

## The Masses Speak: Popular Perspectives on the West Indian Federation

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The West Indian (W.I.) Federation emerged both out of international and regional interests. Placed in broader context, the West Indian Federation can be seen as part of a wider process of decolonization within the British Empire and other European empires or what Michael Collins describes as the ‘post-1945 federal moment’.<sup>1</sup> During the course of the next three decades the gradual process of decolonization saw the formation of the Federation of Malaya (1948), the Central African Federation (1953), the West Indian Federation (1958) and the Federation of South Arabia (1962). The British generally felt that federations provided practical and administrative efficiency but more importantly that shared wealth would lead to overall development.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the W.I. Federation, the British Colonial Office envisioned the wealth of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago would help develop the region and especially the smaller islands.<sup>3</sup> Ideas for the W.I. Federation also emerged within the region and long preceded the post-1945 federal moment. As early as the late nineteenth century, political elites in the Caribbean were considering closer association in the region. By the early twentieth

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**Fig. 2.1** West Indian Federation. *Source* Photograph collection, The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies

century there was growing popular sentiment about a federation that perpetuated increasingly until the establishment of the W.I. Federation (Fig. 2.1).

While the issue of the W.I. Federation has been extensively written on, attention has largely focused on the political elites. As far as popular sentiment is concerned, it is their opinions that have often been addressed by scholars. When the Federation was conceived in Britain and in the West Indies it was the political elites that engaged in its formation, and as a result, it is largely their history that has been examined. It is the aim of this chapter to include the opinions of the masses in the history of the Federation. Whether or not the masses were directly engaged in the Federation's creation, they were its constituents and directly felt the effects. Further, either wittingly or unwittingly they played a major role in its ultimate success or failure. Therefore, their perspective is very important.

Despite a sizeable literature on the W.I. Federation, the opinions of the masses have been largely neglected. Elisabeth Wallace's *The British Caribbean* provides an extensive examination of the origins of the federal idea to the eventual collapse of the Federation. Her book is invaluable for its detailed approach, and provides a good starting point for this research. Like most of the literature encountered it tells the story of the Federation from an official level. However, Wallace does make mention that the masses were not engaged or involved in the formation of the institution. This perspective is of particular interest because this chapter seeks to show that the masses were very involved indeed.

John Mordecai's *The West Indies: The Federal Negotiations* is another valuable piece of literature on the topic of the Federation. It was written in 1968 and was designed to be a post-mortem of the Federation in light of a strong revival of sentiments towards closer association. Mordecai notes that the book 'is a history of agitation for Federation, of negotiations over forty years, of rabid differences dividing island leaders, of the compromises upon which the Federation was founded and of its dramatic failure after four fractious years'.<sup>4</sup> This book is also primarily written from an official perspective. However, Mordecai does from time to time comment on public opinion but certainly not enough to be really useful to a study of popular perspectives.

A few works do address some aspects of popular perspectives on the W.I. Federation. Donna Chambers' M.Phil. Thesis 'Caricom: A Study of the Attitudes of People in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago toward Regional Integration' is just such an example. Though her thesis is on the Caribbean Community, she does make some mention of the Federation. For instance, she discusses the people who were primarily responsible for turning the concept into reality and notes how the masses responded. She writes that 'in the early 20th century the cry for Federation was taken up by the emerging coloured elite of the region', and also that 'at no point during the history of the region was there any evidence that the idea of Federation was embraced by the masses of the people who, traditionally, have been marginalized on issues which concern them'.<sup>5</sup> David Lowenthal, in his work *The West Indies: Perspectives on a New Nation*, assesses that the Federation attempt lacked a 'West Indian national identity' and also addresses popular perspectives. Gordon Rohlehr's article 'A Scuffling of Islands: The Dream of Caribbean Unity in Song and Poetry' provides an excellent look at the W.I. Federation through calypso and poetry. In it can be found numerous examples of verse related to Caribbean integration and insightful analysis of these

sources. Harris Proctor's article 'East Indians and the Federation of the British West Indies' offers perspectives of a specific group of West Indian society, one that is most present in Trinidad and Tobago as well Guyana. This was one of the two major groups comprising the masses in these two societies. Overall, none of these works provide a satisfactory picture of popular perspectives on the W.I. Federation in Trinidad or the West Indies. Though largely exploratory, this chapter will attempt to bring the voice of the people or the masses into the story of the West Indian Federation.

To best get at popular perspectives this chapter makes use of a range of traditional and untraditional primary sources. Newspapers contemporary to the period under study were examined by looking at relevant articles, letters to the editor and editorial cartoons. Calypsoes, an underutilized but quite valuable source, written and sung in Trinidad during the period under study were also reviewed. The calypso is commonly noted as the 'voice of the people' or as Louis Regis calls it, the 'product of social contexts'.<sup>6</sup> The calypsonian is often a member of the masses and therefore can aptly qualify as its mouthpiece. This source cannot, therefore, be overlooked. Seven personal interviews were also arranged. These were conducted using purposive sampling to gather information from persons who experienced and have memory of the Federation. Using these sources, this chapter will demonstrate that the masses were very involved in the Federation attempt at all stages and that there is indeed a popular perspective of the Federation.

The W.I. Federation might have been the first unification attempt in the region of such scale but it was certainly not the first unification attempt in the British West Indies. Mordecai notes that 'movements toward federation and defederation are as old as West Indian history itself'.<sup>7</sup> As early as the seventeenth century, the century that marked the permanent arrival of the British in the West Indies, unification attempts occurred. The first English colony settled in the Caribbean was St. Christopher (St. Kitts) in 1624 after which Barbados and a number of other Leeward Islands were settled such as Antigua, Nevis and Montserrat. The governor of Barbados administered these islands. By 1671 this administrative arrangement was abolished. After this, numerous other attempts would be made towards grouping the Leeward and Windward Islands.

