

AZANIA SALUTES TOSH!

by Frank Talk Staff Writers

MARK OF THE BEAST

*"I see the mark of the beast on their ugly faces,
I see them congregating in evil places,
Me say me know dem a wicked Lordy Lordy,
Me know dem a wicked"*

So wrote Winston Hubert McIntosh, known to us as PETER TOSH, in 1975. He wrote these lines after being beaten with a rifle butt, his ribs broken by policeman who broke into his house while he was having a party. He was handcuffed to a stretcher for hours before the police allowed him to be treated.

The police successfully delivered a message to the masses in this 1975 incident: any militant youth, even a star, could be laid flat by the state.

Tosh's reply, almost as soon as he was on his feet, was to pen "Mark of the Beast" and show how brutally clear he was about the implacable nature of the enemy. He also released his now famous anthem for ganja, "Legalize It". These sides were immediately banned from Jamaican radio and became instant hits.

Others felt the mark of the beast as well. In 1976, two days before Bob Marley and the Wailers agreed to perform in a "Smile Jamaica" concert, seven gunmen went out to his house and shot up the place wounding several people including Bob, whom they were apparently intending to murder.

Bob had been under heavy pressure to do the show by the government of Michael Manley's People's National Party (PNP) and Manley had scheduled his bid for re-election two weeks after the concert.

Edward Seaga's (widely known as "CIAga") Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) was blamed for the shooting, but all indicators are that the PNP actually collaborated as well. For instance, PNP soldiers guarding Bob's home mysteriously disappeared minutes before the ambush. And not surprisingly, Yankee imperialism had its grubby hands in the incident: at the retreat Bob was secreted to by the Manley government after the shooting, one of the few people allowed in as "film crew" turned out to be Carl Colby, the son of the then-CIA director William Colby.

Two years later in 1978, a "Peace Concert" was held in Kingston to seal a truce between the PNP-JLP gangs. In "Peace Treaty" on the *Mama Afrika* album, Tosh commented on the concert in his usual acerbic style:

*"When they signed the peace treaty
I told them it wouldn't worky-worky...
Now this one have a gun
And that one have a gun...
All who signed the peace treaty
Now resting in peace in the cemetery."*

The subject matter of this song contains history, but it also presents a broader insight: namely, that an exploding contradiction (such as a society engulfed in intense civil conflict between competing ruling powers) cannot be resolved by cynical - or even earnest - calls for peace (shades of Pietermaritzburg!). Thinking it's so is disarming, and a mistake generally restricted to the masses: "Because of the words, I say, innocent people shouldna dead."

Tosh himself performed at the concert and took the opportunity in front of a crowd of 3 000 to dress down the entire Jamaican ruling elite, Manley and CIAga included, who fidgeted



in the front rows while Tosh lectured on the iniquities of the political "shit-stem", smoking an outlawed cigar-size spliff.

The Peace Concert was widely hailed at the time as a great success - at the end of the evening, Bob had actually brought together CIAga and Manley for a handshake in front of all of Jamaica. But this was a cruel joke even as it was occurring. In the next period the gang wars continued, and all but one of those who helped to put the concert together - Bob Marley, Jacob Miller, and the leaders of the rival JLP and PNP gangs, Claudie Massop and Bucky Marshall - met untimely deaths.

Within a month of the concert, the Beast once again sunk its teeth into Tosh. He was attacked on the street by police and once again assaulted.

Mikey Chung gave this account: "I was standing with him smoking a spliff by my car in Kingston when a cop came up and accosted him, saying 'Give me dis'. We thought that he was joking, cops do that down there sometimes for a spliff. Peter laughed, said 'No!' The cop attacked him, then squad cars pulled up, cops got out and started beating on him, took out their guns, beat him on his

head right out there on the street, then hauled him down to the police station and beat him almost to death down there."

