

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FJM-23: Trinidad  
The February Revolution

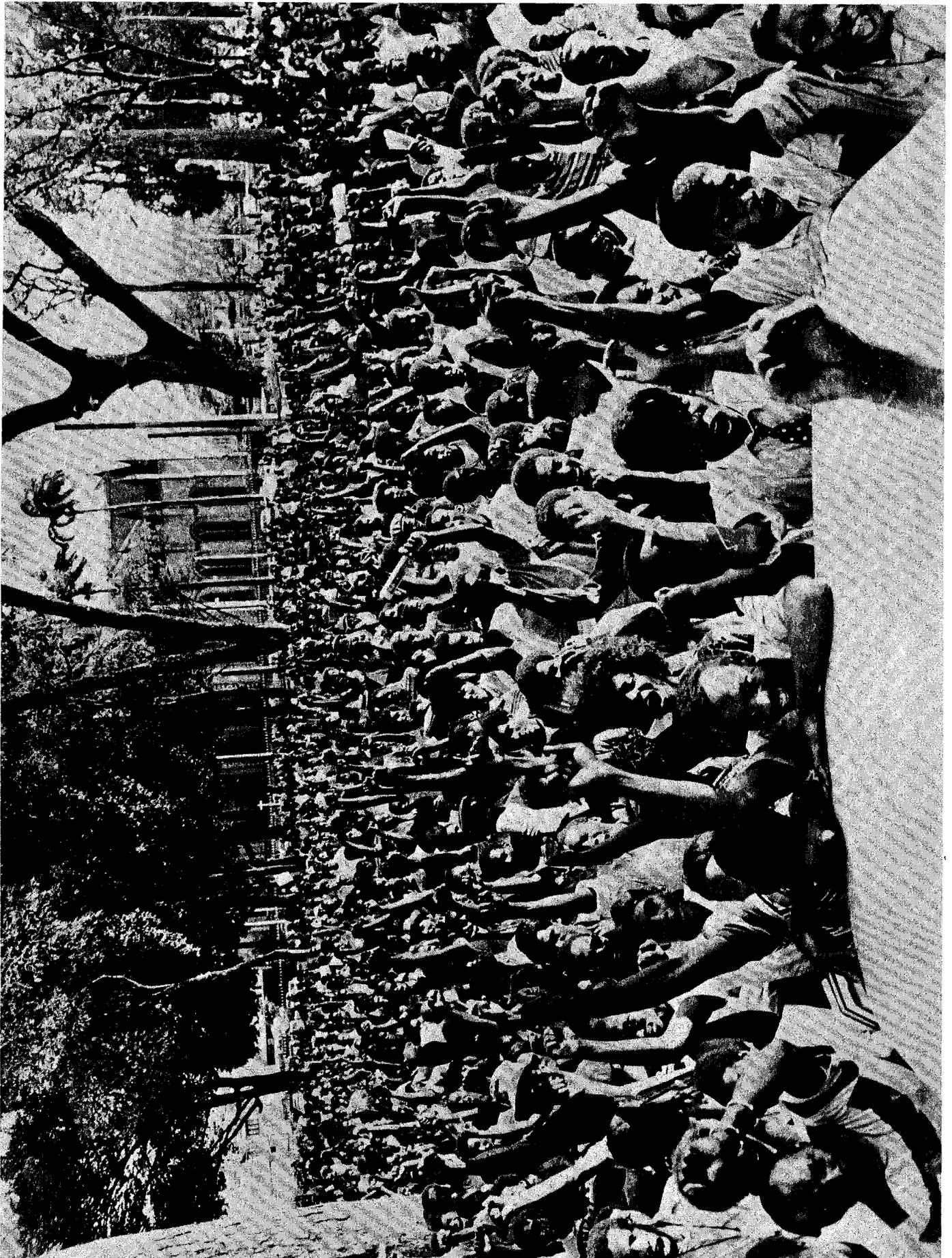
Port of Spain, Trinidad  
April 30, 1970.

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

February 1970 was a time of striking contrasts for the people living in this most southern island of the Caribbean. For the first ten days of the month, a high-spirited gaiety sparked the country as the population prepared for and feted what must be considered the most engaging form of play any people could create —Trinidad Carnival (see FJM-7). Mid-month and Lent followed: a time of calm and a chance to recover spent energies. Then suddenly during the final week of February the thrust of clenched fists raised in unison with a massive cry of "Power" shattered the afternoon quiet of the island capital, Port of Spain. Carnival play soon became an ironic event out of the past and a curious prelude to eight weeks of sustained political upheaval which will forever be known as the "February Revolution".





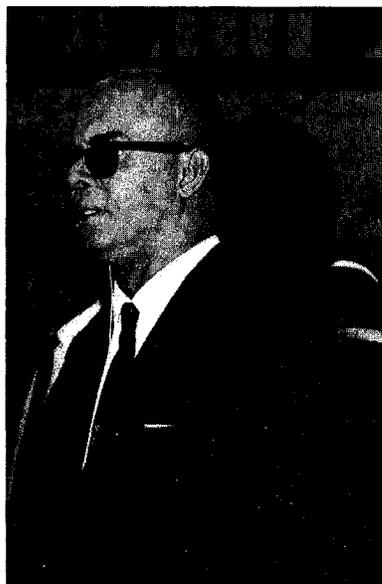
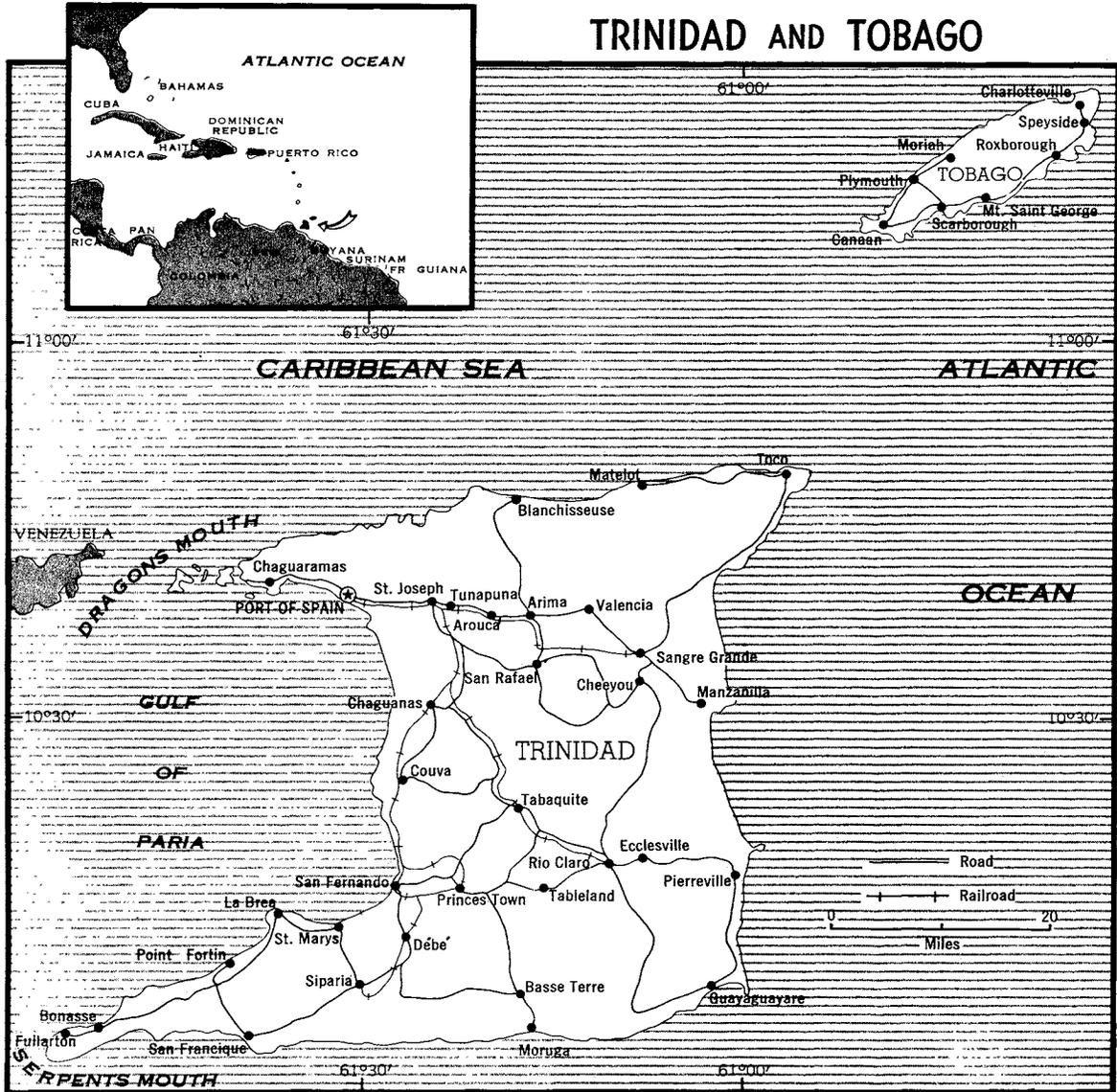
As a result of these eight weeks (February 26 - April 24), the Government of Eric Williams and his Party, the Peoples National Movement, finally demonstrated after fourteen years of rule, that they are politically bankrupt, that a critical leadership vacuum has engulfed the nation and that Government's power of persuasion or control of the people stems from the use of force rather than any moral imperatives that the Williams' Movement at one stage might have possessed.