Perspectives on Federation have always varied. Considerations for full-scale closer association can be noted as early as 1882. A Royal

Commission suggested that W.I. colonies should operate together more closely and as a result suggested some form of federation in the long run. The Royal Commission of 1896–1897 saw no need for a political federation. Again, a Royal Commission in 1910 declared support for closer union of the West Indian colonies. After this initial support the tide turned somewhat. The Moyne Commission of 1918 rejected the idea of a political federation but did support cooperation both administratively and in the civil service. The Wood Commission of 1921 noted that public opinion was not in support of federation and advised against it since there would be too many obstacles to overcome.<sup>8</sup> The Wood Commission, on the other hand, did suggest a union between Trinidad and the Windward Islands.

The Closer Union Commission of 1932 also did not recommend a large W.I. Federation but rather unification of efforts in agriculture. The Closer Union Commission placed some consideration on local opinion in their final suggestions. They summed up that a federation at this stage would be very impractical. However, the commission still suggested greater union between the Leeward and Windward Islands.

By the 1940s a movement to unite both the Windward and Leeward Islands had begun to take full flight. Persons such as T. A. Marryshow pushed for this initiative, but while it gained some degree of popular support, unification eventually failed to materialize. It did, however, help to spark interest in West Indian unity. As a result, this led to the Montego Bay Conference, at which many Caribbean territories were represented.<sup>9</sup> The conference occurred 11–17 September 1947 and was crucial in its outcome. James Millette notes that it ‘marked the first full engagement of the emerging West Indian political leadership with the federal idea’.<sup>10</sup>

Arising out of the Montego Bay Conference a Standing Closer Association Committee (SCAC) was established to consider some foundational aspects of the Federation. These included issues such as the form of a federal constitution and judiciary, assimilation of economic policies and legislation, and the unification of legislation and public services.<sup>11</sup> The committee met first in Barbados in November 1948 and three times in Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica throughout 1949.<sup>12</sup>

The SCAC agreed to a central government for the Federation, albeit on a limited basis. This confirmed the initial opinion arising from the Montego Bay Conference. In justification, the SCAC report noted that the ‘geography alone suggests the wisdom of not attempting too close or

[an] all-[em]bracing Federation for this widely scattered region'.<sup>13</sup> The report continued: 'The social and economic diversity of the region and the strength of local political and other traditions' also provide a significant reason for a limited federal government.<sup>14</sup> The committee report noted that political federation should be the final initiative to be accomplished. Other aspects such as a full customs union and legislative harmonization among the various territories should be achieved first. The report's conclusion also acknowledged the option of implementing the Federation first, noting that the 'existence of federation [could] greatly increase the efficacy of such [a] joint action'.<sup>15</sup>

Part of the reason for such an indecisive conclusion was the level of disagreement that occurred in the discussions. Some delegates wanted Federation immediately while others wanted proper structures to be put in place first. This issue of disagreement was one that would continue to plague the federal proceedings even as they started in 1958. In Trinidad, for example, Dr. Patrick Solomon rejected these early proposals of the Federation. For him, 'the costs of Federation seemed too high in relation to its probable benefits'.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Albert Gomes, who was a strong proponent of Federation, pledged full support, noting that with the absence of any alternatives given by critics, rejection now would only postpone the achievement of Federation.<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Federation was officiated along inconclusive lines. This was, of course, despite numerous commissions, committees and conferences formed to develop various details of the coming Federation. At the initiation of the Federation in 1958, some structures had been approved beforehand while others were still under consideration.

The Federation was established with ten British W.I. colonies.<sup>18</sup> It came with a semi-colonial constitution with executive power exercised by the Queen through a Governor-General. There was to be a bicameral federal legislature. The laws of this legislature were to prevail only when there was conflict between federal and national laws. A supreme court and public service commission were also established. The Federation was to be largely funded by contributions from each of its territories—Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago were to contribute the largest sums, 43.1% and 38.6% respectively. Other critical aspects of the Federation, such as freedom of movement, a customs union and taxes were postponed for a period of five years, specifically because of the divisiveness of these subjects among the territories.

The next major step after the formation of the Federation was the elections to put an official government in place. The election was set for 25 March 1958. Two major federal parties were formed, the West Indies Federal Labour Party (WIFLP) and the Democratic Labour Party (DLP). These parties were led by Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante, respectively, two Jamaicans. In Trinidad, the People's National Movement (PNM) became affiliated with the WIFLP while a number of other parties together aligned themselves with the DLP. The WIFLP emerged victorious in the elections and Sir Grantley Adams of Barbados became prime minister. Adams obtained this position with ease as both Manley and Dr. Williams opted out of the federal elections. The new government was put in place by 22 April 1958.

All seemed well at this point. However, the divisiveness that had surfaced on the road to Federation did not subside. Bouts over the powers of the central government continued. Issues emerged over the number of seats attributed to each territory, immigration and Chaguaramas. In the midst of this divisiveness, the British government granted further self-governing privileges to individual territories. Jamaica was granted full self-government and Trinidad gained more autonomy in 1959. To top everything off, an anti-Federation movement was growing in Jamaica, one that Bustamante soon took the lead in. He eventually called for a referendum in Jamaica to which Manley promptly agreed and set the date for September 1961. Manley lost the referendum and this started the ball rolling for Jamaica's secession from the Federation. Hope remained for the Federation as many felt it could still survive without Jamaica provided Trinidad and Tobago remained a member. Three months later, after the PNM had won Trinidad and Tobago's 1961 internal elections, Dr. Eric Williams, who would become the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, announced that the country would also leave the Federation. Though another attempt with Barbados at the helm was explored, this proved to be a final blow to the Federation. It soon came to a complete halt.

Writers dealing with the 1958 W.I. Federation generally note the interwar years as an origin point. With respect to public opinion, this is a significant period as well. The 1930s in the Caribbean saw the occurrence of labour riots that spread throughout the region. It was a period described as a watershed which signalled the dawning of a modern Caribbean. The masses, demanding that their voice be heard, were a crucial part of this process. This is understandable, particularly if one

looks at the extent to which the masses were still deprived economically, socially and politically one hundred years after emancipation.

