Hitler fascist gangs, who proclaim openly contempt for Negroes whom they consider an inferior savage race. The Negro people of the African colonies who are struggling against the present exploiters must be given the right to determine their own form of Government and rule and to develop their country. We demand that no colonies be transferred to Hitler. That fascism be kept out of Africa. That Africa be Free.³⁸

The B.E.W. & C.H.R.P. held a parallel meeting the next day at its Fyzabad headquarters; Butler's speech focused on the League of Nations, the rise of international Fascism and Nazism, and what was "to be done by the working class to meet the challenge of war".³⁹ Addressing himself to the request of the I.T.U.C.-N.W., Butler cited the Italo-Ethiopian war, which, he said, had convinced every "Home Ruler" of the futility of appealing to the League of Nations for anything that goes counter to the best interests of Fascism and its kindred "isms":

We Home Rulers have no faith whatever in a Body representative of all the nations of [the] earth who have shamelessly and unwittingly broken faith with our blood-brothers in far-off Africa.⁴⁰

For this reason they could not rely on the League to prevent another imperialist war over the scramble for African colonies. War was inevitable and thus it was the duty of all class conscious workers to prepare for that eventuality:

We have sworn to keep out of an Imperialist Robber War, but we take pride and pleasure in preparing in our own way the Workers of Trinidad and Empire to line up with the class conscious workers of the world to meet the threat, the challenge of Fascism and war as the real enemies of true democracy and humanity.... We call on all haters of evil Fascists [sic] and true lovers of Freedom and democracy everywhere to prepare to meet the inevitable.⁴¹

A resolution "couched in identical terms with that of the N.W.S.C.A." was passed at the end of Butler's speech.

Butler's address to the workers, couched partly in Lenin's terms,⁴² reflects an intense interest in African affairs, and a perception of international events which places the Italo-Ethiopian conflict within the context of the international anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist struggle of the working-class. This suggests the common ground for political action the B.E.W. & C.H.R.P. and the N.W.S.C.A. shared on the Italo-Ethiopian question, and a further strengthening of the bonds between the southern- and northern-based working-class organizations.

Butler did not hesitate to use this international perspective to characterize internal class and race conflict. A pamphlet he wrote in early 1937 to solicit support for his organization provides a vivid example of this process. Butler identified Afro-Trinidadians as British Ethiopians whose dispossession and exploitation paralleled that of the Ethiopians under Italian rule, and stressed the need for workers and all oppressed subjects to organize to defend their rights:

The life and liberties of Anti-Fascists all over the world are threatened with extermination by powerful forces and interests. British Ethiopians and all coloured folks in Trinidad are set aside for slow

but sure extermination. The call of the hour to us coloured folks is therefore to Unite, to present a United Workers and Citizens Front in the fight forced upon us by ... fascism.⁴³

By linking the black workers' struggle in Trinidad to the international struggle against fascism (which he associated with the oppression of black people), Butler popularized the N.W.S.C.A.'s class analysis and indicated that the terms fascism and imperialism were not unfamiliar to the working-class constituency he aimed to lead.

Social unrest in the oilbelt intensified in May 1937 when villagers of Sobo and Vessigny were evicted from lands owned by the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company and the Antilles Oil Company. These villagers were, or had been employees of the companies involved and had paid taxes, some for a period extending over fifteen years, while the properties remained Crown lands;⁴⁴ many of the workers depended on the cultivation of the land to augment their meagre wages. However, they were not paid compensation for their houses and crops which were destroyed.⁴⁵ Butler immediately championed the villagers' cause and once again, raised the spectre of fascist and racist extermination of blacks by reference to the Italo-Ethiopian war.

At a mass meeting at Fyzabad on May 9, Butler accused "the Fascist Imperialist band"⁴⁶ - i.e. the oil companies - of "sinking us into slavery".⁴⁷ The situation at Sobo and Vessigny, he told the meeting, evoked images of the Ethiopian countryside destroyed by Italian armies:

For these eyes hath seen a picture that will make you imagine for the moment that you are in some part of Fascist-destroyed Ethiopia with houses and vegetation laid low ... yes these eyes have seen houses razed to the ground ... and I have seen even refugees⁴⁸

Butler, as he often did, combined his religious and political views in a manner that appealed to his constituents.

He went further and emphasized that the oil companies had government support; he declared there was "a Fascist conspiracy" to deprive the people of their rights. Fascism, he said, "is everywhere in the world ... Public Enemy No. 1" and "we in this country who are conscious ... [must] stand and guard ourselves against the evils of Fascist Imperialists ... we must build a united front".⁴⁹ Butler defined fascism as "a system of government, or a set of principles directly opposed to the best interests of the working-class"; Imperialism he defined as "the building of Empires on [the] exploitation of native workers".⁵⁰ The question of class interests was, therefore, always central to Butler's definition of economic and political conflict at both the national and international level. Butler interpreted the Italo-Ethiopian war within this framework and made the terms Fascism and Imperialism permanent components of his political vocabulary.

