

CALYPSOS FROM TRINIDAD:
Politics, Intrigue & Violence in the 1930s,
Including the Butler Calypsos



1. IERE NOW AND LONG AGO - Atilla The Hun and Lord Beginner (39451, 17264, N.Y. 3/22/35)
2. MONEY IS KING - The Tiger (39418, 17254 N.Y., 3/18/35)
3. THE GOLD IN AFRICA - The Tiger (60967, 17271 N.Y., 4/2/36)
4. BARGEE PELAURI - The Lion (60970, 17272, N.Y. 4/2/36)
5. SEND YOUR CHILDREN TO THE ORPHAN HOME - The Lion (61005, 17284 N.Y., 4/8/36)
6. PARAMARIBO (Rufus Callender) - The Caresser (61964, 17301 N.Y., 2/16/37)
7. AH, GERTIE (Fitz McLean) - The Caresser (62007, 17328, N.Y. 2/23/37)
8. TREASURY SCANDAL (Raymond Quevedo) - Atilla The Hun (61976, 17320, N.Y. 2/19/37)
9. I DON'T KNOW HOW THE YOUNG MEN LIVING (Fitz McLean) - The Executor (61965, 17301, N.Y. 2/16/37)
10. SHOP CLOSING ORDINANCE (Fitz McLean) - The Executor (61975, 17308, N.Y. 2/19/37)
11. TOO BOTHERATION (Errol Duke) - The Growler (91479, 17390 Trinidad, 3/15/38)
12. THE RATS - The Tiger (60993, 17272, N.Y. 4/7/36)
13. DOWN THE ROAD (Neville Marciano) - The Tiger (91463, 17359 Trinidad, 3/14/38)
14. TRY A SCREW TO GET THROUGH - The Tiger (60989, 17268, N.Y. 4/4/36)

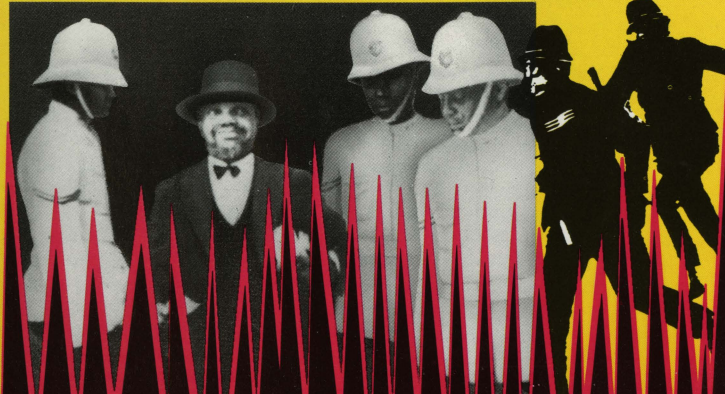
15. THE STRIKE (Raymond Quevedo) - Atilla The Hun (91427, 17371 Trinidad, 3/8/38)
16. MISS MARIE'S ADVICE (Neville Marciano) - The Tiger (91471, 17417 Trinidad, 3/14/38)
17. WHERE WAS BUTLER? (Raymond Quevedo) - Atilla The Hun (91451, 17385 Trinidad, 3/12/38)
18. THE GOVERNOR'S RESIGNATION (Raymond Quevedo) - Atilla The Hun (91408, 17363 Trinidad, 3/4/38)
19. WE MOURN THE LOSS OF SIR MURCHISON FLETCHER (Philip Garcia) - Lord Executor (91426, 17392 Trinidad, 3/8/38)
20. MR. NANKIVELL'S SPEECH (Raymond Quevedo) - Atilla The Hun (91401, 17394 Trinidad, 3/3/38)
21. COMMISSION'S REPORT (Raymond Quevedo) - Atilla The Hun (91376, 17350 Trinidad, 2/26/38)
22. SEDITION LAW (Norman Span) - King Radio (91919, 17483 Trinidad, 2/4/40)
23. THE FIVE YEAR PLAN (Cyril Monrose) - Atilla The Hun (91613, 17402 Trinidad, 1/25/39)

All New York recordings are accompanied by Gerald Clark and his Caribbean Serenaders. #11 with Clemons Smith and his Broadway Syncopators. #13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, & 23 with Cyril Monrose String Orchestra. #16 with Audley Francis' Washboard Orchestra. #20 with John "Buddy" Williams and his Blue Rhythm Orchestra.

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CALYPSOS FROM TRINIDAD

POLITICS, INTRIGUE & VIOLENCE IN THE 1930s



WHERE WAS BUTLER?
Four Killed
21 Injured
In Rio Claro

CITY STRIKE
ONE WOUNDED

Atilla The Hun • The Tiger •
The Lion • The Caresser •
The Executor • King Radio
The Growler • Lord Beginner

CALYPSOS FROM TRINIDAD:

Politics, Intrigue & Violence in the 1930s, Including the Butler Calypsos

This collection offers an unusual opportunity to examine an important incident which became a catalyst in the early years of a Caribbean island colony's movement towards independence. The first few songs reflect a common struggle Trinidad shared with the rest of the industrialized Western world as it tried to extricate itself from the effects of the Depression. Occasional details also appear which bring a focus to the local situation, highlighting the plight of unwanted children, the problems of competition for low-wage employment and other elements of rural and urban poverty.

The latter numbers intensify the focus, with songs commemorating a 1937 oil field strike which was a dramatic element in the struggle of Trinidad's black majority (and East Indian minority) to gain access to the institutions of government and financial power. Strike leader Uriah Butler was an authentic worker hero who threatened a social structure which had been largely undisturbed since the time of slavery. Following the events recounted in these historic calypsos, Butler was imprisoned for over seven years, but the colonial system he challenged paid an even greater price.

These events grew out of a tiring colonial economy, based primarily on sugar and cocoa exports until oil resources were discovered and developed in the 1910s and 1920s. Prices for agricultural commodities were never stable, and the Depression took a serious toll on working-class livelihoods, which even previously had rarely been better than subsistence level. Oil exports were more successful, but profits did not "trickle down" to oil field workers. The colonial power structure had historically resisted the attempts of workers to form viable collective bargaining associations and, by the 1930s, the unequal distribution of wealth and resources was an increasingly conspicuous economic blight.