The real significance of this period however, has very little to do with the inadequacy of Eric Williams' Government. This has long been articulated, perhaps most astutely by radical thinkers at the University of the West Indies, by several journalists and by one or two labour union leaders (see FJM 13-14-15). What is critical here is the very serious confrontation between diverse forms of political organization and ideology taking shape subsequent to the passing of Eric Williams. Will Williams' rule be perpetuated with the use of police power or with the assistance of an American military presence in the event local force is insufficient? Or if the Williams - PNM combination is finished, which of the radical forces now working for political change will emerge with the Trinidad population's support? And as a consequence of changes in leadership, what sort of political, economic and social revolution is likely to take place?

Dr. Williams and the PNM began to dominate Trinidad politics in 1956. Although an essentially middle-class movement, the Party's later electoral success with the people was a consequence of Williams' charismatic leadership coupled with the popular programme he projected: national independence, more widespread participation in the political and economic life of the country; and a refreshing morality in public affairs. Yet after fourteen years of absolute power, the PNM has fulfilled only its pledge to bring independence to Trinidad (1962). In respect to participatory politics, morality in public affairs, effective administration or greater local control of the economy, the record has been poor.

In the words of one local writer, Williams is "a personal monarch who has exercised control over the country which not even Nkrumah at the height of his powers could have done in Ghana". For example, as Prime Minister, Dr. Williams has control over the Ministry of Finance, Planning, Development, Tobago Affairs, Community Development, Local Government and External Affairs. Moreover, most observers recognize that this personal involvement on the part of the Prime Minister is necessitated by the fact that the resources of the PNM leadership are minimal. With the exception of one or two men, the Doctor simply has no one he can rely on to run the country. Most of the Ministers are either incompetent or corrupt or both. And unfortunately, those that are capable have been disillusioned over the years and have subsequently left the Party.

# TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



Lack of popular participation in the country's political processes is also reflected in voting trends from 1956 to the present. In 1956 for example, 80% of the electorate went to the polls. This figure dropped to 73% in 1958; to 65% in 1966; and as low as 34% in 1968. Meanwhile, the PNM's popular support also diminished over the years. In 1961, 50% of the electorate voted for PNM candidates while seven years later the Party received only 18% of the total votes in the 1968 by-elections.

Ideologically, the PNM defines itself as "pragmatic". In fact Williams has never been taken with any ideology. He is essentially a reformist, anti-colonialist politician who leads a Party which has avoided establishing any sustained, long-range programme. The pattern of development most applicable is the Puerto Rican model of incentive industrialization with the use of foreign (principally American) capital. The effects of this model, however, have been negligible if not absolutely harmful. Government's policies, for example, have widened the gap between rich and poor, curtailed indigenous economic creativity, prostituted local labour and placed inordinate control of the economy in the hands of American interests. At the same time, local unemployment and dissatisfaction have expanded significantly.

Today, 57,000 men or 15% of the labour force of Trinidad cannot find work. Of those that do find work, 70,000 or one out of five are employed less than thirty-two hours a week. Of this total, 26,000 are employed for only sixteen hours a week. Further dissatisfaction is generated with the patterns of employment: Trinidadians of European origin have little difficulty finding employment (95% have jobs), while Trinidadians of African, East Indian or mixed origin comprise a disproportionate number of the unemployed. The wage structure is also weighted against the black or East Indian nationals: Those of European extraction earn an average income of \$500 per month, whereas Afro-Trinidadians earn an average wage of \$104, and those of East Indian origin an average of \$77.

Associated with all of these problems is the dynamic question of national identity. Perhaps here, more than in any other respect, Williams must be faulted. The problem is most acutely analysed by West Indian economist, Lloyd Best:

"This is not merely a matter of remaining nominally subject to an English Queen; it is that we have not established our identity. We depend on metropolitan help as if we have a right to it. We have not attempted to estimate how much capital we really need and on what terms; we have not been selecting the technology we borrow. We have made no serious attempt to give up Imperial Preference and protected marketing of exports. We behave as if we were still part of a grand metropolitan family, as if we were not on our own.

Our connections with the outside world run through the metropolitan capitals. New York and London are more important than Kingston and Georgetown. Because we refuse to stand on our own feet, we cannot see our natural supports.

In the Cathedral February 26



Instead of combining with Cuba, Barbados and St. Kitts to re-organise sugar, we are competing for quotas. Instead of joining with Surinam, Guyana and Jamaica to reorganise the regional mineral industry, we are caught up in a side issue about manufacturing and tourism. With the competition for capital and for tourists, it is dog eat dog".

Underlying the play of Carnival time then was a hidden yet very real disaffection with the fourteen years of PNM rule. The depth of this dissatisfaction became apparent when the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), led by thirty-four year old Geddes Granger, marched through the streets of Port of Spain on the afternoon of the 26th of February.

The National Joint Action Committee was initially started last year with the express purpose of establishing solidarity with West Indian students facing trial in Montreal, Canada for "conspiring to burn down the computer center at Sir George Williams University (S.G.W.U.). The S.G.W.U. affair stemmed from claims of racism made by black students against a professor of biology. After several months of fruitless protest against the University administration, a large group of Afro-Caribbean students occupied the University's computer center, holding it until driven out or arrested by Montreal police. In the scramble between the ninety-seven students and the police, the center caught fire with a million dollars worth of damage the result. The students were then charged with deliberately setting fire to the building, held on very high bail and brought to trial this year.

The radicalisation of Geddes Granger and other members of NJAC was a direct result of the SGWU affair. When Granger first entered the University of the West Indies, his interest in contemporary Caribbean politics was slight. Over a period of time however, and particularly as a result of the Canadian action against West Indian students, Granger became more involved in campus politics, eventually developing a reputation as a competent organizer and charismatic speaker. Elected to the Presidency of the Guild of Undergraduates, Granger quickly established himself as leader of the student activists and began organizing NJAC. Among the most significant protests initiated by Granger was the closure of the campus as the Governor General of Canada was on a State visit to Trinidad last year.