Major Wood, who wrote an extensive report on the conditions in the West Indies, often cites public opinion. However, one needs to be careful when the term is used. Mordecai notes that by public opinion Wood meant ‘the opinion of spokesmen for the merchants and the planters’.<sup>19</sup> Wallace gives us further insight into this. She notes that in 1926 a discussion was held in London about a federal union of the West Indies. However, only ‘predominantly white representatives of the British West Indian colonies’ were present.<sup>20</sup>

In 1921, Sir Samuel Hoare, while citing a small movement afoot for Federation, noted that ‘it was time to deal with the matter of closer association without waiting for further ripening of public opinion in the area’.<sup>21</sup> The efforts at formulating the Federation, it may seem, went along these lines. The approach was very much top-down, first in Britain and later by West Indian political elites. The voice of the masses may have been overlooked both by those formulating the Federation and those writing about it, but it was present. Ergo, there must be a search to find it.

In 1933, popular Trinidadian calypsonian Atilla the Hun wrote a song entitled ‘Expedite Federation’. In this calypso, Atilla makes an appeal for the people of the West Indies to support the formation of a Federation:

Arise ye lethargic West Indians, make no delay

We want full representation right away

And come federation of the West Indies today.<sup>22</sup>

At the time, Atilla’s calypso was representative of a growing level of support for a Federation of the West Indies among the masses. Rohlehr notes that the song ‘was a powerful statement of a dream of regional “stability and unity” as well as a longing felt by Caribbean people “for a permanent place in world history” and a seat “in conferences of the world”’.<sup>23</sup> As early as 1918, when the Trinidad Chamber of Commerce pledged support for a Federation, Wallace notes that this stance was supported ‘by planters in some British Caribbean territories and by many ordinary people’.<sup>24</sup> As time progressed, men such as T. A. Marryshow and Arthur Cipriani began to champion the call for a Federation. This was followed by support from trade unions across the region which was

declared officially at a regional labour conference in 1926. Federation was quickly heating up as a topic among the masses.

The Second World War temporarily stifled federal discussions. After its resolution, however, talks began to heat up again. The Montego Bay Conference of 1947 discussed the Federation. Atila the Hun, in his calypso ‘Montego Bay Conference’ noted that:

Nearly every West Indian politician  
Went to discuss Federation.<sup>25</sup>

The conference was clearly high profile and would have certainly helped to stir interest among the masses.

The calypsonian Small Island Pride, a Grenadian living in Trinidad at the time, gives us an indication of what was discussed among the masses in this period. He penned a calypso in 1949 entitled ‘How Can Starvation Fight Federation’. In the calypso he raises a number of issues facing the Caribbean, primarily poverty, but notes that Federation still took up people’s main focus. He sings:

And as they talk  
They tell you England voting for money  
And how St Lucia crying for hungry  
But Venezuelans put on their ban  
Yet Trinidadian only talking Federation.<sup>26</sup>

In this song Small Island Pride gives us an indication that the people of Trinidad seemed to be largely preoccupied with talk about Federation. The political elites were actively engaging in federal discussions. This clearly seemed to help to invoke interest among the masses. For the most part, it seemed as though people were ready and willing to embrace the idea of a W.I. Federation.

Not everyone, however, was willing to embrace the idea of Federation. A common belief among Indians in Trinidad was that they would lose out significantly in a W.I. Federation. The general argument was based on the fact that a West Indian Federation would place Indians in an even smaller minority in the Caribbean. Proctor notes that ‘they were afraid that their rights and interests with regard to such matters as

religion, education and marriage might be neglected if not threatened by a Negro-controlled central government'.<sup>27</sup> As Harold Ramkissoon put it, they may have felt that they 'ain't have no more chance'.<sup>28</sup> It should also be considered that Indians had risen to the top spheres of Trinidadian society by the time 'talk' about Federation took root. The Federation might have put this new development in jeopardy. In addition, some Indians identified themselves more as being from India than being West Indian, or even Trinidadian. Frank Clarke relates that he once lived in Flannigan Town, which was a predominantly Indian village: 'when India was being given independence it resonated in the people of Flannigan Town more than Federation.'<sup>29</sup> He also points out that he, who was not Indian, learnt to sing the Indian national anthem while living there. For all these reasons, some Indians opposed the Federation. It should be noted that as ideas about Federation emerged, there was some support for the cause.

To continue on disagreement with the Federation, Small Island Pride concludes his calypso 'How Can Starvation Fight Federation' with the line: 'Tell them I say to go to Hell with Federation'.<sup>30</sup> His disapproval of Federation helps to show the extent to which there were mixed views on the issue in Trinidad. However, regardless of the view, it is clear that there was public opinion on the Federation. This therefore highlights the importance of adding the voice of the masses to scholarship on the W.I. Federation.

On 3 January 1958 at 10 a.m. the West Indian Federation officially became a reality.<sup>31</sup> As a part of the proceedings the West Indian Governor General Lord Hailes was sworn in. The *Trinidad Guardian* writes of the ceremony:

The ceremony swearing in of the Governor General of the Federation brought large crowds. It was at the Red House. There were large cheering crowds all along the shady side of the gaily decorated route from Wrightson Road, along Marine Square and into Abercromby Street to the Red House.<sup>32</sup>

The mention of 'large crowds' and also 'large cheering crowds' gives some insight into the extent that Federation was of interest among the masses. The fact that Federation was finally here was certainly an intriguing event. The Roaring Lion, commenting on why he wrote the song 'West Indians Get Together', noted that 'news of the Federation of the West Indies reached me in London; needless to say that my blood

pressure went up instantly with joy in my heart.’<sup>33</sup> F. Clarke, who was a member of the crowd in Woodford Square, comments that the ceremony, which he describes as having a respectful atmosphere, ‘attracted those who were attentive’.<sup>34</sup> This statement of attentiveness certainly indicates the varied perspectives that existed on the Federation among the masses. Ultimately, many may have been intrigued by the coming of Federation but Trinidad’s population still held mixed views and varied levels of interest.