The charismatic reformer whose efforts did the most to focus on these inequities and who began the process to undermine colonial authority was neither a Marxist nor a revolutionary. Grenadian-born Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler (1897-1977) became politically active in the years following his service in World War I. The lure of employment brought him to the oil fields of South Trinidad in 1921, where he also served as minister of the Moravian Baptist Church of Fyzabad. An injury on the job in 1929 ended his employment and succeeding years saw Butler becoming active with social reformer Andrew Arthur Cipriani (1875-1945), who had been president of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) since 1923 and Port of Spain's

representative in the legislature since 1925. Though he was a wealthy white descendant of a French-Corsican family, Cipriani had intervened in cases involving racial discrimination in the war and became a champion of numerous working class reforms at home. When the Trade Union Law made official labor union registry possible, Cipriani changed the name of TWA to the Trinidad Labour Party.

Nevertheless, strikes and picketing were expressly forbidden under the law and Cipriani, despite worsening labor conditions, failed to test its limits. He refused to intervene on behalf of sugar workers in a 1934 hunger march or on behalf of an oil field strike in 1935. The latter, led by Butler and John Rojas of the Fyzabad chapter of TLP, served to weaken Cipriani's position as a labor leader and to promote Butler's reputation among workers.

In 1936, Butler and Cipriani inevitably parted company. Joining Butler in his departure from TLP was a young lawyer, descended from East Indian laborers brought to Trinidad as indentured servants, named Adrian Cola Rienzi. Born Krishna Deonarine, Rienzi took his name from the fourteenth-century Roman populist leader Cola di Rienzi. Richard Wagner's 1840 opera *Rienzi* is based on his life. Rienzi and Butler had formed the Trinidad Citizens' League late in 1935, in part to oppose Cipriani's "laissez-faire" policies; by the time the pair left TLP, the new organization was rapidly gaining worker support.

By then, Butler's attention was becoming increasingly focused on conditions in the oil fields. Oil profits revived handsomely in 1935-36, due, among other factors, to depression-based wages still offered to workers in defiance of a rapidly rising cost of living. Butler's Baptist background gave him a messianic image and his dramatic speeches used biblical imagery for effect. On August 1, 1936, he formed still another political labor organization, the British Empire Workers and Citizens' Home Rule Party (BEW & CHRP). Initially he appealed through the party for reforms but he was ignored by both the government and oil interests. His next move was to organize a sit-down strike of oil workers at Forest Preserve on June 18, 1937. At a support rally in Fyzabad the following day, police were called to break up the meeting. Butler was to be arrested, but he escaped as the meeting turned into a rout; fourteen (including two police) were killed as the riot spread to other locations over the next several days and workers expressed grievances which previously had no real outlet.

Butler went into hiding for the rest of the summer, surrendering only when he was promised an opportunity to testify at meetings of the Forster Commission, convened by the Crown to study the causes of labor unrest. The Commission's findings dismissed him, in the words of Atilla's calypso, as a "A fanatic Negro called Butler/Who uttered speeches

inflammatory/ And caused disorders in this colony." (#21)

Butler was found guilty of sedition and sentenced to two years; a successful appeal took nearly that long to be completed. During Butler's imprisonment, his old friend Rienzi took over the reins of leadership, forming the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (OWTU) in July 1937, while colleagues founded a parallel organization for sugar workers. Rienzi grew more powerful in the labor movement, even as he placated the government and industries with "reasonable" tactics which slowed worker progress in obtaining satisfactory negotiations.

When Butler was discharged from prison in May 1939, Rienzi appointed him to a leadership position in OWTU, but their differing agendas made cooperation impossible. England was on the eve of war and both the government and Rienzi perceived Butler as a dangerous subversive. Butler supported an asphalt plant strike in July while Rienzi and other OWTU officials opposed it. Butler was expelled from the union a week later and soon formed a rival union which drew members away from OWTU. As his organizing activities increased that September, England went to war with Germany. New defense regulations made it possible to imprison Butler again, this time without benefit of trial. He remained in jail for the duration of the war. Details of these events and of Butler's later years are better chronicled in the books cited below. His crucial role in labor politics in the 1930s helped to develop a new sense of worth and power among the disenfranchised working classes of Trinidad and Tobago and channeled sentiments which were to coalesce into a successful movement toward independence from England in 1962. In recent years the new government has moved Labour Day observances to coincide with the anniversary of the Fyzabad rally on June 19, 1937, cementing Uriah Butler's place in history.

Calypsos in the 1930s were recorded under the watchful eye of colonial government censors, whose job was to purge them of sexual ribaldry and dangerous political sentiments, especially during the tense period following Butler's activities in 1937. Gordon Rohlehr (see bibliography) cites the text of numerous songs submitted for censorship prior to recording, including several in this collection. Some were completely disapproved; in other cases, only selected verses were struck. In retrospect, the judgement of the censors seems inconsistent, given the forthright nature of at least some of the lyrics which made it past their scrutiny and onto records.

My acknowledgement and thanks go to friends who provided both help and encouragement at every stage of this project. Chris Strachwitz and Archie Green offered their enthusiastic endorsement at the beginning. John Cowley, Keith Warner, Don Hill, Richard Noblett and Robert Bamberger helped me locate reference materials. Don, Lise Winer and

Steve Shapiro prepared several lyric transcriptions on which my own are based. Keith Warner's fine ear helped to ensure a high degree of accuracy in the final result. James Parten and Steven Lasker helped me obtain original recordings, and Jack Towers performed his routinely masterful magic in getting the best possible sound from them onto tape.

(Dick Spottswood-1987 & 1991)

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1. IERE NOW AND LONG AGO – Atilla the Hun & Lord Beginner

Beginner:

How different is the island we know
To the Trinidad of the long ago (2X)
She's really the gem of the Antilles
An' the queen of the West Indies
With motor-cars runnin' up an' down
Trinidad comin' like-a New York town

Atilla:

The island has changed up in different ways
To the Trinidad of the bygone days
Buildings have sprung up all aroun'
We have got a clean an' beautiful town
An' by this it says, we are told
Our streets as good as any in the whole wide world

With motor cars...