Butler's analysis found a ready response among workers who had taken part in anti-Italian agitation and who continued to follow with interest reports in The People about Ethiopia in defeat (cf., Chap. 3, p. 125). In February 1937, The People discussed the Italian occupation of Ethiopia and concluded that the "inhuman attitude which the European Powers have assumed towards Ethiopia has taught us black men that there is a

difference in justice for white folk and another kind for black."⁵¹ "The Ethiopian Bugle", a columnist with The People, advised, on June 12, that blacks should boycott white, Syrian, Portuguese and Chinese merchants and support black businesses.⁵² It was under these conditions of racial tension and black economic deprivation that Butler's language resonated among his followers and helped heighten black working class militancy.

The colonial authorities clearly recognized the threat Butler's activities posed to the highly sensitive oil industry. The governor, as early as February 27, 1937, confided to the Inspector-General of Constabulary that "the man [Butler] was dangerous and should be carefully watched with a view to immediate action if sufficient cause was given".⁵³ The opportunity to act was provided by Butler's attempts to prevent evictions at Sobo and Vessigny; on May 25, 1937 he was summoned on a charge of obstruction.⁵⁴ Butler ignored the summons and a warrant for his arrest was issued on June 14; the same day he was arrested but was released on bail.⁵⁵

Butler, undaunted by legal threats, stepped up his agitation, holding many public meetings and organized in conjunction, Barrat recalls, with the N.W.S.C.A. a general strike planned for June 22.⁵⁶ The B.E.W. & C.H.R.P. was to coordinate activities in the south, the N.W.S.C.A. in the north. On June 19, however, Butler sanctioned a strike of oil workers at the Forest Reserve Field of Trinidad Leasehold Limited after repeated requests for negotiations on wage increases were ignored.⁵⁷

The governor immediately issued a warrant for his arrest on "charges of inciting violence" and ordered police reinforcements into the southern area.⁵⁸ When the police boldly attempted to arrest Butler as he

addressed the strikers, the crowd resisted and two police officers were killed.⁵⁹ Butler escaped into hiding and did not surface until September 1937 in order to give evidence before the Forster Commission appointed by the Colonial Office to probe the causes of the unrest.⁶⁰ The general strike and riots, meanwhile, engulfed the entire oilbelt by 21 June and thereafter, industrial unrest spread to Port-of-Spain and the rest of the island.

The N.W.S.C.A. immediately responded to the events in the south, and on June 22, mobilized Port-of-Spain workers and unemployed in street demonstrations to force the closure of all businesses and bring non-strikers out in solidarity with the workers' cause.⁶¹ A march, which began with 200 protestors, many with placards which bore the messages: "Strike", and "We Want Bread - Not Bullets and Bayonets", quickly grew to some 600;⁶² stores were forced to close as workers vacated their positions; railway and waterfront workers also heeded the cries of Barrat and Bertie Percival (assistant political organizer of the N.W.S.C.A.) to "Close Down! Close Down".⁶³

The actions of the N.W.S.C.A. provoked police retaliation and shots were fired at the crowd, though it is not clear whether casualties resulted. Later that day, Barrat, Percival, Elma Francois (Educational Director) and Tom Ashby were arrested for inciting violent behaviour,⁶⁴ but by then the demonstrators had succeeded in stopping all activity in the commercial sector, the Public Works Department and the Trinidad Government Railways in Port-of-Spain. By June 23, domestic servants, sugar, cocoa and coconut labourers throughout the island had gone on strike.⁶⁵

Significantly, the T.L.P. whose support was traditionally strongest in the northern urban centers, did not support the strikes. Cipriani, who was returning to Trinidad from King George VI's coronation when the strikes erupted, condemned the strikers immediately on his return on June 25, and reiterated the T.L.P.'s policy of "constitutional agitation ... opposed to anything savouring of violence and red riot."⁶⁶ He further advised workers to take only "legitimate and constitutional action".⁶⁷ Cipriani supported the government's suppression of the riots and chided workers for making unreasonable wage demands.

The June disturbances were only brought under control by the extensive use of police and soldiers, including imperial troops from two warships, H.M.S. Ajax and H.M.S. Exeter. In all a total of 2,410 officers and men including 210 troops from the warships, were involved.⁶⁸ The majority of the Constabulary's officer corps were expatriate whites, while the constables were mostly black and local.⁶⁹ Sixteen persons were killed - two members of the Constabulary and fourteen civilians - and a total of fifty-nine wounded by gun shots; more than five hundred and seventy persons were arrested.⁷⁰

This pattern of black working class protest and colonial repression became a West Indian-wide phenomenon in the following twelve months; comparable disturbances occurred in Barbados, British Guiana, St. Kitts, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Jamaica. By the end of 1938, 46 persons had been killed, 429 injured and thousands arrested and prosecuted throughout the British West Indies.⁷¹

The events of June 1937 in Trinidad represented an intensification of black working class consciousness and dramatized the plight of the labouring population. While the immediate causes of the strikes were low wages and poor working conditions on the oilfields, the structure of labour-capital relations on the oilfields were not uncharacteristic of other main occupation sectors of the economy.⁷² Moreover, the industrial relations sub-system influenced every major aspect of society "if only because the operation and functioning of the Trinidad colonial society was heavily dependent on the maintenance of a ruling managerial/capitalist class".⁷³ It was the determination of this class to maintain itself at the expense of the workers that led to the emergence of industrial struggle and heightened working-class consciousness.