A British reporter later queried Tosh: "You really think they meant to kill you?" In a prophetic reply, Tosh said: "If you got eight to ten guys beating the inside of you whole with wood and iron and destructive elements for over an hour what the do you think they intend to do??! What do they think I was made of? Wood or stone? They got orders to do that seen? Cos of the thing I think I talk, like what I talk at the Peace Concert to Government ministers and so on which them don't like. The police take upon their head to show that is wrong, wrong speaking on behalf of poor people, people who have been humiliated on behalf of the system... Well, I have to speak out against that and if I wasn't using my guitar and my lips in records I would be using some other heavy things to fight against a system that tends to fight against me." Reporter: "What other things?" Tosh: "Any other things! Flashing lightning, thundering gun, rolling earthquake, anything! Because the shitstem that, it just tends to incriminate the youth illegally; a youth who just comes out of school and doesn't know anything but because him poor and living in the ghetto and wear little tear up pants they come and stand him up against the streetside and humiliate him. And maybe he's thinking how he can get the next meal legally, without incriminating himself, where him gonna get a job, where him gonna get some rest tonight, and they just brutalize him and lock him up in jail. And many youths die under similar circumstances that they even try to kill me."

Peter was once arrested in Miami airport, accused of "impersonating Peter Tosh." In West Germany, the government warned him if he sang "Legalize it" the dates would be cancelled and he'd be financially responsible and put in jail (reportedly the first such government censorship threat since Hitler); he sang the song anyway the last night, spliff in hand.

At a 1984 concert in Swaziland,

thousands of people who had travelled long distances to get to the concert were left at the gate unable to enter. In the middle of the concert Peter called a "musician's strike", saying: "Calling all promoters, a cyaam (can't) ah stage, it sound like no sense that the people outside cannot afford to pay to come in, and they're standing out there just getting the fragrance of the music." He left the stage, returning ten minutes later to denounce the bankruptcy of the Swaziland regime! "It sound to me like I'm down in North Carolina or down in Texas. I and I don't come to support this ancient 15th century colonialism which depresses I and I integrity, I dignity... I want to know if the promoter open the gates YET!" The gates were opened.

Shortly before his murder, Peter released the politically provocative album *No Nuclear War* and a world tour was planned. The tracks on *No Nuclear War* include "Vampire" and "Fight Apartheid."

Tosh was asked by a reporter from *Reggae Beat*, "In the song, 'Vampire', who is the vampire?" and he replied: "Well, you know of them. They are the ones who suck the blood of the innocent ones. Invisible vampires, because according to technology, vampires don't come out and bite your neck anymore. They cause a plane to crash or something destructive to happen that blood have to spill and those invisible vampires will still get their meals. It shall be eradicated."

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the death of Bantu Steve Biko, a stunned and outraged Azania heard that the Vampire had martyred Peter Tosh.*

Peter's martyrdom brought back the words he uttered when an interviewer told him in 1983 "You are considered to be a controversial person". Peter interrupted, "So was Jesus! I man get a job fe do, and I have to do it with the method I know, the tools at my disposal. Dem say I aggressive, but Jesus did gentle and dem get rid of him so who am I that they should not try to crucify."

"Investigate reporting" has not exact-

ly flowered about the execution of Peter Tosh, but this much can be pieced together from newspaper accounts and eyewitnesses:

One of the reasons why Tosh was in Jamaica on September 11, 1987 was to attend a court hearing in a civil claim he had launched against the government which had been repeatedly adjourned. This claim arose out of an incident with a customs officer at the Kingston airport early in 1987. A fight broke out over a customs matter and Tosh's pregnant wife was beaten, causing her to miscarry.

The night of the killing, Peter was at his home in Barbican, a hilly suburb of Kingston, with his wife Marlene and three friends. At about 20h00 the dogs barked, announcing visitors at the gate outside. Michael Robinson, a craft worker and friend of Tosh, went down to check and discovered Dennis Lobban (also known as "Leppo"), an occasional visitor and friend of Tosh and two other men in business suits.

They were led past the dogs, and once upstairs the three men demanded money of Tosh. When they drew guns, Tosh laughed at them. At some point, radio disc jockey "Free-I" and his wife walked in on the hold-up. Peter Tosh was beaten and pistol-whipped. Eventually all were forced at gunpoint to lie face down on the floor, and the gunmen proceeded to shoot everyone in the head. After shooting Peter, one was heard to say to the other, "Are you sure he's dead?" Then they shot him twice again.



Kingston, Jamaica.

Marlene said that she and the others survived headshot wounds by playing dead in the darkened house. After a brief ransacking, the killers left everyone for dead and escaped into the night on motorcycles of a type only available to the Jamaican police and political-party hitmen.