Beginner:

Long ago, to reach the Manzanilla shore
It used to take us a week or more
Now with the distances twice as far
It take a couple of hours in a motor-car
Today we have electric lights in our home
Refrigerators, radios and telephone
With motor-cars...

Atilla:

The south has changed up entirely
San Fernando's a beautiful town to see
Pointe-A-Pierre, which is lost in obscurity
Now possesses a giant oil refinery

Macqueripe, which presented an awful sight
Is now recognize as the tourist delight
With motor-cars...

Beginner:

To see the change we are proud an' glad
That has taken place in Trinidad

This celebration of progress and prosperity is one of only a few in the calypso discography of the time. It's useful to note that there was visible wealth in Trinidad; however it only served to fan the flames of resentment. in some quarters.

2. MONEY IS KING – The Tiger

If a man has money today
People do not care if he has cocobé¹ (2X)
He can commit murder and get off free
An' live in the governor's company
But, if you are poor, people will tell you shoo
An' a dog is better than you

If you have money to buy in a store
The boss will shake your hands at the door
Call them clerks to take down everyt'ing
Whiskey, cloth, earring and diamond ring
He may send them to your house on a motorbike
You can pay the bills whenever you like
Not a soul will ask you a thing
They know very well that money is king

A man with a collar an' tie and waistcoat
Ask the Chineeman to trus' him acra an' float²
"Me no trus' am," bawl out de Chineeman
"An' you better move on from me fryin' pan
You college man, me no know ABC
You wantum acra, gie am penny"

Chief of which we must now mention
Is none other than the *Trinidad Guardian*¹
Then it's a fact which was once a dream:
They started work on the harbor scheme²
With motor-cars...

¹ newspaper ² see also *The Five Year Plan* (#23)

De worm start to jump in de man's belly
And he cried out, "A dog is better than me"

A dog can walk about and take up bone
Fowl head, stale bread, fish tail and pone
If it's a good breed and not too wild
Some people will take it an' mind as a child
But when a hungry man goes out to beg
They will set a bulldog behind his leg
Forty policemen may chalk him down too
You see where a dog is better than you.

If you have money and things going nice
Any woman will call you honey an' spice
If you can't give her a dress, one new pair of shoe'
She'll say she have no uses for you
When you try to caress her, she will tell you "stop
I can't carry love in the Chineese shop"
I'm sure most of you will agree that it's true
If you haven't money, dog is better than you

¹ leprosy, ² extend credit for food

As the "Siparia Tiger," Neville Marcano became a prizefighter while still in his teens. Almost against his will, he took up calypso soon afterwards, making up a song to sing in a tent competition when he ran out of money. This was in 1934, when Atilla and the Lion first went to New York to make records. As the Growling Tiger, young Neville immersed himself in the art and found himself ready to go to New York with Atilla and Lord Beginner in 1935, largely due to the acclaim given to *Money Is King*. Tiger's predecessors had often touched on themes of social injustice, but rarely with his ability to blend deep outrage with genuine humor.

3. THE GOLD IN AFRICA – The Tiger

Gol', the gol'
The gol', the gol'
The gol' in Africa
Mussolini want from the Emperor

Abyssinia appeal to the League for peace
Mussolini actions were like a beas'
A villain, a t'ief, a highway robber
And a shameless dog for a dictator

He cross the border and added more
The Emperor had no intentions for war
That man I call a criminal
The man destroy churches an' hospital

He said expansion he really need
He have forty-five million heads to feed

Why he don' attack the Japanese
England, France or, hang on, on Germany?

The man want to kill King Haile Selassie
To enslave his territory
They began to cry for food an' water
In that burning deserts of Africa

We have diamond, ruby an' pearl
Platinum, silver an' even gol'
I don't know why the man making so much strife
I now believe he want Haile Selassie wife

If he want gol' as a dictator
Try in Demerara¹
Venezuela or Canada
Austro Hungar' or else in America

¹ Guyana (then British Guiana)

Later in 1935, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini led an invasion of the independent African kingdom of Ethiopia, which became a milestone on the road to World War II. Emperor Haile Selassie's under-equipped resistance soon floundered and he was forced to flee his country in May 1936. Blacks around the world were angered both by the invasion and by the failure of Europe and the League of Nations to support Ethiopia or establish meaningful sanctions against Italy. The event also served to cement feelings of unity and a sense of common struggle with

colonized Africa. These sentiments were particularly ascendant in Trinidad and Tiger's harsh indictment of "Il Duce," coupled with the suggestion that he invade England, surely antagonized colonial authorities.

4. BARGEE PELAURI – The Lion

Though depression is in Trinidad
Maintaining a wife isn't very hard (2X)
Well, you need no ham nor biscuit nor bread
But there are ways that they can be easily fed
Like the coolies,¹ on bargee pelauri
Dhalpat and dalpouri
Channa parata an' the aloo in talkaree

I want you young men to realize
That these are the days to economize
Though your wife may need your crab an'
the calaloo
Stew beef or pork an' pound plantain too
But the time is too hard to get that today
An' so you got to feed the wife the easiest way
Like the coolies—
Today one can hardly get salt-fish

Much less to get a nice beefsteak dish
But remember, we have got our yam
an' khus-khus
Don' talk about a ton-load of other bush
You boil them together, an' make your melee
An' then you have a champion feed every day
Or otherwise—

Poor people say, "If you cannot get mommy
Well, make up your minds to suck your granny"
So, if you cannot get your carpets or
your counterpane
I mean, you put your shoes, your silk an' satin
Remember the fifteen cents watchikong,²
four cents a yard
Prints to make your nightgown
An' otherwise—

¹ East Indian (derogatory) ² sneakers

Pomp and Circumstance introduces and ironically underscores Lion's satirical recommendations for East-Indian-style diet substitutions.