An article in the *Trinidad Guardian*, on 5 January 1958, attempted to give ‘a man in the street’ perspective on the start of the Federation. It noted that ‘now that the Federation is an accomplished fact, the man in the street is bewildered about its political implications.’<sup>35</sup> One taxi driver was quite sceptical of the Federation from the start. His major concern was financial, concerning the fact that Britain had refused to help out the Federation, leaving expenditure such as salaries (Lord Hailes’ for example) as another part of the Federation’s responsibility. Similarly, in an editorial article Tommy Saroda questioned ‘how a nation could be born overnight without finances’, going on to call the ‘twelve years of planning inadequate’.<sup>36</sup>

Some felt that the leaders needed to engage with the people more. A Henry Street tailor commented that ‘I am a busy man and cannot leave my work to see Lord Hailes ... these are the days that the leaders come to the people. Look at Sir Hugh Foot in Cyprus.’<sup>37</sup> What can also be drawn from the tailor’s statement is the extent to which he felt that those at the top were not really engaging with the masses. C. L. R. James considered this aspect an important part of the process. James made a ‘radical proposal calling for a regional constituent assembly as a means by which the masses of the people in the W.I. may be brought to participate and take their role in the establishment of a federal constitution’.<sup>38</sup> Despite James’ proposal the federal process still appeared to be a top-down one. Dr. Williams, in a speech given in Woodford Square (5 January 1956), criticized the Trinidad government for failing to educate the people on the Federation. Dr. Williams noted that ‘you [the Trinidad government] have made no effort to consult the People of Trinidad and Tobago before committing them to the proposals you agreed to in London.’<sup>39</sup>

Issues of Caribbean disunity also surfaced greatly in public opinion on the Federation in Trinidad, which was a place where many different people from across the Caribbean dwelled. In interviews, some

people expressed concern about the extent to which real Caribbean unity could be realized. One store worker being interviewed for the above-mentioned *Trinidad Guardian* article noted that it would ‘take years before the Trinidadian could think of the man from Grenada as anything but Grenadian’.<sup>40</sup> She did, however, feel that the Federation could be accomplished once everyone thought collectively as West Indian and showed a common front to the rest of the world. The calypsonian King Striker echoes this store worker’s sentiments in his calypso ‘Ah Glad for Federation’. Striker sings:

Ah glad we have federation  
 To stop this discrimination  
 They used to tell Grenadian  
 Go back to they island.<sup>41</sup>

Striker highlights that there seemed to be some conflict between people from different islands in Trinidad. Just like the store worker, Striker believed that the Federation would essentially help to battle against this conflict. To an extent, he also felt that the Federation would force unity in the Caribbean. As a result, he expresses positive support for the Federation. Similarly, Small Island Pride sings in his calypso, ‘What’s Federation?’:

This year is federation  
 There will be no discrimination  
 Between a Grenadian and a Trinidadian.<sup>42</sup>

One housewife interviewed expressed positive support by saying that ‘the Federation was a good thing especially since so many politicians have been fighting for it for years’.<sup>43</sup> Small Island Pride, in the same calypso mentioned above, adds to this as he brings up some foundation supporters of the Federation:

T. A. Marryshow rehearse this to me  
 That captain Cipriani always fight for we

Don't mine all these just come politician

They don't know one dam thing about federation.<sup>44</sup>

The last two lines of the above excerpt from *Small Island Pride* make mention of a view held by some that the leaders were making the process more difficult than it should be. In fact, it is because of this that the Roaring Lion wrote the song 'West Indians Get Together'. He noted that:

[His] spirit was ... daunted by adverse rumours making the rounds between West Indians. I thought for a moment that it couldn't be true that all the leaders in the area were so insular in their outlook as to defeat the purpose of the dream they were having for years, just when the dream was about to come true. I doubted it, but, alas! It was true. So I made my observation and advice in this song.<sup>45</sup>

One *Trinidad Chronicle* editorial cartoon depicted the Federation as one big game being played among various personified Caribbean territories. In the cartoon, the various Caribbean territories are seen fighting against each other.<sup>46</sup> There was also the view, commonly expressed, that prior to Federation, an informal, social Federation had already been in existence. The environment in the Caribbean at the time among family and friends was one of Caribbean unity. People from across the region had already been living together harmoniously well before the coming of Federation. One result of this was the reach of extended families across the various Caribbean territories. F. Clarke notes that among young people in Trinidad, in particular, migrating out of Trinidad was quite popular:

It was interesting that a lot of the young people of that era travelled a lot. Although Trinidad always had some promise of petroleum wealth, it did not always generate jobs for our young people. There was a tendency that as soon as a fellow got to seventh standard he thought of travelling to a nearby territory.<sup>47</sup>

For Clarke, 'the notion of the Caribbean coming together in some sort of closer association came naturally to most of the people that [he] was aware of.'<sup>48</sup> Therefore, for some, Federation was essentially a natural progression or a final state of what was already happening socially. *Small Island Pride* mentions in 'What's Federation':

The Grenadian said Federation is a combination of generation  
 She said because me mother was ah Grenadian  
 Who married me father ah Trinidadian  
 And made two children one for ah Chinese man  
 And the other one for a St. Lucian  
 The answer to that is federation.<sup>49</sup>

The official coming of the Federation was certainly met with a great degree of intrigue. Ideas of closer Caribbean unity and the possibility of greater independence are difficult ideas to find contention with. In a rare case, some Indians in Trinidad rejected the idea of Federation. However, for the most part, it can be observed that there seemed to be wide initial support for the idea of Federation but this was also met with a high degree of scepticism about the details. The following sections in this chapter will explore the evolution of these initial varied perspectives among the Trinidadian masses during the inter-federal years, the Federation peril and the post-federal years.