Sir Roland Michener's visit to Trinidad was an uneventful trip until his official entourage reached the University campus where students had placed themselves in front of the main gate. Michener was greeted by this human barricade improvised by Granger and his colleagues; and as a result he was forced to turn and make his way back to Port of Spain. With this "action", Granger focussed popular attention on the plight of black students in Canada, established solidarity with them, gave Prime Minister Eric Williams a stunning personal set-back (Williams is Pro-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies) and emerged as a significant political personality in his own right.

Governor General Michener confronts Geddes Granger



Thus, on February 26, Granger's NJAC march in Port of Spain was only a continuation of his efforts as a student leader and organizer. His group was small, however, and would have gone unnoticed except for the fact that the protest was carried inside the walls of the Roman Catholic Cathedral located in the heart of the capital. With banners and bravado which shocked the middle-class population of the country, Granger marched into the Cathedral, walked to the sanctuary and spoke of the repressive role of the Church in the lives of the black population. Black hoods were draped over statues, placards were waved calling for "Freedom Now" and the slogan "Power" shouted with fists in the air. Granger explained to his followers why they had entered the Cathedral, saying:

"The Roman Catholic Church is white; God is white; Jesus is white; Mary is white; the Apostles (except perhaps Judas) were white; all the angels and saints (save the few hastily added the other day) are white."

The event carried a great deal of publicity and many were voicing outrage that such an incident could happen in Trinidad. Nevertheless, most assumed that Granger had gone too far, that most of the population would follow the lead of the establishment and view the protest as a crude or isolated deviation. A week passed and everything seemed to be normal. Then, on March 5, the nation witnessed the largest demonstration in support of "Black Power" ever to take place in the Caribbean.

From a group of nine the week before, the Granger-led march had grown to over 10,000. Traffic was held for over four hours as Trinidadians from every part of the country crowded into the capital to hear the NJAC and Granger speak about the need for change.

"We shall walk without speaking, without shouting, without smiling, but we shall walk with anger."

The crowds moved out of Woodford Square and passed in front of the Parliament buildings. Shouts of "Power, Power" filled the air and six flags -- three red, two black and one green -- were planted in front of the Red House by six black men and women. Granger explained the significance of the colours:

"The red flags are a declaration of war; black is for victory and black unity. And the green one is for peace after we have achieved victory."

Granger continued:

"There is a plan to brutalise you. But we are not ready for a confrontation. We are not ready for violence. But it will surely come."



Geddes Granger and his People's Parliament

Then, instead of focusing the crowd's attention on the Canadian Government, Granger and the other speakers shifted the protest to local conditions and Dr. Williams Government. The targets became the "white minority who control the significant majority of economic wealth of Trinidad".

"Our movement is working towards the day when each black person will be able to get a fair deal, be he of African or East Indian descent, will be able to feel that he has a stake in the future of our society. We are therefore against the present system in Trinidad which can only result in the perpetuation of the status-quo. In Trinidad we have a black Government which is not working in the interest of the people, for they strive to perpetuate a system of capitalism, a system which serves to provide huge profits for the foreign firms like the Royal Bank of Canada, Alcan, or Texaco Trinidad. We cannot and indeed will not allow our black people to be further dehumanised. And I say to you, there must be change".

Placards carried by the demonstrators carried many of the same ideas, but some hit closer to home:

"Doc, Remember the RC Church was against you in 1956"

"Williams is keeping us in Capitalism and Slavery"

"Mnt. St. Benedict is a Legal Obeah House"

"What has the Church done for Black People, Suffering People, Unemployment?"

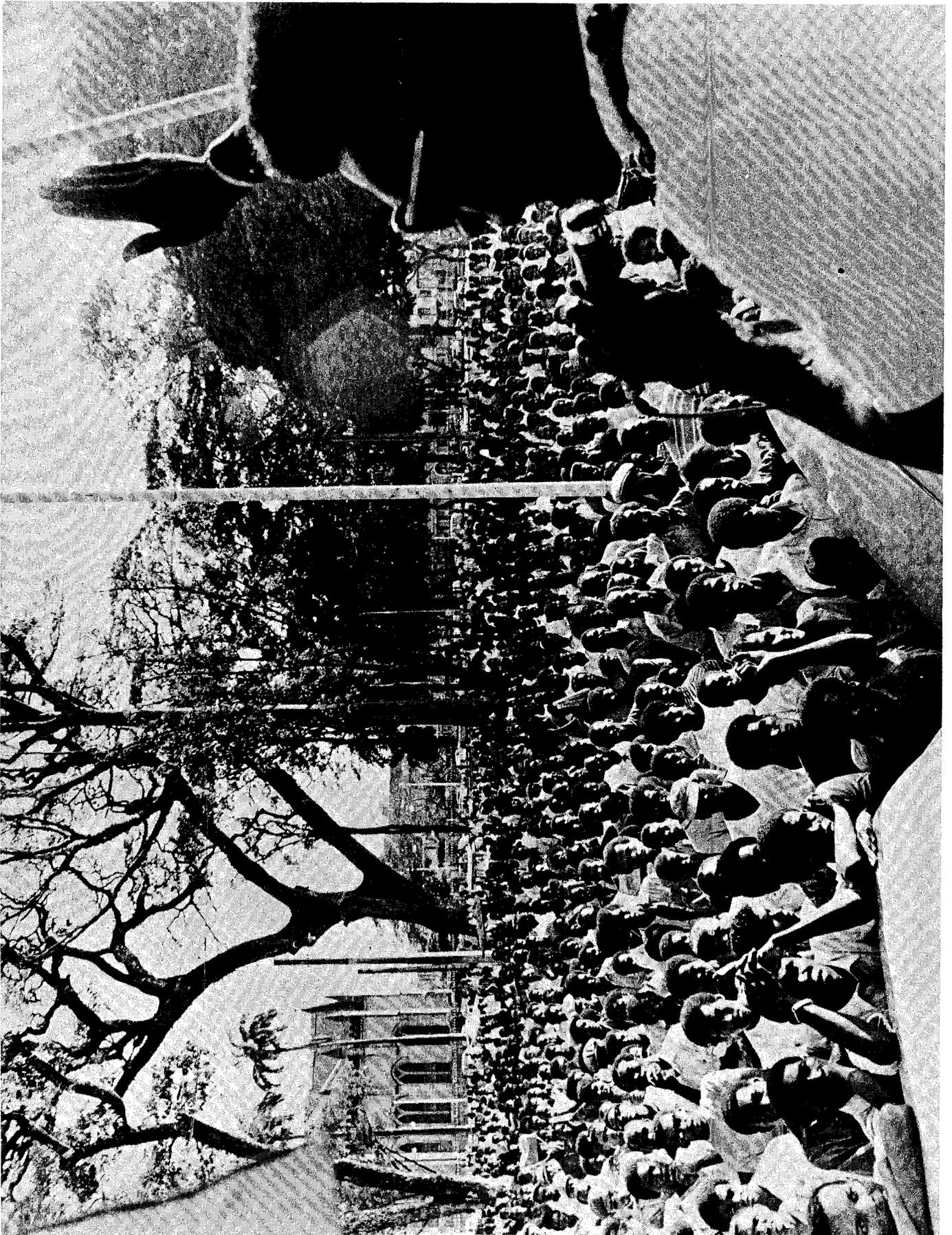
"Police we know your Problems"

"Pretty Policemen, would you lash Black me? (held by a pretty Trinidadian)"

"I've Never Seen A White Ape -- So Where Did The White Man Come From?"