5. SEND YOUR CHILDREN TO THE ORPHAN HOME – The Lion

Mothers who can't afford to
Maintain their children as they ought to (2X)
Because the time is so very hard
The children father so very bad
Before you leave them to roam
Gladly send them to the orphan home

There are many fathers with such dirty minds
As would leave their wives and children to pine
Although they know that the time is hard
Still, they treat their wives and children so bad
And then they mother may be unable
To see that they children be comfortable

Well, before you leave them to roam
Gladly send them to the orphan home

The nuns up there are blessed people
And they will see that your children be
comfortable
Well, to tell you this I forgot
That they will be baptized if they are not
And they will prepare for first communion
And then be given confirmation
So, before you leave them to roam
Gladly send them to the orphan home

There is a time for education
And a time for recreation
There is a time when they cannot shirk
And that's the time when they are taught to work

Though times were unquestionably hard in the years preceding the Butler strikes, the understated irony of Lion's observations of negligent parents suggest conditions beyond the purely economic which motivated the abandonment of unwanted children. The British ethos viewed charity as a more desirable social goal than collective bargaining, with the result that dependent classes tended to remain that way.

6. PARAMARIBO – The Caresser

To Paramaribo
That's the place I want to go
I am such a crooked lad
I can't get work in Trinidad

I've tried all technological screws
But is kept back by circumstantial views
I can't eliminate the discrepancies
Which unfortunacy brings to my families
My indescribable unsuccessfulness

They can be first-class musicians
And men, a proper education
So, before you leave them to roam
Gladly throw them in the orphan home

There is a day called Visiting Day
Appointed during every month, it's on the first
Sunday
It is appointed to families and friends
That's the day you can gladly see your children
And you can carry money, eatables or toys
And give them to your children, whether girl or
boys
So, before you leave them to roam
Gladly heave them in the orphan home

Patience is virtue but I cannot bear this
"Sweet are the uses of adversity"
A proverb for rich ones but not for me.

My incessant endeavors constantly fail
By entirely producing the saddest tale
But if I can't get money to pay
I will take rat passage and stow away
Looking back at those dependent on me
House rent to pay an' a young baby

A sick wife, five children, a mother-in-law
 Each refused appeal makes my heart more sore
 Sometimes, when hunger stare me in my face
 Not even a slice of mango to taste
 Don't you think it's a mortal sin
 For me to be daily living on win'?
 My clothes is tattered, my shoes is bad

Though Caresser's *Edward the VIII*, commemorating the 1936 abdication of the Duke of Windsor, was one of the best-selling calypso records of the era, he was not considered a first rate chantwell at home. Some of the shaky usage in *Paramaribo* may indicate a reason why, though there are poignant images which turn it into an unforgettable document of the times.

7. AH, GERTIE – The Caresser

Ah, Gertie darling, when you are poor
 Lots of things you have to endure (2X)
 Making us suffer with starvation
 Nowhere to live, what a sensation
 The rich man work you worse than a slave
 When you take stock, the end of you is de grave
 Truly, might indeed is right
 Advantage they takes of us black is white
 Before man's unbearable case
 Is the many privations he has to face
 He enjoys with a measure of liberty
 Under the yoke of political slavery
 More than civilization, I fin'
 Has made things terrible for mankin'
 Lionhearted, indeed
 No sympathy for the poor in need
 They have more feelings, of course
 For the dog, the captive mule, an' de horse

Friends, is not my biology sad?
 My children is naked, hungry and pale
 I'm blessed I've not yet been sent to jail
 But, in spite of all my desolation
 I've evaded all evil inspiration
 And to take this chance, although it is sad
 I'm compulsory boun' to leave Trinidad

The best of feed some animals get
 An', to boot, are kept an' reared as a pet
 But, with human bein', it's a different tone
 They'll hardly save your life with a bone
 Alderman Richards, our new mayor
 Who brought the workman association¹ here
 An' through his instrumentality
 Mr. Pointer came to this colony
 The first woman druggist he also made
 So tribute and honor to him should be paid
 To be loyal, faithful an' true
 Good things for us he is going to do
 While we watch an' pray
 Conditions are getting worse every day
 To get charity, as you know
 Either pay a fine or to jail you go
 Some went mad through sorrows an' grief
 Some committed suicide to get relief

Let the oppressors have they own way
 You can bet every hog have its Saturday²

8. TREASURY SCANDAL – Atilla the Hun

I wonder if it's bobol'¹
 What they doing with taxpayer's money at all (2X)
 All around the town you can hear the talk
 Two hundred thousand dollars can' walk
 People saying it's conspiracy
 I mean the scandal in the treasury
 It was about just eight months past
 That the whole of Trinidad stood aghast
 When the government made a declaration
 That created a great sensation
 In the book of the treasury something went wrong
 Two hundred thousand dollars could not be foun'
 And every clerk say, "It ain't me fault
 So it must be a spirit open de vault"
 Well now, the entire population
 Are demanding explanation
 For when to balance his books the poor clerk fail
 They take him to court and sends him to jail
 Some say in baccarat the money los'
 Others declare that they buy race horse
 That someone stole it we can't deny

The standard histories of modern Trinidad and Tobago don't record the event Atilla narrates in this nicely constructed kaiso. His air of detachment and mock envy of the "clever attempt" surely mirrored the feelings of his listeners, who were coming to the conclusion that they were ruled by a government which could hardly see after its own interests, much less theirs.

9. I DON'T KNOW HOW THE YOUNG MEN LIVING – The Executor

I don't know how the young men living
 They never have a shilling (2X)

¹ perhaps in competition with the Butler/Rienzi
 BEW & CHRP ² i.e. gets butchered for market

For money ain't got wings and it cannot fly
 All of this evidence goes to show
 They were bobolizing long time ago
 In fact, it's an opinion of mine
 They carry 'way cash a very long time
 I'm sure that near everybody know
 How they used to burn the notes long ago
 Well, this clever culprit, he use he head
 He keep the bank notes and burn up paper
 instead
 Well, I would not have made this song at all
 But I ain't got nothing in the bobol
 While I, poor Atilla, seeing hell
 They carrying away cash and they doing well
 For two hundred thousand, take it from me
 I would make five years quite happily
 And, when I come from jail, what the deuce I
 care?
 I'd be living the life of a millionaire
¹ scam, fraud

Oh, Tommy, open the door
Gimme me bundle and lemme go (2X)

In the day he walk 'bout
Only coming with his sweet mouth
Calling for his (minou)
Fowl, pound plantain and callaloo

In the night he come an' peep
Only longing for a place to sleep
As to cast his weary head

Lord Executor was a generation older than the other singers in this collection. Atila states that Executor made his debut in 1897; he remained an active kaisonian, despite an accident which caused blindness in later life, until his death in the mid-1950s. Many of his best songs showed strong social conscience, though this one uncharacteristically seems to blame the victim more than his circumstances.