A *Trinidad Guardian* editorial in March 1958 noted that ‘the first years [of the Federation] will be largely formative, when foundations will be laid and blue prints prepared’ (8). This statement sums up the inter-federal years well. This period indeed marked an attempt to work out how the Federation would operate. During this time many issues were being addressed: in March 1958 the federal government was officially inaugurated by the people and Sir Grantley Adams became prime minister; Chaguaramas was selected as the capital of the Federation, but the United States was required to relinquish their rights to the area; and Port-of-Spain became the temporary capital of the Federation. Much of importance took place and it evoked various responses from the Trinidadian population.

What is significant about this period is the fact that people in Trinidad, regardless of what they felt about the Federation, were living as federated citizens. There was no longer a case of expectation with regard to the idea of Federation. In a 1959 calypso entitled ‘Federated Islands’ the calypsonian Mighty Bomber sang about a number of considerations during this period:

Now we are a nation  
 I am glad we have Federation  
 Now we form the Federal Government  
 Thanks to those who fought so magnificent.<sup>50</sup>

Bomber, here, might have been expressing a view held by many, even if they had doubts about the Federation. He continues:

I now believe what old people say  
 What ain't happen in years could happen in a day  
 Who would have thought such a day would dawn  
 To salute this sweet federation norm.<sup>51</sup>

This perhaps is part of the reason people during this period felt some accomplishment in the Federation as it evolved. The promise of the Federation had been a long one and, for some, may have been thought to be unachievable. Now that the Federation had finally been accomplished, Bomber calls for people to wake and support it.

Ramkissoon noted of the period that 'something new came on the scene [and] people wanted to buy into it'.<sup>52</sup> For F. Clarke, the fact that Trinidad was the chosen capital for the Federation provided a bit of intrigue particularly as he noted 'a fairly imposing building that was erected in Port-of-Spain [known as] Federal House, stood as a landmark for the Federation and that was where most of the federal activity took place'.<sup>53</sup> A great deal was happening, all at once, that created intrigue and excitement. Arnim Hughes notes that he 'got caught up in the excitement of something new happening in Trinidad and that is probably true of a lot of people who lived here'.<sup>54</sup>

An important consideration is the extent to which the people of Trinidad were engaged or in tune with the activities of the Federation. While Ramkissoon, as noted earlier, felt that people wanted to buy into the Federation as it was something new he, however, also expressed the point that 'it did not have the kind of strength to withstand the discussion for that period with the man in the street'.<sup>55</sup> Edric Sealy also makes a similar point as he writes of enthusiasm for the W.I. Federation 'which

reached its zenith at the inauguration of the federal parliament, on April 22, 1958, [but] began to diminish shortly after the federal government began to function'.<sup>56</sup> The development of Trinidadian nationalism and also social and economic issues may have played a major role in this phenomenon.

The federal election of 1958 was an early feeder to public opinion in the inter-federal years. The date set for the casting of ballots was 25 March 1958, something of a milestone in the political arena. Interest in the election was intense—feelings and opinions became more heated as it progressed, eventually leading to outbreaks of violence, which was also the case in Jamaica. Some individuals were becoming quite passionate about the affair. During the process of the federal elections a trend of Trinidadian nationalism can be seen in the public opinion of the period. These elections made many aware of the Federation but a nationalistic focus prevailed. F. Clarke notes that the election 'tended to be focused much more on local politics'.<sup>57</sup> In one sense this was very true; traditional local politics remained of immense importance, emerging as a contest between the PNM and the Trinidad DLP. F. Ledgister comments that 'the federal elections of 1958 provided the ... opportunity for the PNM and DLP to take measure at each other'.<sup>58</sup> However, with regard to issues, F. Clarke's statement also refers to local concerns dominating the elections. One reality that may have aided this occurrence was the decision of Dr. Williams not to take part in the federal elections. One cannot deny that Williams held a special place in public opinion discourse in Trinidad, and his decision to remain preoccupied with local rather than federal politics would also have swayed public opinion.

The issue of the site of the W.I. Federation capital emerged as a major factor during the elections. The problem outlived the elections and developed as a major source of contention in Trinidad—one that certainly engaged the masses. In fact, Dr. Williams organized a mass march in Port-of-Spain on the Chaguaramas issue on 22 April 1960, and it developed into a national rather than a federal issue. It should be noted that the masses held mixed views on the issue of Chaguaramas. The fact that the PNM and the Trinidad DLP took different positions on the issue may have contributed to this. Dr. Williams was quite caught up with acquiring Chaguaramas, eventually clashing with prime minister Adams, who did not want to antagonize the Americans over the dispute.<sup>59</sup> The DLP took an opposite position, instead requesting that another site, such as Wallerfield, could be used. The Chaguaramas

question became a major topic of public opinion during the inter-federal years. It also became the subject of a calypso by the Mighty Sparrow, entitled 'The Base' (1958).<sup>60</sup> Rohlehr notes that the fact that the song failed to relate to Chaguaramas as a suitable site for the Federal election indicated that 'Dr. Williams's campaign for Chaguaramas was perceived by the Trinidad public to be an issue of Trinidadian rather than West Indian nationalism.'<sup>61</sup>

One letter to the editor in the *Trinidad Guardian*, commenting on the Chaguaramas issue, disagreed with the insistence that Chaguaramas should be the site of the capital. It noted that Trinidad would be 'starting on the wrong foot by begging for a ready-made capital' and that another site such as the swamp area in POS [Port-of-Spain] should be developed and used.<sup>62</sup> Another letter writer felt that the Chaguaramas issue was a 'strong moral issue that lack[ed] nationalistic support [and had] a very sad and unfortunate spirit that can be seen so clearly in the lukewarm attitude of the people towards this new wonderful Federation of the West Indies'.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, Lincoln Clarke expressed support for the push for Chaguaramas and appealed for national unity on the issue: 'I was expecting national unity ... to be the deciding factor in such an important issue like this. What kind of patriotism has been displayed by those who spoke and wrote against the request of our duly elected leaders against a foreign power?'