The following day, March 6, another mass demonstration filled the streets of Port of Spain. At the same time, five of the nine leaders of the march into the Cathedral were charged with assault and unlawful assembly on February 26. In court, one of the nine and member of NJAC, Dave D'Abreau pointed a finger at the police guard and shouted a prophetic warning:

"You police should be on our side. The Army is on our side. All we need now is your help to seize power. We have suffered too long at the hands of those Canadian bastards, and this is the time you black policemen should join our crusade."



Aldwin Primus addresses an early NJAC meeting

March 6 was also the day the movement turned to violence. Nine stores were hit that day, windows smashed and molotov cocktails began to explode around the homes of leading businessmen. One home-made bomb exploded the front window of Mr. Frank Hagan's home. Hagan is the Vice-Consul of the American Embassy.

During the next two weeks, demonstrations numbering eight to twenty thousand Trinidadians kept the Country in a perpetual state of protest. Granger with his arms uplifted pleaded with the adulating crowds to rise up and rid the nation of white oppressors. Newspaper articles and editorials focused attention on the fact that there was need for change, that the black population had been short-changed but that violence or revolution were not the answers. But Granger kept marching -- and with him the population. Meanwhile, Government was still. The middle-class, threatened as they have never been before, began to panic. Many wondered what Dr. Williams was doing, why he remained so silent in the face of the NJAC challenges. Others began to pack their bags and leave for "vacation" in Barbados -- a haven for the middle-class whites of the Caribbean.

The violence also increased. And although NJAC never organized terror campaigns, the molotov cocktail became an extension of the movement. At least a half-million dollars worth of damage was caused by fire throughout the island. The Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs, Senator Donald Pierre, was threatened and his home hit by a lighted "flambeau". Vigilante groups began to form in the middle-class, wealthy, white housing developments which surround Port of Spain. Communication systems were set up between neighbours who had previously never even spoken with one another.

Yet Government responded with only the most ineffectual comments. The statement of Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, Minister of West Indian Affairs, serves as one example:

"It is a sad day indeed when others who saw Trinidad as an example of peaceful co-existence and progress now think of the nation as a place of unrest. The damage done to the nation's image is priceless. The eyes of the world are on us".

The equally incredible comment of the Minister of Petroleum, Commerce and Industry, John O'Halloran also demonstrates how out of touch the Government really was:

"The present Black Power demonstrations have been engineered by Communist agitators trained and paid by Fidel Castro's Cuba".

However, violence was also taking toll of the movement itself. As a result of Granger's willingness to condone, if not encourage the violence and tactics of terror, the Black Power movement began to split. For example, Aldwin Primus of the Black Panther group openly disassociated himself and the Panthers from the NJAC.



NJAC marches to Caroni to ally with the East Indians



Annoyed with Granger's personal control of the movement, upset by the indiscriminate use of "flambeau" and disenchanted with the idea of any University-based group taking charge of the population he himself had tried to muster for several years, Primus issued his own "White Paper" and called Granger a fraud.

"The Black Panthers are opposed to any organized syndicate of practicing politicians from the University of the West Indies, and will ruthlessly destroy any attempt to force campus politicians on the people."

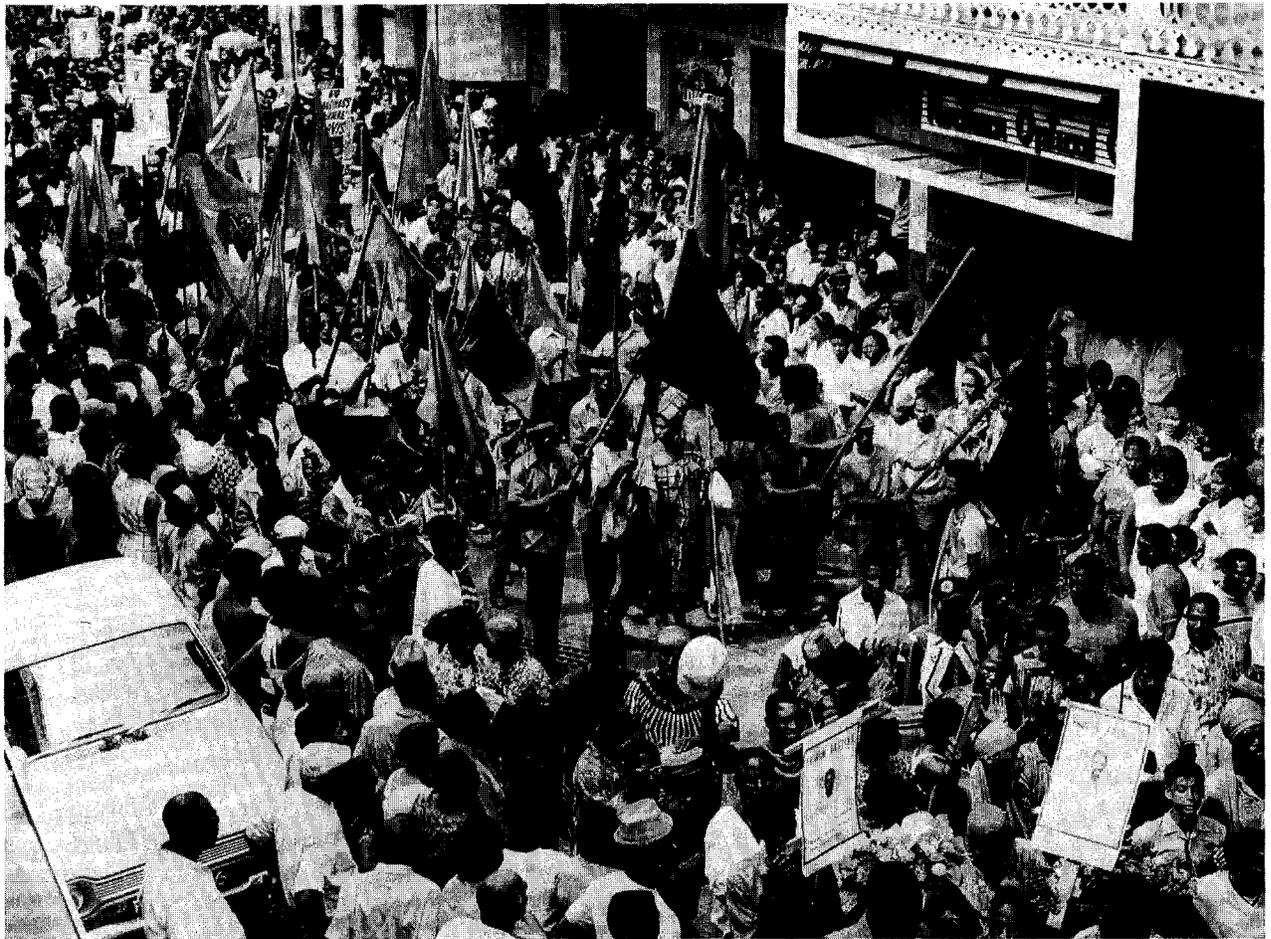
Even though the seams began to show, Granger and NJAC continued to march. At the end of two weeks, a policy decision was made to make a greater effort to communicate the Black Power philosophy to the East Indian sectors of the population. The movement had to become national in scope and identify with the entire oppressed population of the nation. The most important action in this regard was the twenty-eight mile march through the heart of the sugar-belt, an agonisingly long march under a very hot sun. From Port of Spain to Caroni, the home of British-owned Tate and Lyle's Caroni sugar plantation, Granger's marchers moved in a long line strung out at times 6,000 strong. At every village, Granger himself made his "declaration of war on Tate and Lyle" speech and thanked the East Indian population for their gifts of water, oranges, food and rest points. He explained that there must be change, that to eke out an existence for Tate and Lyle was brutal oppression and that Afro-Trinidadians and East Indians must unite against the foreign oppressors and the PNM, their local representatives.