Racial inequality was an equally significant factor in transforming the June 1937 disturbances into a national crisis. The high visibility of rich white managers and top employees amidst poor black workers reflected the social system of racial stratification and prompted black discontent which was openly expressed during the turbulent June days. On July 7 the new governor, Sir Murchison Fletcher, wrote to the Secretary of State for the colonies that while "the immediate origin" of the labour unrest was "economic pressure",⁷⁴ "racial antipathy", he admitted, "is definitely an outstanding factor ..."⁷⁵ He attributed this to the Italo-Ethiopian war which "had aroused an intense anti-white feeling among the negro population".⁷⁶ Furthermore, he singled out both Butler and The People as the main protagonists of black "resentment" against whites.⁷⁷ It was also the opinion of the Commander of the warship H.M.S. Exeter that by Monday 21st June the disturbances "had begun to develop along

racial lines and to become really menacing on that account".⁷⁸ These comments, by members of the white ruling class, suggest that fear for the safety of whites partly determined the massive coercive force used in suppressing the mass violence and riots which accompanied the strikes.

Racial and economic inequalities which were inherent to the colonial order and had intensified since the depression, laid the foundations for working-class protest; yet individuals and organizations played important roles in determining the course of events. Butler's populist-cum-race conscious-cum-working class rhetoric and the leadership he provided focused black working-class grievances and prompted the strikes and mass violence of 1937. The B.E.W. & C.H.R.P., however, lacked the organizational form or capacity to organize an island strike. The fact that this was achieved while Butler was in hiding, has to be attributed to the spontaneous actions of the workers and the mobilizing ability of the N.W.S.C.A.

Cipriani's and the T.L.P.'s response to the strikes and disturbances "indicate that they had lost touch with the aspirations of the workers".⁷⁹ As one of his contemporaries, Albert Gomes, put it, by 1937 Cipriani had

already alienated himself from the new elements of protest who were clamouring for immediate and drastic reforms.⁸⁰

Another factor which may have contributed to Cipriani's decline was his close racial identity with the ruling class. He had contributed to the building of a working class consciousness; however, given his

shortcoming as a labour leader, and the rise of black consciousness during the Italo-Ethiopian war, Cipriani's prestige among blacks declined. The events of 1937 clearly established Butler, a black man of working-class origin, as the leader of "the barefooted man".⁸¹

The June strikes and riots represented a watershed in Trinidad's labour history in that they gave birth to a genuine trade union movement and forced employers to recognize the right of workers to institutionalized bargaining procedures.⁸² This development, significantly, was supported by the Forster Commission which recommended the creation of a labour department to promote the conciliation of disputes between management and labour, and the appointment of an Industrial Court.⁸³ Immediately after the strikes, workers recognized the need for labour organizations to represent their interests with employers and the government; between August and November 1937, five trade unions registered under the 1932 Trade Union Ordinance despite the fact that it did not safeguard the right of peaceful picketing, or give unions immunity against action in tort.⁸⁴ In South Trinidad, where Butler's escape into hiding had created a temporary leadership vacuum, Adrian Cola Rienzi, the East Indian lawyer, with whom Butler was associated in the Trinidad Citizens Committee (T.C.C.) (cf. Chap. 3, p. 104), organized the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (O.W.T.U.) and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Union (A.T.S.E.F.W.U.) in July and September respectively.⁸⁵ Rienzi also assisted in the forming of the Federated Workers Trade Union (F.W.T.U.) in Port-of-Spain.⁸⁶ The N.W.S.C.A., meanwhile, founded two other unions: the Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union (S.W.W.T.U.) and the Public Works Workers Trade Union (P.W.W.T.U.).⁸⁷ These organizations encountered

some opposition from employers and the local government. The former initially refused to recognize the unions - the O.W.T.U., for example, was not recognized by the oil companies until April 1938 - and the trade union act remained unchanged until 1943.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the changes resultant upon the June strikes and mass violence were irreversible and laid the foundation for significant labour gains and political change in the following decade.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The labour unrest of June 1937 derived from economic and racial contradictions of Trinidad's colonial society. Trinidad's response to the Italo-Ethiopian war, reflected by The People and the black nationalist organizations, however, served to heighten race consciousness and sharpened black sensitivity to white racial domination at home and abroad. Under the impact of the economic crisis of the 1930's, the question of race assumed a greater importance in the eyes of blacks whose standards of living rapidly deteriorated amidst prosperity for the white ruling class. It is within these circumstances that Butler articulated the Ethiopian experience to heighten the awareness among oil workers of economic and social injustices. Butler stressed the similarity between the Italian fascist aggression in Ethiopia, and the exploitation of Trinidad's economic resources, not in the interest of the workers but of foreign and local capitalists. In this sense Butler transformed Ethiopianism into a vehicle for black working-class radicalism which, for a brief but significant moment, threatened British colonial rule in Trinidad.