Having noted the nationalistic slant present in the federal elections and the Chaguaramas issue in Trinidad, it would be wise to address the issue directly. To do this, we should consider whether people during the time of the Federation felt more West Indian or Trinidadian. Ramkissoon considered himself Trinidadian and suggested this was the case for many others.<sup>64</sup> He notes that because of a lack of information about the Federation, people felt more Trinidadian than West Indian at the time. He equates this lack of information to limited methods of mass communication. Kenrick Thorne states that he was a 'full-blooded Trini'.<sup>65</sup> He explains that this belief was forced into his head particularly as it was a period when Dr. Williams came on the scene. Both Alma Jordan and Sir Ellis Clarke, who had spent some time abroad during the lead-up to the Federation, saw themselves as West Indians. This certainly indicates that a different reality existed for those living in and out of the region around the time of Federation. Clarke notes that when abroad 'your only identity was as a West Indian'.<sup>66</sup> He also confirms significant growth of nationalism in Trinidad at the time. Clarke returned to Trinidad

before the start of the Federation and says that he began to ‘decline in [his] “West Indian-ness” and once again [he became] substantially “Trinidadian” [by the mid-1950s]’.<sup>67</sup>

Cynthia Perry notes that she considered herself West Indian in the broader scheme of things. According to her, she was Trinidadian, but part of the West Indian landscape. At the time she was of the firm belief that we ‘couldn’t get anywhere singly’.<sup>68</sup> Clarke expressed a similar notion—he believed that the period saw a broadening of interests and, in his opinion, some people entertained a sentimental love not only for the land that bore them but also the region.<sup>69</sup> What is most interesting about these opinions is the fact that the common denominator for all was their association as Trinidadian. The main difference centred on whether they simply saw themselves as Trinidadian, or Trinidadian but also West Indian. There were many issues other than elections and Chaguaramas that took up the attention of the Trinidad public. The third verse of Bomber’s calypso ‘Federated Islands’ perhaps best expresses some of the issues that were considered during the inter-federal years and which surfaced in popular opinion from time to time:

There’s a task before us  
 We must fight dominion status  
 Free trade and free movement  
 And have a sound devoted government  
 So to speak we want to accomplish  
 We must forget everything about racial business  
 Giving our leaders their every need  
 Regardless of colour, their class or creed.<sup>70</sup>

What Bomber is essentially pointing out is that the Federation had become a reality but now the difficult task of implementing it was still ahead. His calypso gives a reminder that the problems that surfaced in the process leading up to the Federation had not gone away. Two major issues worth further mention, especially in Trinidad, are freedom of movement and race.

Freedom of movement was a very critical issue being addressed during the period of Federation. It was one that took up debating time among the leaders of the Caribbean and also the people themselves. The problem can certainly be considered an extension of the Caribbean disunity sentiment already mentioned—a disunity seen both among government officials and the masses in Trinidad. Coming out of the 1959 London Conference on the Federation, Dr. Williams and the Trinidad government made an agreement to waive the freedom of movement issue for nine years. A. Hughes notes that there was a belief that ‘we were going to be dragged down rather than Trinidad succeeding in pulling up the other islands. That was a widely felt sentiment.’<sup>71</sup> There existed at the time a general opinion that freedom of movement in the region would result in a flood of immigrants to Trinidad from other islands.

The racial aspect of the Federation in Trinidad cannot be ignored. The issue of Indians in Trinidad opposing the Federation has already been considered. This tendency, while persisting for a short while, changed during the period being considered. Proctor attempts to give an explanation. He notes that ‘the East Indians appreciated the advantages which Federation could bring, and realized the importance of not appearing to obstruct a movement which was so strongly identified in the West Indian mind with economic and political progress.’<sup>72</sup> The Indians seemed to be more interested in self-government than the Federation. The Federation came, regardless of any opposition, and it seemed as though it may have taken the region to independence. Some Indians therefore, preferring the ultimate achievement of independence, later expressed support for the Federation. Proctor notes that they decided to ‘accept the inevitable in good grace lest their position in the politics of the new union be jeopardized’.<sup>73</sup> Bhadase Maraj, a notable representative of the Indians in Trinidad, who was first against the Federation, expressed support for it as he and his party, the Trinidad DLP, joined the Federal party of same name.<sup>74</sup>

Economic conditions in Trinidad also surfaced in public opinion and may have caused decreased interest in the Federation. The words of *Small Island Pride*’s 1949 calypso ‘How Can Starvation Fight Federation’ could possibly also stand true more than a decade later during the inter-federal years. In fact, ration cards, started because of the war, continued well into the 1950s. In the midst of the economic situation Ramkissoon questions how anyone would take on the Federation. He states that ‘Federation was not on anybody’s timetable, it was more

economic survival.<sup>75</sup> Lowenthal, in a book published in 1961, points out that poverty 'is still the common lot in every island, even Trinidad'.<sup>76</sup> He concludes that 'national ideals are of small use to those without property or status'.<sup>77</sup> In Ramkissoon's eyes, this was critical, and he believes that others thought so as well and that it must have reduced interest in the W.I. Federation. For the 'man in the street' the big question about the Federation was whether it would bring social and economic improvements. Ramkissoon points out that in the inter-federal years there seemed to be none of that.<sup>78</sup> Jobs were still very difficult to come by and as a result, people were preoccupied with economic sustainability and interest in the Federation may have waned.

Public opinion in the inter-federal years certainly indicates that people were aware of the Federation and opinions were not in short supply. This period saw a number of events that helped to evoke reactions from the masses. The elections stirred up interest although local problems seemed to take precedence over federal issues. Chaguaramas emerged as a significant concern that escalated into a major national controversy in Trinidad. A strong sense of nationalism was developing in this period. Issues involving the economic condition in Trinidad, freedom of movement and race also surfaced in public opinion. At this point, Federation seemed to be becoming a more polarizing issue. However, support for the Federation was still maintained—many Indians appeared to have jumped on the Federation bandwagon. The divisiveness over different issues, however, certainly was not a positive sign for the future of the Federation.

The collapse of the W.I. Federation came first with Jamaica's decision to pull out after a September 1961 referendum. By the start of 1962 Trinidad and Tobago had also made the decision to leave. While an attempt was made to continue the Federation without these two important territories, it soon ceased to exist. This gave rise to appeals for independence in the West Indies which was first granted to Jamaica and later to Trinidad and Tobago in 1962.