Peter was dead ten minutes later after being taken to the hospital by neighbours. An herbal healer and friend, Wilton "Doc" Brown, died instantly, and Free-I (Jeff Dixon) died several days later. The survivors of the assault were Santa Davis (the drummer in Peter's last band), Yvonne Dixon, Michael Robinson and Marlene Tosh.

Initially, the official story was that Tosh was killed in a random robbery attempt. Almost no one took this seriously. Literally everyone in Jamaica knew Peter, and any shooting had to be a very deliberate act. This story sounded even more ridiculous when two weeks after the execution, Marlene Tosh was shot on the street by unknown assailants as she was returning home. She was unharmed.

Eventually the Jamaican police announced that they were "working on the premise that (the murders) were the result of a feud between some of the victims and the gunmen."

Within hours of the murder, the identity of at least one of the killers, Leppo, was broadly known on the streets of Jamaica. For several years, Leppo had been in General Penitentiary. The government had recently paroled him from a life sentence, and on his release he turned up at Peter's place. Peter gave him money to help get him on his feet, as he often did for people who came to him in distress.

Rumours abound concerning this man, including the story that Peter and Leppo were arrested years ago at a roadblock by policeman who found a gun in their car. As the story goes, Leppo went to prison, and Peter was to take care of his family financially.

One must keep in mind that Peter was not one to duck and cover from the authorities, nor beg protection

from anyone. This rumour has done little to dispel widely held suspicions that "higher authorities" were ultimately responsible for the execution of Peter Tosh.

It was quite clear that there would be no safe haven for Leppo among the people. He turned himself in to the authorities in the next week; other suspects were arrested and later released. The word on the streets is that Leppo's business-suited accomplices were hired guns who probably immediately escaped to Miami.

After the Tosh murder, there was an increase of incidents of armed hold-up, dozen of break-ins and shake-downs of reggae musicians. Still more have been threatened. Leppo himself is rumoured to have been involved in more than one of these assaults. More ominous still, in the Jamaican community in Brooklyn, New York, two reggae artists were shot dead gangster-style in December 1987: Alton Irie, a DJ and Lui Lepke, a DJ/singer.

Tosh's execution occurred as Jamaica lurched into election time, a time traditionally marked by bloody gang warfare between the PNP and the JLP.

Tosh's whole *persona* rested on his refusal to be a doormat for anyone—in fact he was the one musician who steadfastly refused to have dealings with any of the Jamaican politicians.

CIAGA's featured comment to Tosh's murder was: "The shooting points to the need for intensifying the drive against the criminal element in our midst. "This in a country where there were 217 reported cases of people killed by the police in 1986 and which has one of the largest death row populations *per capita* in the world! And Manley chimed in: "This is a blot of shame on all Jamaicans..."

The upshot of Peter's murder is that the authorities are rid of a longtime enemy, and in his death they have a pretence to turn up the heat in laying down "heavy manners" on the masses.

Tosh's funeral was held in the Na-

tional Arena in Kingston. The roads from Kingston to Savanna-la-Mar were lined with people as the procession made its way to the burial site at Peter's mother's home.

And in occupied Azania, we were forcefully reminded of Mongane Serote's message about Bra Steve in the poem "Time has Run Out" as we commemorated the tenth anniversary of Steve's murder by the Vampire:

*"the bright eye of the night keeps whispering
when it paves and pages the clouds
it is knowledgeable about hideous nights
when it winks and keeps winking
like that
it is like a breathing burning wood—
i feel looked at
walking and silent like this in the night
in this strange land which mutes
screams."*

GET UP, STAND UP

On 9 October 1944, Peter Tosh was born in the aftermath of the 1938 Uprising and calls for self-determination from Britain.

The island of Jamaica in the West Indies was ruled by Spanish invaders between 1509 and 1655. These Spaniards exterminated the indigenous Arawak population and gradually introduced slaves from Africa.

In 1655 Jamaica became the first colony to be captured by a formal British expedition and in 1660 the British colonialists expelled the Spaniards. After an outbreak at Morant Bay in 1865 when nineteen whites were killed, a crown colony form of government was introduced in 1866 with only the Governor having real executive and legislative power.