Notes

Chapter IV

¹Bridget Brereton, A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962 (Port-of-Spain: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 199-205.

²W. Arthur Lewis, Labour in the West Indies: The Birth of a Workers' Movement (1938; London: New Beacon Books, 1977), p. 28.

³W. Richard Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest in Trinidad - The Strikes and Disturbances of 1937". Paper read at Conference of West Indian Historians at St. Augustine Campus of U.W.I., April 1973.

⁴Hansard, July 9, 1937, p. 257.

⁵Lewis, Labour in the West Indies, p. 28.

⁶Ibid.

⁷ibid.

⁸Sahadeo Basdeo, Labour Organisation and Labour Reform in Trinidad 1919-1939. (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1983), pp. 147-148.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Bukka Rennie, History of the Working-Class in the 20th Century - Trinidad and Tobago. (Toronto: New Beginning Movement, 1974), p. 80.

¹¹Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 147.

¹²Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest," pp. 4-5, 11-12.

¹³Nyahuma Obika, An Introduction to the Life and Times of Tubal Uriah Butler. (Point Fortin, Trinidad: Caribbean Historical Society, 1983), pp. 1-7.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 12-14; W. Richard Jacobs, "Butler: A Life of Struggle". In the Spirit of Butler: Trade Unionism in Free Grenada. (St. George's, Grenada: Fedon Publishers, 1982), pp. 32-34.

¹⁵Obika, Life and Times of Tubal Uriah Butler, p. 14; Jacobs, "Butler: A Life of Struggle", p. 35.

¹⁶Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 161.

¹⁷Rennie, A History of the Working Class, pp. 170-171. Interview with Jim Barrat, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, March 21, 1985.

¹⁸Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 133.

¹⁹Cf., chapter 3, p. 104.

²⁰Obika, Life and Times of Tubal Uriah Butler, p. 28. Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 146.

²¹Selwyn Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 40.

²²Ibid. The Minimum Wage Ordinance was only "an enabling ordinance which permitted the government to act if it determined that an enterprise was paying substandard wages", idem.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Jacobs, "Politics of Protest", p. 14.

²⁶Trinidad Guardian, December 10, 1937.

²⁷Jacobs, "Politics of Protest", p. 15.

²⁸The concept of "Home Rule" was first popularized by Lokmanya Bal Tilak, who established the Indian Home Rule League in 1916; the League laid the foundation for the movement for Indian independence.

²⁹W. Richard Jacobs, Butler Versus the King. (Port-of-Spain: Key Caribbean Publications, 1976), p. 58.

³⁰Rennie, History of the Working Class, p. 73.

³¹CO 295/608/70387. Butler to the Acting Governor, July 27, 1936.

³²Ibid.

³³The People, January 2, 1937, p. 4.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷The Amalgamated Wood Workers Union was the first union to register under the 1932 Trade Union Ordinance. It was organized by the N.W.S.C.A., Port-of-Spain Gazette, August 21, 1937.

³⁸The People, March 6, 1937, p. 9.

³⁹Ibid., March 13, 1937, p. 12.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²V.I. Lenin, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978).

⁴³Jacobs, ed., Butler Versus The King, p. 237.

⁴⁴Jacobs, Butler Versus The King, pp. 63-69.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid, p. 68.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 82.

⁵¹The People, February 13, 1937, p. 4.

⁵²Ibid., June 12, 1937, p. 9.

⁵³CO 295/599/70297/ Governor Fletcher of Trinidad to Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 26, 1937.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Interview with Jim Barrat, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, March 21, 1985.

⁵⁷Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 150.

⁵⁸CO 295/599/70297, Governor Fletcher to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Ormsby-Gore, June 26, 1937.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰The Royal Commission appointed to investigate the Trinidad disturbances of 1937 is usually referred to as the Forster Commission, so named after its chairman, Mr. John Forster.

⁶¹Trinidad Guardian, July 13, 1937, p. 2.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest", pp. 19-29.

⁶⁶Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 60.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ron Ramdin, From Chattel Slave to Wage Earner. (London: Martin & O'Keeffes, 1982), p. 106.

⁶⁹Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest," p. 30.

⁷⁰Lewis, Labour in the West Indies, p. 29.

⁷¹Basdeo, Labour Organization and Labour Reform, p. 151.

⁷²Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest," p. 38.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴CO 295/599/70297, Governor Fletcher to W. Ormsby-Gore, Secretary of State for the Colonies, July 7, 1937.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸CO 295/599/70297, Commander of the H.M.S. Exeter to the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies Station, July 9, 1937.

⁷⁹Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 57.

⁸⁰Albert Gomes, Through a Maze of Colour (Port-of-Spain: Key Caribbean Publications Limited, 1974, p. 38). Also quoted in Basdeo, idem, p. 616.