Sparrow's calypso, 'Federation' (1962), perhaps the most popularly recalled song on the topic of the West Indian Federation, can be used to review the organization's demise in Trinidad. In this calypso, Sparrow attempts to explain the public discussion on its collapse. The song suggests that Jamaica's decision to quit was the most directly held cause of the Federation's eventual collapse. Sparrow clearly states this in the final lines of the song:

But I find we should all be together

Not separated as we are because of Jamaica.<sup>79</sup>

Sparrow's tone in the song is very aggressive and almost angry. Some in Trinidad clearly seemed to hold a grudge against Jamaica as a result of their referendum decision to pull out, with criticism being directly targeted at both political elites *and* the general Jamaican population.

In the following lyrics Sparrow clearly offers a perspective that was representative of the feelings of many Trinidadians—that Jamaicans were essentially looking after their own interests:

When they didn't get the capital site that nearly cause big fight

When Sir Grantley Adams took up his post that even made things worse

They bawling ... we ain't want no Bajan premier Trinidad can't be capital for here

So the grumbling went on and on to a big referendum.<sup>80</sup>

Word coming from Jamaica, during the referendum debate, may have also led to some of the ill feelings felt by some in Trinidad. Edward Seaga, who was a staunch anti-federalist, noted two days before the vote set for 19 September 1961: 'Too much need and want exist in Jamaica for anyone to think of using our resources to help anyone else. This need and want have built in thousands of people a mood of hopelessness and desperation that will burst out if they see Jamaica's resources being used to help others.'<sup>81</sup> This statement essentially reflects the view of some Trinidadians that Jamaicans regarded their country's individual progress as a priority over that of the region as a whole. Most of all, some in Trinidad believed that Jamaicans felt they were better than the rest. Clearly, not all in Jamaica held similar views but the result of the referendum was enough for increasing numbers of Trinidadians to hold this opinion. An *Evening News* editorial cartoon a few days after Jamaica's secession depicted Jamaica as a lady, dressed for high society, walking away with her nose turned up at those she is leaving.<sup>82</sup> Perry notes of Jamaica that 'there was always a silent envy or discrimination, something that would separate ... Jamaica particularly from the others, although the main idea was all come as one, but they always felt a cut above the rest.'<sup>83</sup> M. Dupres, in a letter to the editor in the *Trinidad Guardian*,

wrote: ‘why all the fuss? Those who know Jamaicans are not surprised [at] what they have done.’<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, even Trinidadians abroad at the time seem to have expressed similar sentiments about Jamaica. Alma Jordan for one, who spent some time in London in the 1950s, noted: ‘I didn’t feel that the Jamaicans really had a lot of interest in the rest of the Caribbean. I really feel that Jamaicans have always been a little bit different from the rest of the West Indians in their outlook, in their Jamaican orientation—their loyalty to Jamaica I think comes before their West Indian-ness, and I feel that that has a lot to do with why the Federation fell apart.’<sup>85</sup>

To be fair, similar views about Trinidad were also held. Certainly, some people in those territories that attempted to maintain the Federation after Jamaica pulled out would have had negative opinions about Trinidad. This is, however, outside the scope of this research. A. Hughes notes that ‘Trinidadians always felt that they were a cut above the common herd. We referred to others in the Caribbean as them small islanders. We had oil.’<sup>86</sup> Even Sparrow hinted at some negative views about Trinidad’s role when he sang:

Some may say we shouldn’t have parted  
But is Jamaica who start it.<sup>87</sup>

In these lines, Sparrow is clearly referring to those in Trinidad that did not want Trinidad to leave the Federation. For some, Trinidad leaving the Federation may have been regarded as a selfish act.

Dr. Eric Williams, then premier of Trinidad and Tobago, became the main focus of global and Caribbean attention immediately after Jamaica opted to secede from the Federation. Jamaica’s secession certainly left some worrying about the Federation’s future. People were waiting with bated breath. What may have added to this was Williams’ decision to stay silent on the issue until after the 1961 elections in Trinidad on 4 December 1961. In an election meeting in Princes Town he noted that

Nobody is going to commit the people and Government of Trinidad and Tobago to any Federation without telling the people the full implications of that Federation. After we shall have won this election, we shall come to the people and tell them the full implications of the Federation.<sup>88</sup>

The main topic of public debate in Trinidad at the time was largely based on Dr. Williams' role, suggesting what he should do and ultimately criticizing or supporting his eventual decision to pull Trinidad and Tobago out of the Federation as well.

On Williams' position of 'no comment' on the Jamaican referendum, Da Costa McDonald noted: 'I think that Dr. Williams has been wise in not making any haphazard comments which might be detrimental one way or the other.'<sup>89</sup> He further expressed the belief that the Federation could be successful without Jamaica. Lloyd Knight felt that Dr. Williams should 'leave the determination of the federal issue entirely to the people. He should ... state the pros and cons and ... not take sides.'<sup>90</sup> He felt that this was Manley's problem. Manley took a side and when things went against him it put his authority in jeopardy.