10. SHOP CLOSING ORDINANCE – The Executor

The new shop closing ordinance
Is an intolerance (2X)
A thing that should not be in a community
Of wealth and prosperity
Through the passing of the law, after four
Bound to affect the poor

I was passing when I saw placard against the wall
Posters large an' small
Inviting the poor of humanity
To protest unitedly
"Oh my!" they going to cry, I will tell you why
They can neither sell nor buy...

I repeat the statement that were 'ready made:
Depression is on parade
Emaciated beings are everywhere
The embodiment of despair

As a lump of lead on the cozy bed
You can see that villain next day
Half crazy and totol-bey'
His watchikong, goodness knows
And half of his feet expose

Who can measure the human mind
When it is uncultured and unrefined
An impulse (of) society
And not to be mentioned in history

¹ crazed, dazzled

Some paralyze, some cripple otherwise
All seem penalize...

Is the government blind an' cannot see
The decrepitude an' misery
Of women an' men, girls an' boys
Don't rob them of those sparks of joy
For, if the stores are close, no food nor clothes
On the rum they'll get overdose...

We shall miss the bustle of Charlotte Street
Where wealth an' industry meet
The lights, the life, the crowds to an' fro
Look how to the stores they go
So, don't you cast a gloom, as the spirit from
the tomb
Allow the island to bloom...

11. TOO BOTHERATION – The Growler

Oh, the outside nation too botheration
It's them that bringing this place starvation
Put them outa me lan'
Before I take a drive in the prison band

Oh, believe me, I don't know what to do
With them Grenadian and Carriacou
Oh, when they gets a dollar a week
Believe me, they will think that they win a sweep

Oh, this is a thing I can't understand
The people come in me native land
Cut down alla me pay and what you think
They baffling on me today

Oh, they come in here just like stinging ants
Some of them in they gun-mouth' pants
Now they gettin' so fresh

That they want to tell you how you must dress
And when they go home to their country
They will make they style on they family
Hear what they'll tell they brother
"John, I now from America"

I must really ask the authority
Please to stop this irregularity
If this was a place they coulda used guns
Well, every bloomin' Grenadian would have to run.

Oh, they send them up on government farms
Some of them feet bigger than old wild yams
Now they want to abuse
The one who learn them to walk in shoes

¹ tapered

Along with Lord Invader's memorable - and controversial 1945 hit *Small Island* (*Go back where you really come from*), Growler offers the standard complaint of those suffering from an already depressed economy who become further frustrated as they see immigrants willing to take jobs at substandard wages. Though this calypso mentions neither Butler nor the strikes, one wonders if Growler's indictment is meant to include Grenada-born Butler, whom a minority of Trinidadian workers must surely have seen merely as a disrupter and trouble-maker.

12. THE RATS – The Tiger

It's a burnin' shame
To think about the spiders in Port-of-Spain (2X)
I mean the flea, scorpion an' santapee'
The rat, the mouse an' the vampire bat
An', if in Queen Street you don't meet them there
Make two blocks, they pop up in Marine Square
If they're dressed in red

You know danger, it lies ahead
After all, if they garment blue
They will beat you an' rob you too
I mean the rat an' the vampire bat
Along with that bad luck, you lose you hat
An', after they beat you mercilessly
Two to one you don't sleep in custody

At six-thirty
Some would powder immediately
An' take up duty
As a member of the constabulary
As the early bird suck the sweetest flower
Of course, on the road they take up tower
Don't matter how they dress or how they rouge
It mean Mucurapo or La Payrouse²

But, in Marine Square
You're boun' to meet the spider were dere
After all, what the santapee
They would drive you to Lavantille³
I mean the bad scorpions around the town

An elegant and extended metaphor about local prostitutes.

13. DOWN THE ROAD – The Tiger

Down de road, mama, down de road
Tie up you dress an' run down de road
Your children too harden, they doesn't feel
In that prison channel they bound to yiel'

Down de road, mama, down de road (2X)
You children too hardened, they doesn't feel
In the prison channel they bound to yiel'

When she got the news, her mother went wild
With excitement, trying to protec' her child
They too harden', gal, they doesn't feel
In that prison channel they bound to yiel'

Tomkin that made the attack
And Sims with the cutlass behin' his back
Brown Boy *pas connait danger*²
Matura *descend* ³ Morunday

When they sting you, you prefer the burial groun'
An', if you get doctor, don't hesitate
Run quickly by the hospital gate

Some are tall an' fat
Others are flat like an alphagat⁴
Imagine, they're trying old screw⁵
If you ain't smart, they will put you through
They have so much tac(t), too much skill an' brain
I mean, they bad varmint in Port-of-Spain
An' now I mus' speak of the country rat
They will grin' your bones and will melt your fat

¹ centipedes ² local cemeteries ³ shanty district
⁴ sandal ⁵ a scam

Tommy, you should bite your fingernail
You are well six months from the Royal Gaol
You ain't even wait to see Carnival
Now they charge you habitual criminal

I heard a voice calling from afar:
"Crabda, you don't listen to your mother
Don't cry, too late to realize
In that Royal Gaol you done penalize"

Nowhere in a British territory
You can't commit violence so easily
Ask anybody, the charge for grand larceny
The first penalty's ten years in custody

Aun' Ella took her troubles to heart
And quite suddenly from us she depart
Her actions were true, she was as good as fooled

But her children who run her out of the world ¹ Carrera, an island prison ² was unafraid ³ killed

This old-style kalinda focuses on the sorrows of women with delinquent children. Its perspective alternates between first, second and third person, lending casual continuity and suggesting that elements were adapted from still older songs. Perhaps the stick-fighters named in the third verse were among these wayward juveniles. Costumed stick-fighting bands were an integral element of Carnival celebrations for decades after emancipation in 1834. In recent years the combat has come to be enacted in pantomime but Tiger suggests that it was still part of the problem of juvenile delinquency in the troubled 1930s. A minor point: it's hard to refrain from speculating that the Sims of the third verse could be the Jules Sims who recorded stick-fighter kalindas in 1914.