In post-slavery Jamaica a strict racial hierarchy operated. Power was vested in the whites; their economic domination over Black Labour was attributed to some innate superiority of the white skin. Below the British planters were the urban Portuguese and Spanish Jews, and the energetic "mulattoes".

Paradoxically the "mulattoes", while challenging white hegemony, served also as the transmission belts for the values of the mother country.

A wide gulf separated the leisure of the Great Houses from the tea-meetings and "nine nights" of the poor. A social system based on gradations of colour and texture of hair was consolidated by the system of formal education, which ensured that only the children of the well-to-do had access to a set of systematic ideas. Through the medium of the English language the school system provided the early foundation for a layer of teachers, actors, farmers, lawyers, preachers and shopkeepers who serviced the plantation economy.

Even in their language the colonialists and their aspirants were to be distinguished from the working masses. Coming from differing African nations, the slaves had brought with them a cultural and linguistic diversity. This was reflected in a language which all Europeans, in their inability to understand it, denigrated as Pidgin English. In using and developing this language as a form of protest, the poor Blacks had to depend on the Bible as their only source of ideas. Yet, it was to this very Bible that the slavers resorted for justification for the place of Black people on earth. Characteristically, the institutions and religious expression of the poor took different forms from those of the established churches.

Thus it was not accidental that the Morant Bay revolt was led by a lay Baptist preacher, Paul Bogle.

As from 1884, "representative government" was restored in stages and in 1944 a House of Representatives elected by universal suffrage was introduced.

In the depressions and economic crises of the 1930's the conditions of the Jamaican poor were serious indeed. Threats and force had to be used on the workers - banana loaders worked in a line and were whipped with sticks if they broke the line. On top of this coercion the workers had to endure low pay, bad housing, malnutrition and disease. On the sugar

estates the workers were effectively slaves to the owners, unable to leave because of their poverty, nakedness and deprivation.

Organisations sprang up under these objective conditions among all classes of Blacks: from citizens' associations and welfare groups, like that of Norman Manley and Edna Swithenbank, to trade unions and friendly societies arising out of the ranks of the most exploited.

The weakest in terms of financial resources were the trade unions and friendly societies. Thus the educated and up-and-coming Blacks, in joining the workers' organisations, were able to restrain them with their reformism.

The violent and largely spontaneous uprisings of the poor in 1938, with armed confrontations in every parish, dominated Jamaican society between March and April. The petit bourgeoisie especially Norman Manley, before they understood the full significance of what was happening, still treated the poor with derision.

When the smoke of the rifles had dispersed and the weeping for the dead had ceased, the colonialists praised Manley. As the Governor put it:

"Perhaps no man on the island did more to re-establish confidence and restrict the growth of the disturbances than N W Manley KC who came forward almost immediately after the beginning of the disturbances. Employers had someone with whom to negotiate, who understood the conditions on the island and who knew what demands could be reasonably made and what could not. We think his services to the community as a whole were invaluable."

The Governor, of course, was refer-



ring to the white community. The mass struggles had threatened the whole plantation economy. And, in creating the PNP in 1938, Manley took advantage of, and reaped the benefit from, these mass struggles. The creation of a two-party democratic system in Jamaica grew out of the resistance of the masses over the period 1938-1962.

Sir Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley were engaged in strong competition which divided the working class with political warfare and escalating violence since 1949. Bustamante imprinted his authoritarian stamp on trade unionism in Jamaica by organizing workers under the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union and its political party, the JLP.

In 1949, Manley expelled the left from the PNP in the wake of McCarthyite anti-communist hysteria. He brought in his son Michael from abroad to organize the PNP's faction of the working class under the National Workers Union.

In 1959 Jamaica introduced full internal self-government and Norman Manley of the PNP became premier. On August 6, 1960 Jamaica became independent with full dominion status within the Commonwealth.

Jamaican society moved from formal colonialism to constitutional independence on the pretentious motto "out of many, one people." Such a myth of race harmony belied the lop-

sidedness of the economy and the unequal division of the social product.