During the third week of marching, Granger's charisma seemed to dissipate somewhat. The numbers he could attract grew smaller, the Express (Trinidad's more liberal daily) which had at first endorsed Granger began to editorialise against him and there were signs of internal dissension within the NJAC itself. Then finally, the Prime Minister broke his long silence and on a nationally televised hook-up presented his Government's reaction. Because of the importance of Williams' reaction and since it represents one of the few occasions during the last several years that the Prime Minister has actually addressed the nation as a whole, his comments are excerpted below.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I know that you are all very concerned, in one way or another, with what has been happening in our country in the past few weeks. So I think I ought to begin by trying to clarify for you the background to these development. There are three main points to remember.

The first is that in the last decade we have witnessed a world-wide revolt against authority and traditional institutions and values. This has been particularly noticeable in the ferment in the Roman Catholic Church, with particular reference to the pill, divorce, and celibacy of the clergy, in the questioning of Parliament and Congress, in the obsession with sex, and in the growing addiction to drugs.



On top of that has come the revolt of the youth and the ferment among university students in countries as far apart as the United States of America, France and Japan.

They have violently opposed the war in Viet Nam and the attempt by a large white country to dominate a small non-white country.

The second phenomenon of the past decade has been the growing revolt in developing countries against foreign investments. Some, like Cuba, Tanzania, and India in respect of foreign banks, have gone in for outright nationalisation.

Three questions arise with nationalisation: the large capital investment required for the takeover, the lack of national experts in management and administration, and most of all the problem of securing adequate markets.

So that countries like Chile, Zambia, Sierra Leone and Trinidad and Tobago have preferred to proceed on the basis of joint ventures and a greater national share in decision making by taking a 50 or 51 per cent national share in key enterprises - in our case, the port, oil, telephone, external communications with outright purchase of a sugar company, a radio station and television.

The third important feature of the last decade has been the revolt of Black people against the growing indignities to which they have been subjected.

Black people everywhere have been outraged by the British treatment of the white minority in Southern Rhodesia, by the sale of arms by white developed countries to maintain the system of apartheid in South Africa, by the support of the white developed countries of the reactionary treatment by Portugal of its African colonies.

West Indians and Asians in particular have been angered by the insults of Enoch Powell and the Commonwealth Immigration Act in Britain. West Indians have leveled accusations against the growing tendency to racism in Canada. But the outstanding feature of this Black revolt has been the determined attacks of the Blacks in the United States on the inequalities they have to face in the ghettos.

In the Caribbean a decisive blow against the tradition of white control, especially white economic control, was struck last year in Curacao which, very significantly was never a slave plantation society.

Our Government has fully appreciated all these world currents and its whole policy has been directed towards a restructuring of the society which we inherited.

Political power and independence were the key to everything, and so we concentrated on those first. We have consciously sought to promote Black economic power. We have in five years created 1,523 Black small farmers over the country. We have brought free secondary education within the reach of thousands of disadvantaged families who could not dream of it in 1956. Our Public Service, at all levels, is staffed today almost entirely by nationals, mainly Black.

The demonstrations however, suggested that neither the policy of the Government nor the measures taken to implement that policy are sufficiently known. I get a feeling that there is not sufficient awareness of our policy statement in the Third Five Year Plan to strengthen local decision making where investment is concerned and to achieve a larger national share in the principal enterprises.

I get a feeling **also** that there is not sufficient awareness of our deliberate policy to control land alienation to foreigners in both Trinidad and Tobago.

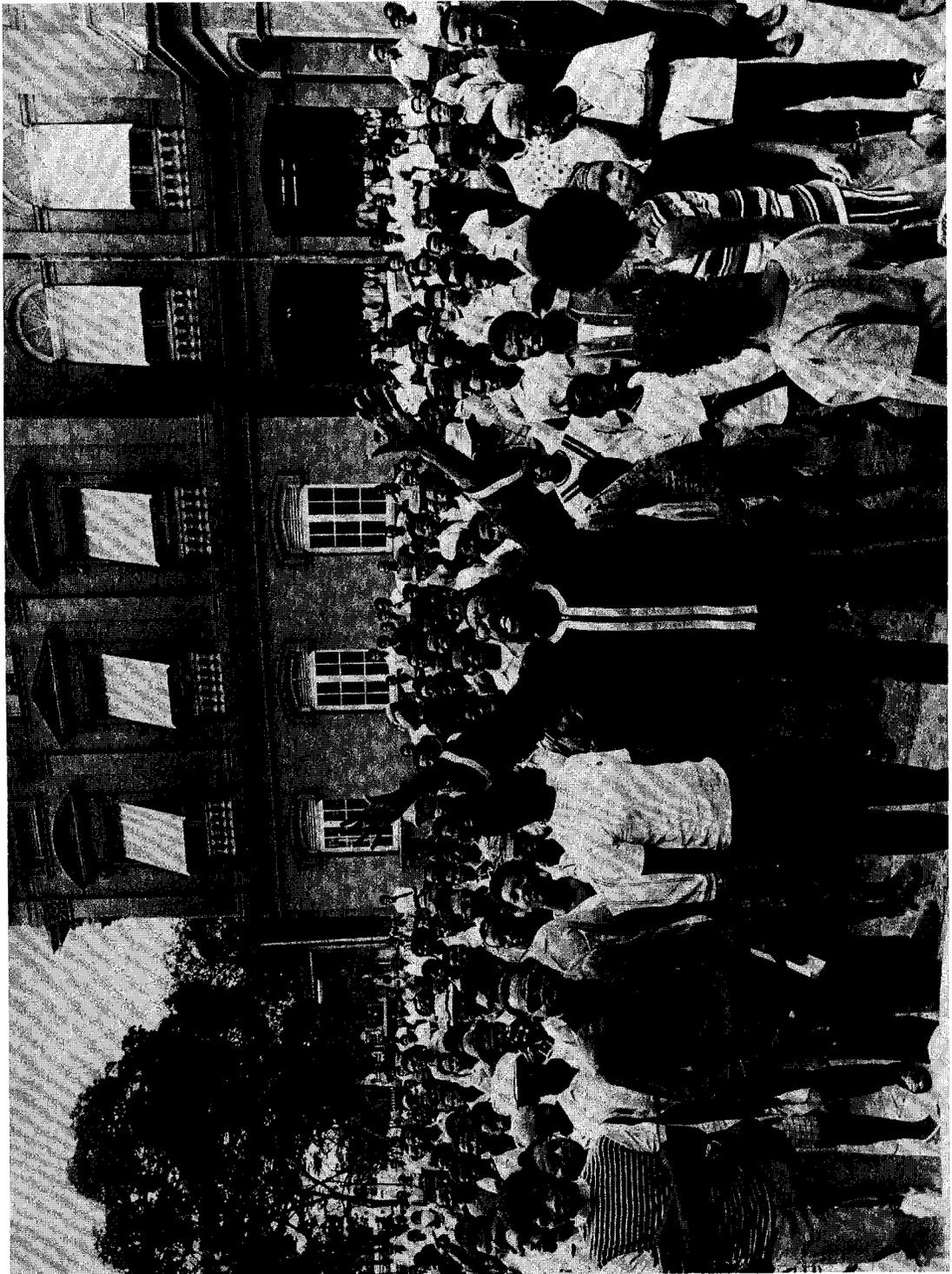
Another point which has emerged from the demonstrations is that the pace of change has been and is too slow, and that the Government must be more forceful in implementing its policies. I am myself frequently infuriated by the delays we encounter of one sort or another at various turns. But the population must understand that there are certain basic difficulties. The most important is the parliamentary system which we are trying to promote and maintain. That is at the best of times slow, but many of its procedures - such as the call for public tenders awarded by a special board and the control of public expenditures by the Auditor General - are safeguards in the public interest. Administrative procedures are also slow and bureaucratic. But the fundamental feature of the demonstrations was the insistence on Black dignity, the manifestation of Black consciousness, and the demand for Black economic power.