14. TRY A SCREW TO GET THROUGH – The Tiger

The government should really deal more leniently	After all, there is no work to do
With the unemployed of this colony (2X)	We boun' to try a screw to get through
Work's nowhere, I mean, you have a rent to pay	An ol' man told me one day quite plain
The money circulation is decreasing everyday	"When are we going to the city on the mid-day train?"
After all, there is no work to do	
We boun' to try a screw to get through	When he was a boy in 1894

You may look for work, it's natural, of course	He was a king to we boys who were naked and
But if your money finish, you have no resource	poor
Richard Dix said man must live, it's widely known	I know a boy who play Hawaiian music in his
How mus' we live on a bed of stone	nose
You'll have to play, wappy ¹ , dice or rummy	One have a bottle as a bass, heaven knows
Or take some han' in negromancy ²	After all...

Open your brain, if you can' make money	Collegiates are walking to Toco Bay
Or join the chain of burg-u-lary	Wearing their suits, can't get work today
They'd only need a little of starvation,	With all their education, some bite their nails
To notice the change in this Iere lan'	Play whe-when, break shop or live in jail
Mango crop we can' hardly see	It's rather hard, in this land of Trinidad
Breadfruit gone out entirely	The livin' conditions is enough to drive us mad
Cosada (cassava) we just eat now and again	After all...
Well, everything is thrown up on the poor sugar cane	¹ card game ² necromancy

15. THE STRIKE – Atilla the Hun

The strikes and the riot, though I wasn't there
Was a most regrettable affair
I'll now entertain you with a song
I don't know who is right or who is wrong

Different versions have been stated
As to how the strikes originated
Well, you may draw your own conclusion
Atilla will reserve his opinion

I wanted material for calypso
So I took a bus to San Fernando
But I wouldn't tell you friends all I saw
For I'm afraid of the sedition law

Atilla curiously suggests his absence from the Fyzabad riot in the first two verses, while giving an eye-witness account in the third and fourth. Despite his acknowledgement of censorship policies, Atilla makes it clear what his "reserved opinion" would be if he were allowed to express it. The sentiments of the final verse sound like an expression of official policy and are at odds with the accusing tone of *Commission's Report*, (#21) recorded two weeks earlier.

16. MISS MARIE'S ADVICE – The Tiger

(I mean to say) your advice was fine
Miss Marie, but I change me mind
(Thank you so much) your advice was fine
Miss Marie, but I change me mind
Is you what say that four dollars a week for me pay
Can't support no woman today
I joined the strikers an' what happen finally
They give me three months in custody
(She can remember) she told me to strike
And demanded more salary (we agree, I mean)
Big stick in me han'
She laugh and say, "Look, Texas bad man"

Fyzabad was like a battlefiel'
Police surrounded by a ring of steel
With blood an' carnage litterin' the scene
An' pandemonium reigning supreme

In the words of our ex-governor
Uriah Butler was a sincere leader
And though he has ended unfortunately
Still, he's deserving of sympathy

These regrettable incidents have passed away
An', in conclusion, all I can say
We hope on the island it don't leave no stain
An' happy days will come back again

They bust me head, with all of that I try me best
A bullet nearly get through me chest
I had to run, I bounce with a barrel and I fall
And lose me felt hat an' all
(And then she tol' me) "You have already start
So continue, don't be chicken-heart
(How you say) you wanted more salary
I tol' her daily I'm getting hungry
She said, "You too coward"
I said, "You really talk nice"
An' I took the woman advice
Then came the fight, don't talk how they

beat me cruelly
An' give me three months in custody
(You could believe, I mean to say) my business
was low
So I joined the longshoremen and stevedore
An' I strike, going along the town
Closin' down business right aroun'
I persevere, I saw a police in the rear
He discharge a shot in the air
I had no fear but they shot me partner St. Clair
I grease' me heel and disappear

Tiger's semi-comic account of the strikes wasn't released until 1939, over a year after he recorded it. Perhaps the innocuous title was meant to mislead the censors but the record company was also unaware of the song's references to current events. The phrases in parentheses are characteristic of the "old talk" Tiger occasionally punctuates his kaisos with to lend conversational flavor.

17. WHERE WAS BUTLER? – Atilla the Hun

The police, the police, they search here and there
Sergeants and majors, they tore out their hair
In kitchens, in attics, in country and town
But still, elusive Butler, he couldn't be foun'

Some said he had gone to America
Others said they saw him in Venezuela
But I knew, despite all the people had to say
Butler was right here in our midst, he didn't go,
no way

The police got a wire one day, I understand'

Next morning at seven-thirty
Miss Marie came to visit me
(What she tol' me) "I heard that you strike
An', furthermore, they beat you for spite"
She say, "You young an', furthermore, you
lookin' strong
And three months can' break you down"
(Don't talk how they beat me)
So I thank her heartily
For the advice that she gave to me

They hustled out in force but they didn't get the man
The IG' declared, "This is a mystery
Butler getting 'way, worse than Houdini"

I ask Butler what was the mystery
He said, "Atilla, I was right in the city
Arrest by the police is what I really feared
So I just clip me moustache and I shave off me
beard"

¹ A. S. Mavrogordato, Inspector General of the
Constabulary

Butler escaped during the June 19 uprising. He emerged from hiding three months later, on September 27, to give testimony before the Forster Commission and was promptly arrested and charged with violation of the sedition laws. The mild mannered tone of Atilla's kaiso suggests

it may have been altered for the recording.