⁸¹Ryan quotes Hewan Craig, a member of the Legislative Council, who stated that "Cipriani's decline and Butler's rise in working-class favour were ... to some degree symptomatic of the changing attitude of the Trinidad negro towards the white man It was probably inevitable in the natural course of development of the labour movement that negro leaders of working-class origin should arise, but to some extent it was also perhaps the very attitude which Cipriani had aroused among the workers which caused them to transfer their allegiance to Butler in 1937." Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 57.

⁸²Ibid., p. 58.

⁸³Report of the Commission on the Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances 1937 (London: H.M.S.O., 1938), p. 87.

⁸⁴The right to strike and immunity from action in tort was not granted to workers until 1943. Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 59.

⁸⁵Ramdin, From Chattel Slave to Wage Earner, p. 142.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ramdin, From Chattel Slave to Wage Earner, p. 141.

⁸⁸Ryan, Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago, p. 59.

⁸⁹By the end of 1938, a total of 10 trade unions had been registered under the Trade Union Ordinance of 1932. See Report by Major G. St. J. Orde Browne on Labour Conditions in the West Indies, (London: H.M.S.O., 1939), p. 132.

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to assess the importance of the Italo-Ethiopian war to the development of Trinidad's social and labour history. The war provided both an international context and stimulus to the ideological and organizational struggles of the blacks against colonial exploitation. Under the impact of the Great Depression, Afro-Trinidadian responses to the war became interwoven with the existing economic and political grievances of the black working class and petit bourgeoisie, and Ethiopianism - a sense of fraternity, of racial brotherhood, of a common history of oppression and exploitation among all people of African descent - became a vehicle for politicization and radicalization.

Central to this dynamic were the ideological and organizational developments which preceded the war. The most influential and durable of these were the black nationalist newspaper, The People and the marxist Negro Welfare, Social and Cultural Association (N.W.S.C.A.). The People, which was widely supported by the urban working-class and petit-bourgeoisie, articulated the Italian conquest of Ethiopia as symptomatic of black subordination to, and dependence on whites, and advocated the social, political and economic liberation of blacks through collective action and self-reliance. Organizational responses to the Italo-Ethiopian war also revealed the significance of race. This was manifested by the Afro-West Indian League (A.W.I.L.) - which emerged to mobilize and organize support for Ethiopia on the basis of racial solidarity and unity

- the West Indian Youth Welfare League (W.I.Y.W.L.) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.). Racial consciousness also influenced and was reflected in black religion and culture. Baptist and Shango worshippers, calypsonians, carnival masqueraders and poets, expressed not only support for Ethiopia, but an African consciousness and identity which enhanced their sense of self worth.

The major weakness of black nationalism was its failure to address the concrete material problems of black people, such as low wages, poor working conditions and the need for trade unions. Both the petit-bourgeois dominated A.W.I.L. and the W.I.Y.W.L. were shortlived, and despite the lingering existence of a few U.N.I.A. branches, no comprehensive race movement emerged on the wave of black nationalist sentiment.

The marxist N.W.S.C.A., a black working-class organization with links to the Comintern and the I.T.U.C.-N.W. defined the struggles of the Ethiopian people as an aspect of the international struggle of the working-class against imperialism. Under the impact of the war, the N.W.S.C.A. introduced techniques of mass agitation and politicization and attempted to discredit the gradualist and constitutionalist approach of Captain Cipriani and the Trinidad Labour Party (T.L.P.) by taking issue with him on the organization of workers and the unemployed; it combined anti-imperialist and anti-Italian protest with unemployment marches and trade union activities (with a view to the immediate radicalization of the workers and unemployed). The N.W.S.C.A., furthermore, sought to fashion the rise of Ethiopian consciousness into a political awareness of the class contradictions and antagonisms within Trinidad.

The most successful manifestation of this was the oilworkers movement led by Tubal Uriah Butler, an associate of the N.W.S.C.A., and the British Empire Workers and Citizen Home Rule Party (B.E.W. & C.H.R.P.). The Italo-Ethiopian war provided Butler with a vivid example of the extreme harshness of white colonial rule and exploitation, an experience he found analogous to the treatment of Afro-Trinidadian workers by the "Fascist-Imperialist band" of white employers. Butler's Ethiopianist propaganda, combined with his radicalism and open challenge of the colonial establishment on behalf of the workers - a challenge which mirrored the courageous resistance of the Ethiopian people against the overwhelming forces of the Italians - nurtured a sense of resistance in the minds of oil workers whose initiative achieved a mobilizational momentum which resulted in the nation-wide strikes and mass violence of June 1937.

The June disturbances, and the concrete gains of the working-class through the subsequent development of trade unions, discredited the leadership of Cipriani, and signalled the start of an era in which a black working-class leadership assumed the mantle of anti-colonial protest.

This study of the Afro-Trinidadian responses to the Italo-Ethiopian war reveals important similarities and contrasts to the Jamaican experience which has been critically studied by Ken Post. In both societies, blacks identified Ethiopia as the symbol of black pride and nationhood, and Ethiopianist sentiments affected individuals across a wide class spectrum. Post's conclusion that Jamaican Ethiopianism failed to inspire black protest action against colonial oppression at home because "it

looked far beyond the bounds of the island and refocused consciousness into another country whose contradictions were not the same", however, cannot be applied to the Trinidadian experience.