By early November, however, Dr. Williams had begun to hint at the cards that would be played early in 1962. In a PNM meeting on 7 November 1961, he described the Federation as being 'one of the most disgraceful episodes in West Indian history', and that it 'held out only the faintest of hope of any form of resuscitation'.<sup>91</sup> Three months later, the Central Executive of the PNM passed a resolution to leave the Federation which was followed by Dr. Williams citing the now popular phrase 'one from ten leaves nought'.<sup>92</sup>

H. Purcell noted that 'it surpass[e]d [his] comprehension why there must be all this bickering. I suspect it was largely caused by Dr. Williams wanting to "high hat" his fellow West Indians.'<sup>93</sup> Edmund Williams professed his 'profound disappointment over the stand taken by the Central Executive of the PNM'.<sup>94</sup> He did agree that no Federation could exist with Trinidad funding 56% of the organization's budget and that hardly any external aid was provided, but he felt the PNM should have been more patient in making their decision. For him 'too many persons ... dedicated their lives for such a united front, too many conferences were attended for this Federation, though weak in structure, but great in potentialities ... Dr. Williams must save us from the great catastrophe that is facing us and not be like Manley.'<sup>95</sup> On Dr. Williams' and the PNM's decision, Desmond Jobity stated that it was 'necessary that the will of the people be ascertained clearly and concisely and once for all'.<sup>96</sup> He called for a referendum. He concluded that 'Federation did not fail. We failed Federation—by our selfishness, our false pride, our greed and

lust for power.<sup>97</sup> Another letter to the editor made an ‘appeal to the Premier and his Cabinet to reconsider the decision to go it alone’.<sup>98</sup>

On the other hand, there were those that fully agreed with Dr. Williams and the PNM. A. Hughes notes that there was a sort of awe around Williams so that whatever he decided ‘was bound to be good for us’ because ‘he knew what he was doing’.<sup>99</sup> Hughes agreed with Williams, stating that ‘we had all the more to lose with trying to have a Federation without Jamaica. [The Federation] had to include Jamaica’.<sup>100</sup> Egbert Lawrence admired Dr. Williams and saluted him. For him, the people fighting for the Federation were ‘fighting with their guard down for the plant of the Federation which was planted upside down and the fruits are now being reaped’.<sup>101</sup>

It would be an error to close off this chapter without considering the impact of the collapse of the Federation on the people of Trinidad. The federal experiment came after many years of effort that culminated in four years of intense activity. Albert Gomes was of the opinion that ‘it would be a mistake to believe that the Federation has not made a deep impression on the people. It has ... dug its roots deep in their emotions and has fixed itself permanently as an indispensable facet of the national mystique’.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Gomes’ comments here may be true for some in Trinidad. Raoul Pantin is one example. He ‘felt [the collapse of the Federation] was a setback for the region. I certainly [thought] the attempt was worth it and was very disappointed when it collapsed’.<sup>103</sup> A. Hughes said that while he did not have much of an opinion of the collapse as a teenager, he did feel some disappointment that a brainchild of his great leader, Dr. Williams, did not come to fruition.<sup>104</sup> The views against Dr. Williams’ decision to leave the Federation also indicate that there were people who had grown attached to the federal idea.

Though some may have been disappointed, it appears that the growth of Trinidadian nationalism lessened the impact of the collapse of the Federation. Both Vilma Thorne and Ramkissoon, two persons who considered themselves as Trinidadians during the federal era, quickly moved on. Thorne stated that ‘it collapsed and that was it’.<sup>105</sup> Ramkissoon was quite happy that it did not succeed. For him, ‘self-preservation was more important at the time’.<sup>106</sup> Clarke echoes these sentiments, even going further to suggest the role that nationalism played on the impact of the collapse of the Federation:

It was not a particular traumatic experience. There was no grand explosion. It was more an implosion. Most of the actors already saw themselves in place in their respective territories. A lot of the major actors almost moved seamlessly from federal to national, almost overnight Federal House became Trinidad House.<sup>107</sup>

As far as public opinion in Trinidad is concerned the demise of the Federation was essentially a Jamaica–Trinidad reality. Many saw Jamaica as a hindrance to the Federation and also as the primary reason for its collapse. Interestingly, some in Trinidad also blamed Trinidad for its demise, accounting for some of the criticism and appeals that surfaced against Dr. Williams’ decision to leave the Federation, but, as only to be expected, some also supported his decision. The demise of the Federation certainly did not seem to leave a bad taste in the mouth of many in Trinidad. Even if it did for some, it would not have been for long—the development of Trinidadian nationalism ensured that. The almost immediate focus on independence helped many in Trinidad to quickly move on.

The attempted West Indian Federation was a critical point in the history of the Caribbean. It was the first time that all the British West Indian islands in the Caribbean had agreed to unite as one. Although it has been noted that the formation of the Federation was largely a top–down process, it was the ordinary people of the Caribbean that stood to be impacted the most in this new regional reality. This chapter has sought to bring the people, who have been largely overlooked in scholarship, into the historiography of the Federation. The perspectives of the people on the Federation provide an insightful glimpse into the reality of the (failed) experiment.

The Federation was a long time in coming. With its progression, popular interest in it also increased. The idea of the Federation originated with widespread support, with the exception of many in the Indian community who did not support the idea outright. However, scepticism was always rife with regard to the Federation’s structure and internal politics. Markedly, the discussion about the Federation produced polarizing views. Most importantly, there was an upsurge of Trinidadian nationalism, seen especially with the Chaguaramas issue and federal elections, which overshadowed Federation issues.

The collapse of the Federation was also a popular issue in public opinion. People had a lot to say on the Jamaica referendum and Williams’

decision to also pull out. However, the collapse progressed almost like a passing rainy cloud. The seeds of nationalism had begun to dig deep in the inter-federal years. These seeds were enough to encourage a quick shifting away from Federation to independence.

Although this study is restricted to an examination of Trinidad some general assumptions can be made. It can be assumed that nationalism played a role in the other Caribbean territories and especially Jamaica. Additionally, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago can, perhaps, be regarded as most responsible for the Federation's demise in the minds of most Caribbean people. Lastly, it can also be assumed that Caribbean integration will continue to be difficult to implement as the level of scepticism evident in Trinidad is perhaps a pan-Caribbean reality. Having said that, one cannot settle for these assumptions. There is a need for a similar study to be undertaken on a pan-Caribbean scale. Such a study could help to provide insight into the psyche of Caribbean peoples when it comes to the issue of Caribbean integration and could, as a result, assist in the creation of a prescription towards tackling the question of regional integration. It should never be forgotten that any attempt to integrate the Caribbean, either politically or economically, is largely one of a social nature, involving the unification of millions of people. As a result, the first stage of any assimilation attempt should be one concerned with integrating the minds of disparate peoples in the region.

## NOTES

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