18. THE GOVERNOR'S RESIGNATION – Atilla the Hun

In my opinion, Sir Murchison Fletcher
Was our ablest governor (2X)
We only wish the Downing Street authorities
Would send more men like him to the
West Indies

His resignation was a shock to me
Regretted throughout this colony

Sir Murchison Fletcher will ever be
Beloved in every Trinidadian's memory
For he proved in sincerity
His interest in the welfare of this colony
"We must foster local industry," said he
"An' augment the island's prosperity"
It is no wonder, such regret and pain
We learned he ain't coming back again

Many of you will remember an' know
When he first came, I sang a calypso,
In which, I'll admit, I was rather bol'
For I contended he was too ol'
When he was here a year, I change my opinion
For he gloriously justified his selection

19. WE MOURN THE LOSS OF SIR MURCHISON FLETCHER – Lord Executor

Sir Murchison the noble, the gallan', the brave
The whole island grieve (2X)
He endeared himself in every human heart,
He beautify the buildings, the squares an' parks
The whole population cried out in vain
To know that he will never come back again

An', today, we fin' his resignation
Is a cause for lamentation

In this, my sentiments which are sincere an' true
I must include Lady Fletcher too
For her interest in the oppressed masses
she has shown

Her baby clinic work is too well known
This social worker fought indefatigably
To help an' aid suffering humanity
So, we can say, our luck is bad
To lose them both here in Trinidad

We don' know whom his successor may be
But this we can say independently
He might be as good but cannot be better
Than our own Sir Murchison Fletcher
We receive his resignation with deep regret
We know what we had but we don' know what
we going to get
But, still, the population is always glad
To welcome him back to Trinidad

Oh, let a statue of him be made
Honor an' tribute to him be paid
A colossal monument be erected
In commemorating the great things he did
His name to be wreathed an' letters of gold
And his history described by the young and old

The whole population cried out in vain
To know that he will never come back again

Among the gallan' governors that I have met
Sir Murchison Fletcher, him I selec'
A paragon among men, fearless and bol'
Honorable and just, with a heart of gol'
He seemed to impress me as one who realize
That six feet of earth makes us all one size
I emphasize an' recognize
He made of this island a paradise

It was true, the internal problems of the lan'
That he was called home to old Englan'
And in Government House there was a gloom

20. MR. NANKIVELL'S SPEECH – Atilla the Hun

Han' me the *Port of Spain (Gazette)*
To read Mr. Nankivell's speech again (2X)
Replete with tac' an' sympathy
Fair play an' Christian charity
We promise that, whatever they do
Trinidad will remember you

Imagine the moral courage of that man
In the legislative council to stan'
And give his opinion without no fear
In the midst of the members sitting there
To get on his feet and openly say
That the oppressed worker deserves more pay
We should erect, right in this city
A monument to his memory

There were many Trinidadians that day
In the council, but they didn' say
A word in defense of the working man
Although they are natives of this Iere lan'

Enshrouded with the majesty of a tomb
And, though many are pining to see his face
Another governor has stepped in his place
And to his family right across the sea
We send a message of sympat'y

He came here with a bright career
In the Civil Service, we are all aware
An', nine months afterward, do we fin'
The internal upheaval upset his min'
So let us mourn, let us sigh, let us cry
An' let us wish him a long goodbye
An' let us cry out in grief and pain
We know that he will never come back again

They didn't go to argue or commend
But to blindly support the government
And Nankivell, though not a Trinidadian
Fought for our emancipation
He spoke feelingly an' strikingly
Logically an' conscientiously
His diction was perfect, elocution great
To describe his speech, words are inadequate
He said, "We who plant the cane and dig the oil
An' develop the estates with sweat an' toil
While employers are living luxuriously
Why should we die in misery?"

His speech created a sensation
An' was welcome by the population
There's a rumor he will be recall'
By the commissioners he has been blackball'
If he's a million miles over-sea
Beloved in all hearts he'd ever be

it may have been altered for the recording.

18. THE GOVERNOR'S RESIGNATION – Atila the Hun

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There's a rumor he will be recall'
By the commissioners he has been blackball'
If he's a million miles over-sea
Beloved in all hearts he'd ever be

At the time of the uprising, Murchison Fletcher was the Crown-appointed governor of Trinidad and Tobago. Howard Nankiwell (not Nankivell) was acting Colonial Secretary. As Crown appointees, both had previously aligned themselves with propertied interests, and lost their jobs as a result of their deviation. Each addressed the legislative council on July 9, 1937, citing substandard wages and living conditions as the true cause of the riots. Fletcher said (as Atilla notes in *The Strike*) that, if Butler was misguided, the sincerity of his motives was unassailable. Nankiwell went even further, claiming that "industry had (sic) no right to pay dividends at all until it pays a fair wage to labor and gives the laborers decent conditions." (Brereton, p. 182) Both took prompt steps to institute reforms which were frustrated by oil and sugar interests whose intransigence increased following the renewed disturbances accompanying Butler's September arrest. Fletcher finally capitulated and instituted new repressive policies in October; nevertheless, he was called back to England and forced to resign in December. Nankiwell was transferred out of Trinidad the following May, confirming the rumors cited in Atilla's song about him. Both men died before the end of 1938.

21. COMMISSION'S REPORT – Atilla the Hun

The report of the Commission of Inquiry
Has arrived in this colony (2X)
It touches health an' sanitation
Housing, wages and' education
It states that the riots were terrible
An' declares Butler was responsible

Through the unrest that we had recently
A commission was sent from the mother country
To investigate an' probe carefully
The cause of the riots in this colony
They accumulated a bulk of evidence
I cannot speak of their competence
But, I can say independently
The report was a revelation to me

They criticize our ex-governor
The beloved Sir Murchison Fletcher
And Howard Nankivell, they said that he
Had uttered speeches wrong to a marked
degree
They castigated him severely
Our ex-Colonial Secretary
But all these things just appear to me
An example of English diplomacy¹

They said, through the evidence they had
That the riots started at Fyzabad
By the hooligan element under their leader
A fanatic Negro called Butler
Who utter speeches inflammatory

And cause disorders in this colony
The only time they found the police was
wrong
Was when they stay too long to shoot people
down

A peculiar thing of this Commission
In that ninety-two lines² of dissertation

The Forster Commission was appointed by the Crown to examine the working and living conditions which caused the June uprising and its aftermath. Though Butler, Fletcher and Nankiwell were indeed found to be at fault for inciting and defending the "hooligan element," the Commission also cited the substandard wages and living conditions of workers in the oil fields, sugar cane fields and in the urban sectors as primary causes of unrest. *Commission's Report* was recorded only a short time following publication of the Forester findings in February 1938. Atilla says that his kaiso was banned on the island, perhaps because it comes closer than any of the other 1938 Butler songs to reflecting the sense of anger and frustration felt by a major portion of the working population.