The entire population must understand that these demands are perfectly legitimate and are entirely in the interest of the community as a whole. If this is Black Power, then I am for Black Power.

The question now is how to provide the means by which these legitimate demands can be satisfied.

Cabinet has therefore decided to impose, as from January 1, 1970, a special levy of five percent on the chargeable income of all companies paying corporation tax, all banks, all insurance companies.

Pioneer companies and partnerships which pay no corporation tax will pay the levy on their tax exempt profits.



Granger responds to Williams' address before  
Parliament March 25

On individuals the levy will be 5 per cent on the excess of the chargeable income over \$10,000.

I anticipate that this levy will yield \$10 million in the first year. This sum will not go into the general revenues of the country. It will of course take some time to identify appropriate projects and to design and construct training facilities. Cabinet has therefore agreed that, in order to provide some more jobs as a matter of urgency, work should commence almost immediately in three already identified areas of national grievance - roads, drains and recreational facilities.

I turn now to the greater national participation in the important sectors of our economy. We shall proceed more expeditiously with the implementation of our decisions taken at the time of the Third Five Year Plan regarding Government shareholding in particular enterprises.

We are proceeding with the setting up of our own indigenous commercial bank, in respect of which the Swiss Government has provided an expert who has been on the job for the past month.

With the transfer of the assets of the Bank of London and Montreal to the Bank of Montreal which was announced 10 days ago, Cabinet has accepted my recommendation that the Government itself should take over the BOLAM bank in Port of Spain, and its ancillary institutions as the headquarters of the National Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, with the rural branches of the Post Office Savings Bank serving as its branches.

Whether immediate or more fundamental issues are concerned, the Government remains ready to give serious and sympathetic study to any concrete proposals that may be formulated and to encourage any approaches for dialogue. On this point we need to be very careful not to cut off our nose to spite our face.

Take one example: you have all heard of the substantial discoveries of oil and gas off our East Coast, and you may also know that we have invited public bids for concessions off our North Coast. We have also been encouraging exploration off our South-East Coast. We must do nothing to interfere with this exploratory effort.

If anyone wishes to continue to march and demonstrate, by all means let him do so. Our Constitution guarantees this as a fundamental right. But I urge that this should be done without violence trespassing on the constitutional rights of others; without interference of any sort with the freedom of worship equally guaranteed by our Constitution. There must be no interference with the churches, no interference with the temples, no interference with the mosques, no interference with any place of worship.

Our young people are a part of the general world malaise, seeking something new and something better, and seeking it with a sense of urgency. They are restless, frustrated, possibly a little exuberant. But let there be no misunderstanding about this. It is a horse of a different colour if what is involved is arson and molotov cocktails. In that case the law will have to take its course.

It was a weak address. As one member of Lloyd Best's Tapia Group, (see FJM-15) commented, Dr. Williams' comments could only be received with "a near-unanimous groan of boredom and cynicism". On several points, the Prime Minister was clearly expecting the Trinidad population to accept a whitewash.

--"I get the feeling that there is not sufficient awareness of our .... policies...."

Yet in the past five years Dr. Williams has only held one interview with the local press and that was with his own Party weekly, The Nation.

--"I am frequently infuriated by delays .....the Parliamentary system.... is at the best of times slow....."

As Tapia has pointed out, the Aliens Landholding Act took one day to become law; the Industrial Stabilisation Act only forty-eight hours.

--"Administrative procedures are also slow and bureaucratic....."

One of the principal reasons for this is Dr. Williams' penchant to see everything that moves through the Ministries of his Government. At present, there are 6,000 submissions waiting for Cabinet approval.

--"The Government has had the greatest difficulty in securing markets for the disposal of the 44,000 barrels of crude oil a day .....produced by Trinidad Tesero."

This is the Government-owned oil company. Lloyd Best intelligently suggests that Trinidad force Texaco Oil to buy this produce since the American controlled refinery is the largest in the Commonwealth.

--"...in the last decade we have witnessed a world-wide revolt against authority and traditional values. This has been particularly noticeable in an obsession with sex."

Tapia, Best's voice in print, justifiably points the finger back in the direction of Williams' own Party functionaries who are guilty of their own "obsessions". Tapia's comment: "To combat this obsession we banned Playboy magazine but did not manage to prevent a Cabinet Minister from being caught by a Coast Guard patrol indulging his obsession in the open air at Chagaramus."



Above: The funeral of Basil Davis

Below: Port of Spain burns



--"Cabinet has therefore decided to impose a ....special levy....."

This action, of course, over-rides the powers of Parliament which the Prime Minister has just said he was trying to "promote and maintain".

Most telling of all, however, was what Williams did not say. There were no new ideas, no significant departures from the patterns which had already proven fruitless. Disaffection had gone deep and Williams was simply too late with too little.

The Williams panacea did not work. And though hundreds of unemployed lined up to register for Government sponsored work, the general reaction was hostile. Arson increased and only three days after the Prime Minister had addressed the country, eight molotov cocktails destroyed \$100,000 worth of property. Bottle and stone-hurling Trinidadians also kept up a constant barrage on busy policemen. Port of Spain shop-owners began shutting down, their windows smashed and stocks depleted by looters. On March 25, one demonstrator was shot and wounded. On March 26, Granger took his followers to the American Embassy and explained how the United States' Texaco Oil Company robbed the country of \$200 million each year. "The time" he said, "was not very far off when the people would put a stop to this". Then over the weekend of April 3-5, Granger went to Tobago, the sister island of Trinidad. There, half the population turned out to march with him, - an incredible display of "Power".

Ten days later a young NJAC supporter, Basil Davis, was shot and killed by a policeman. An angry mob converged on Police Headquarters and others reported the killing to the local newspapers. This was the chance Granger had been waiting for. The funeral of Basil Davis became a Black Power "State Funeral" which Granger stage-managed to attract more than 20,000 angry demonstrators. The confrontation between the Movement and the Government drew nearer and it was doubtful whether Government would continue to retain control of the Country. On April 14, aware by now that Williams was preparing to declare a State of Emergency, Granger addressed a meeting of demonstrators and advised his supporters what action they should take in that event.

"Do not bow to it. From the time an Emergency is declared, come to town and demonstrate. By God we will fight fire with fire. If you bow to a State of Emergency, mark my word here tonight, your children will curse the day you were born. Your children will not respect you. Your wives will turn against you and it is this disunity which will bring the forces of oppression upon you. We will retreat not one single inch. This is war. We are going to show them that the will of God is the will of the People. Come to town. If they want to lock you up let them lock all ah we. We must be prepared to fight on all fronts. No rum-drinking. From tonight do not buy anything except food. Do not pay your bills. Do not pay telephone or electricity bills. This is war...."



A.N.R. Robinsen

The most critical events for Eric Williams were yet to come however. And they were not to come from his political opposition (Unions, Black Power or the press) but instead from within the ranks of his own Government. The first crisis was the sudden resignation from Cabinet of Williams' Minister of External Affairs, A.N.R. Robinson. On Monday, April 13, Williams received the following note from Robinson:

"I hereby submit my resignation from the Cabinet. I do so because I do not in all conscience feel satisfied that a sufficiently serious attempt is being made by the government to remove the underlying causes of the present situation in the country. Accordingly, I ask that you advise the Governor General to revoke my appointment as a Minister".

At 44, Robinson was the youngest and most popular member of the Government. Once considered as a possible successor to Williams, Robinson once held the critical post of Minister of Finance. In 1967, however, as a result of differences between the Finance Minister and the business community, Williams shunted his young protege into the Ministry of External Affairs. There, Robinson has since remained a curious "opposition within the Government".