Jamaica, almost totally dependent on agriculture, contained an extensive peasantry, steeped in religious traditions which reinforced the conservatism of the rural population. This was vividly manifested by the Ras Tafari movement which claimed Haile Selassie as God, and envisioned the miraculous repatriation of all blacks to Africa, preferably Ethiopia, where they would be freed from colonialism.

The majority of Afro-Trinidadians, in contrast, constituted a landless labouring population, which included an element of industrial proletariat, conscious of its alienation from the means of production and the need for collective action if change in its working conditions was to be achieved. This proletariat, politicized and radicalized by the combination of black nationalist/Ethiopianist and marxist ideology, and led by a black working class leadership, challenged, in 1937, the internal structure of colonial capitalism.

This study of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict as a factor in Trinidad's social and labour history, has left an important question unanswered: How did the East Indian community respond to the crisis? Adrian Cola Rienzi, who founded the Trinidad Citizen's Committee, was not a leader of the East Indians, the majority of whom were rural-based and loyal to their religious leaders, Hindu or Muslim. It was not until the introduction of adult suffrage in the 1940's that the East Indian community joined the mainstream of colonial politics. East Indian support for the Ethiopian cause, however, may have led to instances of Indian-African

cooperation and unity on an issue which had become a symbol of anti-colonial struggle. It is the fervent hope of this author that this study inspires others to pursue this line of enquiry.

Bibliography

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

Archival

CO 295/586, Trinidad and Tobago Despatch.

CO 295/599/70297/Part 2.

CO 295/608/70387, Trinidad and Tobago Despatch.

CO 299/116, Trinidad and Tobago Despatch.

CO 318/421/71062, Trinidad and Tobago Despatch.

Government Reports

Annual Colonial Reports, Trinidad and Tobago, 1933-1938.

Hansard, July 1937.

Cmnd. 5641. Report of the Commission on Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances 1937. London: H.M.S.O. 1938.

Cmnd. 6070. Report by G. St. J. Orde-Browne on Labour Conditions in the West Indies. London: H.M.S.O. 1939.

Cmnd. 6607. West India Royal Commission 1938-1939. Report and Recommendations. London: H.M.S.O. 1945.

Newspapers

The People, 1933-1937.

Trinidad Guardian, 1934-1937.

Port-of-Spain Gazette, 1934-1937.

The Negro Worker, 1930-1935.

Interviews with Author

Jim Barratt, Trinidad, March - May, 1985

Lloyd Braithwaite, Trinidad, May 1985.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

Books

Asante, S.K.B. Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1934-1941. London: Longman, 1977.

Barker, A.J. The Civilizing Mission: The Italo-Ethiopian War 1935-6. London: Cassell, 1968.

Barrett, Leonard. The Rastafarians The Dreadlocks of Jamaica. Kingston: Heinemann, 1977.

Basdeo, Sahadeo. Labour Organisation and Labour Reform in Trinidad, 1919-1939. St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1983.

Braithwaite, Lloyd. Social Stratification in Trinidad. Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1975.

Brereton, Bridget. Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

_____. A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962. Port-of-Spain: Heinemann, 1981.

Burkett, Randall K. Black Redemption Churchmen Speak for the Garvey Movement. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978.

Calder-Marshall, Arthur. Glory Dead. London: Michael Joseph, 1939.

Clarke, Henrik, ed. Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

Craig, Susan, ed. Contemporary Caribbean, A Sociological Reader. 2 vols. Port-of-Spain: Susan Craig, 1982.

Cronon, Edmund. Black Moses. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955.

- Drake, St. Clair. The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion. Chicago: Third World Press, 1970.
- DuBois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Kraus-Thompson Organization, 1973.
- Ford, James W. The Communist and the Struggle for Negro Liberation. New York: The Harlem Division of the Communist Party, 1936.
- Garvey, Amy Jacques. Garvey and Garveyism. Kingston: Amy Jacques Garvey, 1963.
- Garvey, Amy Jacques, ed. Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey. 2 vols. New York: Atheneum, 1974.
- Geiss, Imanuel. The Pan-African Movement. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1974.
- Gomes, Albert. Through a Maze of Colour. Port-of-Spain: Key Caribbean Publications, 1974.
- Greenfield, Richard. Ethiopia, A New Political History. New York, London and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965.
- Hardie, Frank. The Abyssinian Crisis. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1974.
- Harrod, Jeffrey. Trade Union Foreign Policy. New York: Anchor Books, 1972.
- Hooker, James R. Henry Sylvester Williams, Imperial Pan-Africanist. London: Collings, 1975.
- _____. Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism. London: Pall Mall Press, 1967.
- Jacobs, W. Richard, ed. Butler Versus the King. Port-of-Spain: Key Caribbean Publications, 1976.
- James, C.L.R. The Black Jacobins. New York: Random House, 1963.
- _____. The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies. Nelson, Lancs.: Coulton & Co. Ltd., 1932.
- _____. A History of Pan-African Revolt. 2d ed. Washington: Drum and Spear Press, 1969.
- Kilson, Martin and Hill, Adelaide, eds. Apropos of Africa. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1971.