22. SEDITION LAW – King Radio

Believe, I warning the rich an' poor
Be careful, friends today, from this seditious law (2X)
If you talk without defense, you have no evidence
They mean to licen' we mouth, they don' wan'
we talk (3X)

A fellow was charged for that offense
An' his lawyer couldn't break down the
evidence
Because the jurors' decision that he was guilty
But the Judge really acted with sympathy
I mean by givin' him two years in custody

I 'gree with any man who speakin' for their rights
But you cannot say everything what you like

Is there no talk of exploitation
Of the worker or his tragic condition
Read through the pages, there is no mention
Of capitalistic oppression
Which leads one to entertain a thought
And wonder if it's a one-sided report

¹ deviousness ² i. e. pages

There's certain things would affect the authority
Who was the strength and the force in this colony
An' when you get the blow, in the jail you'll walk

You wants to be versed in politics
I mean, you got to be cocky with-a lots of tricks
Firs' you got to use a little diplomacy
Mix up with common sense and psychology
And when you get the blow, not only talk
They mean to licen' we foot, they don' wan' we
walk (3X)

Politics improving our native lan'
We lectured and preached by women and men
But you gotta know, friends, what you talking about

As you're sure to pay darn dear for your mouth So, if you know you can't use the knife and fork

King Radio (Norman Span) composed a calypso in 1933 which dealt with adulterous liaison at the local country club involving an upper class white woman and police commissioner Mavrogordato:

From the swimming pool to the servant's room
That is where Mrs X met her doom
The Country Club scandal was hideous bacchanal

Radio's calypso had the effect of crystallizing and perpetuating gossip about the unfortunate couple, bringing down the wrath of police and the government on calypsonians at large. Laws were passed in 1934 which gave the police censorship authority over calypso song contents and the Colonial Secretary the right to ban "offensive" records from the island. Exactly which records were thus affected and to what extent isn't currently known, but rumors persist about an entire shipment from New York being dumped at sea. The 1934 laws were grouped under a general Theatre and Dance Halls Ordinance. Offenders presumably were not charged with sedition, although that was the charge against Uriah Butler when he was arrested in 1937. Attila (p.103) quotes a verse from Radio's uncensored version of *Sedition Law*:

They want to licence me mouth
They don't want me to talk
Ai-ai, I ain't Butler
They want to licence me foot
They don't want me to walk
Ai-ai, I ain't Butler
But if it's blood, sweat and misery
We're going to fight until we get our liberty

Curiously, Radio didn't record it until 1940 when Butler had been re-incarcerated and the song had acquired a renewed timeliness. Nevertheless, two years elapsed before it was released. By then the United States had entered the war and it is doubtful that copies of *Sedition Law* ever went on sale in Trinidad.

23. THE FIVE YEAR PLAN – Atilla the Hun

Happy days are coming back again
Join with me an' sing this sweet refrain
The government has got a five year plan
That will relieve the depression
No more starvation, emancipation is here

Public works are being started right away
So we have cause to be happy and gay
These gigantic things they're going to do
Will find work for me and you

A mammoth engineering job has been executed
I mean the harbor scheme that's just been completed
Port-of-Spain will hold her place with ease
The premier city in the West Indies

Soon a marked, improved change we all will see
A happy tidal wave of prosperity
We'll be able to maintain our family
In comfort and an' luxury

This 1939 recording reflects a new optimism following the establishment of an organized labor movement along the lines recommended by the Forster Commission report and a second survey of conditions in all Caribbean islands by the Moyne Commission in 1938. Atilla's predictions of public works and prosperity would come true in ways he couldn't foresee: in September 1939, England declared war on Germany and collective bargaining procedures ensured that workers shared more equally in oil field and agricultural profits. Finally, when the United States established strategic bases on the island, the boom was on.

Edited and annotated by Dick Spottswood
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THE ORPHAN HOME - The Lion
6. PARAMARIBO - The Caresser
7. AH, GERTIE - The Caresser
8. TREASURY SCANDAL - Atilla The Hun
9. I DON'T KNOW HOW THE
YOUNG MEN LIVING - The Executor
10. SHOP CLOSING ORDINANCE -
The Executor
11. TOO BOTHERATION - The Growler
12. THE RATS - The Tiger
13. DOWN THE ROAD - The Tiger
14. TRY A SCREW TO GET THROUGH -
The Tiger
15. THE STRIKE - Atilla The Hun
16. MISS MARIE'S ADVICE - The Tiger
17. WHERE WAS BUTLER? - Atilla The Hun
18. THE GOVERNOR'S RESIGNATION -
Atilla The Hun
19. WE MOURN THE LOSS OF SIR
MURCHISON FLETCHER - Lord Executor

20. MR. NANKIVELL'S SPEECH -
Atilla The Hun
21. COMMISSION'S REPORT -
Atilla The Hun
22. SEDITION LAW - King Radio
23. THE FIVE YEAR PLAN - Atilla The Hun

In June of 1937 certain events took place in Trinidad which were to effect that Caribbean island colony's movement towards independence. This collection of topical commentaries offers an opportunity to not only reflect upon the common struggle Trinidad shared with the rest of the industrialized western world as it tried to extricate itself from the effects of the Great Depression, but also on a series of dramatic events, such as the 1937 oil field strike, which eventually contributed to the black majority's gaining access to the institutions of government and financial power. For details, see enclosed 24 page booklet. Edited and annotated by Dick Spottswood.



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