Williams' second crisis came just one week later. Over the weekend of April 18-19, George Weekes, head of the Oilfield Workers, Granger and several other labour union leaders announced their intention to march in a protest demonstration on Tuesday 21st. Sugar workers, postmen and other essential services announced that they were going on strike at the same time. The meaning of this was clear for everyone. A revolution was at hand and unless a State of National Emergency was called, the Government of Eric Williams was certain to collapse. It was then, on the occasion of the declaration of the State of Emergency that the Army rebelled.

On Monday evening, April 20, the Proclamation ordering the Nation into a State of Emergency was signed by the Acting Governor General, Sir Arthur McShine. The following morning at sunrise, thirteen of the major Black Power leaders including George Weekes of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union were picked up at their respective homes and taken into custody. Of all the major figures in the movement, only Geddes Granger escaped detention until two days later when he was arrested in a small snackette in the south of Trinidad. Granger offered no resistance.

Meanwhile, the soldiers at Teteron Bay, the major base for Trinidad and Tobago's Regiment, were drawing rifles and ammunition -- part of the normal procedure under Emergency regulations. Suddenly one of the soldiers turned on the officers and held them at gunpoint. Some shooting occurred. At one point the officers were able to free themselves, only to be taken captive again by other soldiers from another unit. Between 8.00 and 9.00 a.m. Tuesday morning, a major element of the Regiment had revolted and taken control of the entire Defence Force arsenal (figures are difficult to fix but reliable sources put the rebels as high as 360 to 400 -- roughly half the total Regiment.) Dave D'Abreau's prophecy had become a reality.

Below: Lt. Rex LaSalle



Above: Colonel Jeffrey Serrette  
Below: Colonel Stanley Johnson



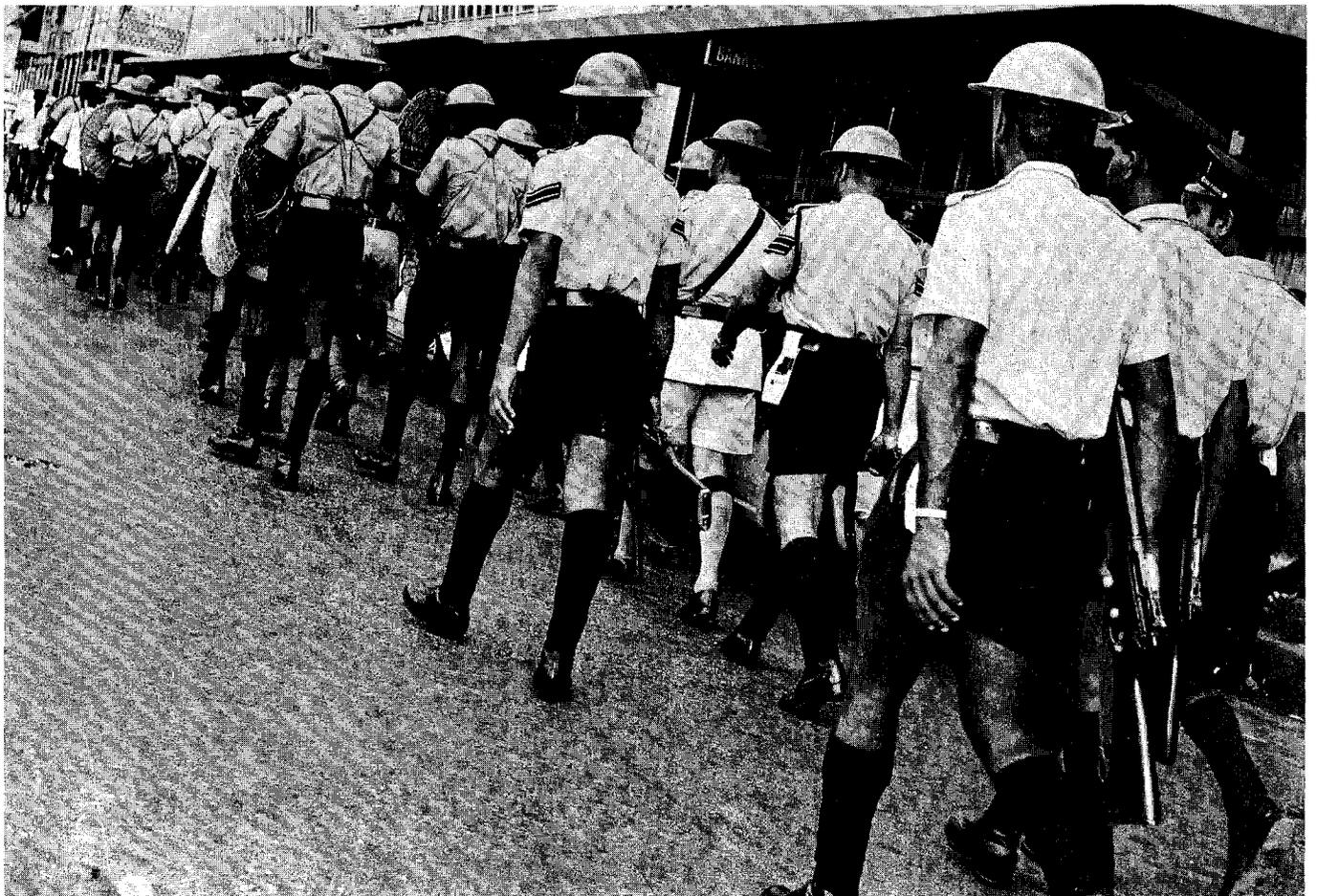
Then word of the revolt managed to leak out of the base to the Commander of the Coast Guard, David Bloom. On Coast Guard cutter, FPB Trinity, Bloom approached the Teteron Bay area and Chaguaramus just as a convoy of jeeps and private cars began moving toward Port of Spain. The situation was clear. The rebellion had spread throughout the Army and a military take-over was rapidly developing. In a desperate effort, Bloom ordered his guns to shell the convoy and then the road along which it was moving. This heavy fire forced the troops to retreat to Teteron where they took up defensive positions.

Williams acted quickly. He requested arms from Guyana, Jamaica, Venezuela and the United States. That night, Venezuela responded with some equipment for Williams' police force and a few hours later, the Americans flew in 75,000 rounds of ammunition to the island. In the meantime, desperate for time to regroup his forces, Williams dispatched his newly appointed Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Karl Hudson-Phillips, to negotiate with the rebel soldiers. As one of the shrewdest diplomats Trinidad has produced, Hudson-Phillips apparently stalled the rebel troops long enough for the foreign sources of weapons and ammunition to deliver. Negotiations took place at the Chagacabana Hotel and lasted most of that day.

The leader of the rebel forces was Lt. Rex LaSalle, a very popular officer within enlisted ranks and a black power supporter. For some months, LaSalle has been under the scrutiny of higher ranking officers who at one point attempted to have him court-martialed. One private described this attempt: "They were after LaSalle and a few other officers because they knew LaSalle was a progressive and educated officer and we liked him".

Conditions in the Army reflected many of the same social problems found in the Trinidad society as a whole. Men in the ranks charged the senior officers with racism, inefficiency, victimization and poor working conditions. Privates complain of the fact that a beach used by regimental officers was out of bounds to them but that privates from the British or American navy have been given permission to use the same beach. The enlisted men's barracks was also in a poor state of repair until British troops were due to arrive on a training mission (troops later used in Anguilla). Then, money was provided for repairs. There was also great sympathy within the Regiment for the Black Power movement. Officers and men split over this issue and anyone talking "Black Power" was severely disciplined.