- La Guerre, John Gaffar. The Social and Political Thought of the Colonial Intelligentsia. Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1982.
- Langley, J. Ayodele. Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa 1900-1945. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973.
- Laurens, Franklin D. France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936. The Hague: Mouton, 1967.
- Lenin, V.I. Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. 1917; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978.
- Lewis, W. Arthur. Labour in the West Indies. The Birth of a Workers' Movement. 1939; Port-of-Spain: New Beacon Books, 1977.
- Lynch, Hollis. Edward Wilmot Blyden 1832-1912, Pan-Negro Patriot. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Macmillan, W.M. Warning from the West Indies. A Tract for Africa and the Empire. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1936.
- Makonnen, Ras. Pan-Africanism From Within. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Martin, Tony. Race First. The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. London and Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976.
- _____. The Pan-African Connection. Massachusetts: Majority Press, 1983.
- Mathurin, Owen Charles. Henry Sylvester Williams and The Origins of the Pan-African Movement, 1869-1911. London: Greenwood Press, 1976.
- Obika, Nyahuma. An Introduction to the Life and Times of Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler. Point Fortin, Trinidad: Caribbean Historical Society, 1983.
- Ottley, Roi. New World-A-Coming. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968.
- Oxaal, Ivar. Black Intellectuals Come To Power. Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1968.
- Padmore, George. Africa and World Peace. London: Secker & Warburg, 1937.
- _____, ed. History of the Pan-African Congress, 2d ed. London: The Hammersmith Bookshop Ltd., 1963.

- Padmore, George. Pan-Africanism or Communism. London: Dennis Dobson, 1956.
- _____. The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers. London: Red International of Labour Unions, 1931.
- _____. What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers? Hamburg: I.T.U.C.-N.W., n.d.
- Payne, Stanley G. Fascism, Comparison and Definition. London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980.
- Post, Ken. Arise Ye Starvelings. The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.
- Quevedo, Raymond. Atilla's Kaiso, A Short History of Trinidad Calypso. St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies, Department of Extra Mural Studies, 1983.
- Ramdin, Ron. From Chattel Slave To Wage Earner. London: Martin Brian and O'Keefe, 1982.
- Record, Wilson. The Negro and the Communist Party. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951.
- Rennie, Bukka. History of the Working-Class In the 20th Century - Trinidad and Tobago. Toronto: New Beginning Movement, 1974.
- Robinson, Cedric. Black Marxism, The Making of the Black Radical Tradition. London: Zed Press, 1983.
- Rodney, Walter. The Groundings With My Brothers. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications Ltd., 1969.
- _____. A History of the Guyanese Working People 1881-1905. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1981.
- Rogers, T.A. The Real Facts About Ethiopia (1936). London: African Publication Society, 1981.
- Royal Institute of International Affairs. Survey of International Affairs, 1935, Vol. 2. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.
- Schafer, Ludwig, ed. The Ethiopian Crisis: Touchstone of Appeasement? Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1961.
- Selwyn, Ryan. Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.

- Simpson, George Eaton. Religious Cults of the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti. Rio Piedras, San Juan: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1980.
- Smith, M.G., Augier, Roy and Nettleford, Rex. The Rastafarian Movement in Kingston, Jamaica. Kingston: Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of the West Indies, 1960.
- Theodore G. Vincent. Black Power and The Garvey Movement. Berkeley, California: Rampart Press, 1974.
- Ullendorf, Edward. The Ethiopians. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Vincent, Theodore G. Black Power and the Garvey Movement. New York: Ramparts Press, 1972.
- Weisbord, Robert. Ebony Kinship. Westport and London: Greenwood Press Inc., 1973.
- Williams, Eric. History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago. London: Andre Deutsch, 1964.

Articles

- Asante, S.K.B. "The Afro-American and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1936." Race, XV, 2 (October 1973), pp. 167-84.
- _____. "The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict: A Case Study in B.W. African response to Crisis diplomacy in the 1930's." Journal of African History, XV, 2 (1974), pp. 291-302.
- _____. "The Catholic Missions, British West African Nationalist and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, 1935-36." African Affairs, 73, 291, April 1974, pp. 204-16.
- Bracey Jr., John H. "Black Nationalism Since Garvey", Nathan Huggins, Martin Kilson and Daniel M. Fox, eds. Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience, Vol. 2, New York: 1971, pp. 262-263.
- Contee, Clarence C. "Ethiopia and the Pan-African Movement Before 1945." Black World, Feb. 1972, pp. 41-50.
- Drake, St. Clair. "The Black Diaspora in Pan-African Perspective." The Black Scholar, 7, 1 (September 1975), pp. 2-14.
- Elkins, W.F. "'Unrest Among The Negroes': A British Document of 1919." Science and Society, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, Winter, 1968, pp. 66-79.