The head of the Regiment, Colonel Stanley Johnson, failed to recognize the divisions within the Army. A Sandhurst-trained, British-oriented officer, Johnson was completely out of touch with his men. For example in one oration during a military review the Colonel urged his men to remember that they had taken an oath to defend the Queen, her heirs and their heirs, forever. In response, the soldiers began rebelling in symbolic ways. Many grew their hair in the Afro-style. And last Christmas, at a dinner which officers traditionally serve privates, the soldiers shocked the Regimental hierarchy by refusing to eat the meal and many of the men actually started to dump food onto the floor.

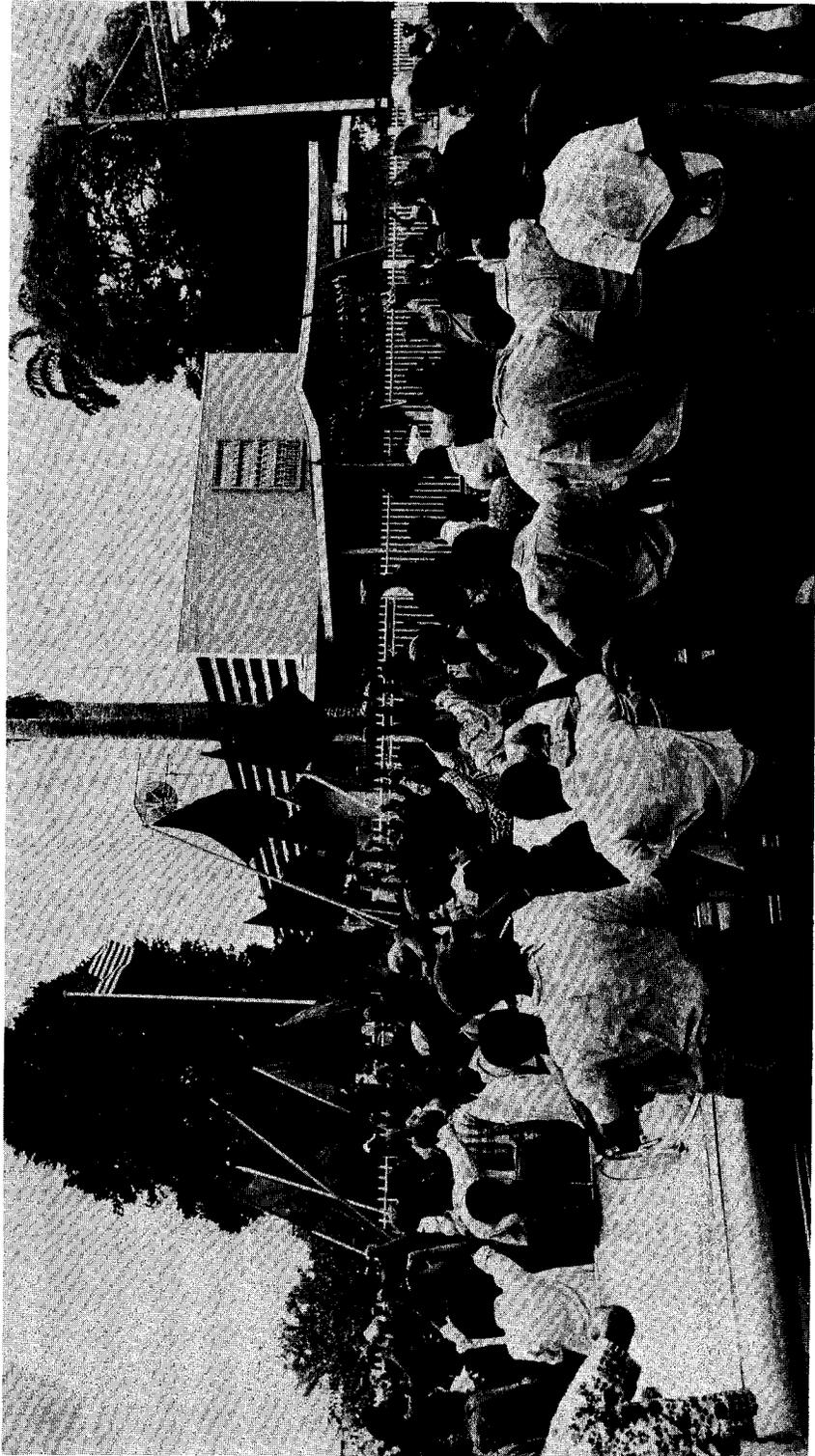


As the rebellion progressed inside the regiment, police were occupied with keeping order in Port of Spain. The threat of massive upheaval created an acute sense of urgency in the capital as 52 stores were smashed and arson kept the fire brigade moving from one end of the city to the other. At one point, the Regimental Reserve Barracks burst into flames and burned to the ground. Black smoke billowed over the Port of Spain skyline and many felt that the revolution had come. A 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. curfew was imposed.

By nightfall however, the streets were empty, and quiet was broken only by an occasional fire truck moving quickly through the city. Never has Trinidad been so curiously silent. In the middle-class neighbourhoods, nervous guards were posted to keep watch over the houses. Radios tuned to the same stations provided the only means of communication between Trinidadians and it was only the announcer who was able to break the consequent sense of isolation. Government's control of the situation was extremely tenuous.

It was at this point that Williams decided to make the "precautionary" request of American military assistance. Six American war-ships left Puerto Rico for Trinidad. However, it is both ironic and sad that ten years after he had led an exuberant march of 15,000 rain-drenched Trinidadians to Chaguaramus (the U.S. military base) and demanded that the "Americans Go Home", Eric Williams thought it necessary to call on the Americans to return. It was ten years to the day: April 22, 1960. Nothing other than this ironic twist of history could possibly demonstrate more effectively how bankrupt Williams' Government had become.

However, it wasn't the presence of the American carrier, nor the 75,000 rounds of ammunition provided by the American Government which saved Williams' regime. In fact, had U.S. troops landed, it is likely that the population might have turned completely against the Government. Rather, Williams was saved as a consequence of inaction by the labour unions (all unions which had planned or were on strike resumed work as the State of Emergency was announced). Not even a whimper was heard from the oilfield workers as their President-General, George Weekes was jailed. (When this happened to a trade union leader in Jamaica, the entire work force went into the streets.) Another factor was the failure of the population to defy the Emergency Regulation forbidding demonstrations. Had one or two thousand people started marching in support of the Army rebellion on Tuesday morning, it might have been the action which would have altered the entire situation. And even though he was at liberty for twenty-four hours after the police had rounded up the Black Power leadership, Geddes Granger apparently had no organizational depth or contingency planning ready. Finally, the ability of the Government to stall for time in negotiation with the rebels provided an important opportunity to regroup forces and bring in badly needed arms and ammunition.



Demonstration before the American Embassy

The negotiations lasted all week long. First Karl Hudson-Phillips and then Colonel Joffre Serrette (newly appointed Commander of the Regiment) represented Government in those discussions. The content of these discussions was not publicly available; but as a result of conversations with rebel leaders by phone, it is known that three proposals were first put to Government by Lt. LaSalle: first, a general amnesty for all rebel soldiers at Teteron; second, a release of prisoners detained by police; and third, the resignation of certain Cabinet Ministers.

Government rejected these terms but countered with the suggestion that a Court of Inquiry be established in order to examine the complaints of the Regimental dissidents. If the Court found good cause for the rebellion, amnesty might result. Whatever the findings of the three man Court of Inquiry appointed by Government (three old Army veterans were rushed into Chaguaramus by Williams and held a three day session), its convening produced the desired results. LaSalle and his men were lulled into submission and put away their arms.

Today, Lt. LaSalle and twenty-six other rebels face charges of treason and sedition. The revolution was over. And the rest is politics.

Yours,

*Frank M<sup>s</sup> Donald*

Frank McDonald.

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