- Elkins, W.F. "The Influence of Marcus Garvey on Africa: A British Report of 1922." Science and Society, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, Winter 1968, pp. 321-323.
- _____. "Marcus Garvey and The Negro World in the British West Indies, 1919-1920," Science and Society, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1, Spring 1972, pp. 63-77.
- _____. "A Source of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean: The Revolt of the British West Indies Regiment at Taranto, Italy." Science and Society, XXXIII, 2, Spring 1970, pp. 99-103.
- _____. "Black Power in the West Indies: The Trinidad Longshoremen Strike of 1919." Science and Society, 33, 1 (Winter 1969), pp. 71-75.
- Geiss, I. "Notes on the Development of Pan-Africanism." Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria, iii, 4, June 1967, pp. 719-40.
- Hargreaves, John D. "African Colonization in the Nineteenth Century: Liberia and Sierra Leone." Jeffrey Butler, ed. Boston University Paper on Africa, Vol. 1, 1965, pp. 55-76.
- Harris, Joseph E. "Introduction to the African Diaspora," T.O. Ranger, ed. Emerging Themes of African History. London: Heinemann, 1966, pp. 147-51.
- Hart, Richard. "The Life and Resurrection of Marcus Garvey." Race, IX, (1967), pp. 217-37.
- _____. "Aspects of Early Caribbean Worker's Struggles." Collected Seminar Papers No. 29 Caribbean Societies, Vol. 1. University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1982, pp. 35-49.
- Jacobs, W. Richard. "Butler: A Life of Struggle." In the Spirit of Butler: Trade Unionism in Free Grenada. St. George's, Grenada: Fedon Publishers, 1982, pp. 32-36.
- Johnson, Howard. "Oil, Imperial Policy and the Trinidad Disturbances, 1937." Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, IV (October 1975), pp. 29-54.
- Joseph, C.L. "The British West Indies Regiment 1914-1918." The Journal of Caribbean History, II (May 1971), pp. 94-124.
- July, Robert W. "Nineteenth-Century Negritude: Edward W. Blyden," Journal of African History, V, 1 (1964), pp. 73-86.
- Langley, J.A. "Garveyism and African Nationalism." Race, XI, 2, October 1969, pp. 157-72.

- Lynch, Hollis. "Edward W. Blyden: Pioneer West African Nationalist." Journal of African History, VI, 3 (1965), pp. 373-88.
- Martin, Charles. "The ILD and Black America." Labour History (1985), V. 26, No. 2, pp. 165-194.
- Post, Ken. "The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Ta. 1930-38." Allen, C.H. and Johnson, R.W., eds., African Perspectives. (London: 1970), pp. 185-207.
- Ross, Rod. "Black Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian Relief 1935-1936," Ethiopian Observer, XV, 2 (1972), pp. 122-131.
- Samaroo, Brinsley. "The Trinidad Workingmen's Association and the Origins of Popular Protest in a Crown Colony." Social and Economic Studies, V, June 1972, pp. 205-22.
- Scott, William R. "Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict 1934-1936." Journal of Negro History, LXIII, 2 (April 1978), pp. 118-134.
- _____. "And Ethiopia Shall Stretch Forth its Hands: The Origins of Ethiopianism in Afro-American Thought 1767-1896." Umoja, II, 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 1-14.
- Shack, William A. "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans: Some Historical Notes, 1920-1970." Phylon, XXXIII, 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 142-155.
- Shepperson, George. "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism." Phylon, XIV, 1, 1953, pp. 9-18.
- _____. "Pan-Africanism and pan-Africanism, Some Historical Notes." Phylon, XXIII, 4 (1962), pp. 346-358.
- _____. "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism." Journal of African History, 1, 2 (1960), pp. 299-312.
- Weisbord, Robert G. "British West Indian Reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War: An Episode in Pan-Africanism." Caribbean Studies, 10, 1 (April 1970), pp. 34-41.
- _____. "Black American and the Italian-Ethiopian Crisis: An Episode in Pan-Negroism." Historian, XXXIV, 2, February 1972, pp. 230-41.
- _____. "Marcus Garvey, Pan-Negroist: The View from Whitehall." Race, XL (1969-1970), pp. 419-29.

Unpublished Theses and Papers

- Engwenyu, Joseph. "The Great Depression and Labour Protest, Some Caribbean and West African Dimensions 1930-1939." Paper presented to South-South Conference, African, Latin American and Caribbean Connections, May 15-17, 1985, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec.
- Jacobs, W. Richards. "The Politics of Protest in Trinidad - The Strikes and Disturbances of 1937." Paper read at Conference of West Indian Historians held at St. Augustine Campus of University of the West Indies, April 1973.
- Reddock, Rhoda Elizabeth. "Women Labour and Struggle in 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago." Ph.D. Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1978.
- Scott, William R. "The American Negro and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1934-1936." M.A. Thesis, Howard University, 1966.
- Singh, Kelvin. "Economy and Polity in Trinidad, 1917-38." Ph.D., U.W.I., 1975.