As Jamaica lurched from British crown colony to US neo-colony, the island's local bourgeoisie got a lift as they hitched themselves to this new capital and the freshly-stirred waves of nationalism that surged up off the "independence" celebration of 1962. They had a new style of rule, and a greater freedom and necessity to promote and especially to try to gain control of a "national" culture.

In the late 1950's the Jamaican countryside was getting ripped apart by American capital more intensively than almost any other Caribbean island.

Major American and Canadian aluminum companies appropriated huge areas of land from the peasants (eventually owning 1/3 of all land area in Jamaica) and left gaping strip-mined valleys of the burning red dirt all over the Jamaican hills. More people were forced off the land with the stagnation of the British sugar plantations, as well as the growth of tourism. They flocked to Kingston to survive, pitching tin shacks on a reclaimed garbage dump in the harbour. Today a third of Jamaica's population live in Kingston, and a third of Kingston live in the slums. There were a few jobs on the docks and in some US plants, but for most the pickings were slim and many kept going.

A system of out-migration to find employment has been the only avenue by which the poor could escape the social decay of underdevelopment. In the 1950's and 1960's one eighth of the population emigrated. Today only about 62% of the world's Jamaicans actually live on the island.

Jamaica exhibited the outward appearance of prosperity, with its supermarket chains, traffic jams and resort hotels, but at the same time units of housing for the vast majority of the population were decreasing and more people were going without proper clothing. The state published glowing figures showing increases in the gross domestic product, yet the population in the slums of western

Kingston increased and unemployment rose to more than 25% of the productive labour force. By 1969 Jamaica was listed as having the most unequal distribution of income of any country in the world - truly a "black man's hell in a white man's paradise" as reggae artist Gregory Isaacs would sing it.

On top of the economic unevenness between town and country was added the factor of the tourist industry. Political careerists perpetuated racial stereotypes of the Jamaican masses as a happy-go-lucky people, in a hot-house effort to organize recreation for the metropolitan bourgeoisie.

Public policy was influenced by the desire to provide the economic infrastructure (electricity, water, roads) and the correct hospitality (a smiling populace) in order to give the proper welcome to tourists. Incredible images of an island in the sun, its people romantically poor, were backed up by advertisements in the *New York Times* - Rent a Villa, Rent a Car, Rent a Nanny.

North American gangsters, posing as tourists, were given tax-free holidays so that they could exploit and expropriate small farmers. The continuities between slavery and neo-colonialism were expressed in the take-over of the Rose Hall Great House (where so many slaves had died) in St James by a questionable US-funded hotel and real estate development company.

Elections since 1967 have been marred by warfare between the JLP and the PNP gangs (possees).

There are some tacit (and open) agreements between the JLP and PNP to at least keep their political gang violence out of the tourist areas.

In 1972, Michael Manley (the son of Norman Manley) became premier: he based his campaign on the "politics of participation" and maintained strong ties with Cuba.

Manley's PNP is a "socialist" outfit which ruled with an iron fist for eight years. Manley is a bourgeois careerist who has long vacillated between support for the USA and the USSR.

Michael Manley surrounded himself with known gunmen such as Burry Boy and Feathermop and cleverly orchestrated various strategies to suppress, undermine or rob Rasta culture of its significance. He exploited the spiritual and metaphysical content of Rastafari by likening himself to the biblical Joshua, and equating his rival, Shearer to the Pharaoh. He called his African walking stick a rod of correction and claimed it had been given to him by Haile Selassie. Co-option of Rasta here reached its apogee.

The falling wage rate and the increased accumulation of the few was compounded under Manley by unprecedented levels of thuggery. By 1976 the political culture had become so debased that gunmen were burning out the homes of political opponents-children were even thrown back into the fires. The conjunction of the PNP waste of resources, the attempted US destabilisation of Jamaica and pressure from the IMF resulted in greater impoverishment- to get hold of basic food items was a major task. By 1979 the "democratic socialists" had buckled under the IMF.

Manley's rule showed how Jamaica's neo-colonial status allowed:

- (a) the middle classes to expand by providing greater patronage and more "jobs for the boys";
- (b) a ruling party to ground and mediate between the classes as if they were "brothers" and
- (c) his ilk to talk more flashily and crassly about bringing "socialism" without revolution.

At the same time, however, the ruling classes found themselves exposed, showing hands grimy with rip-offs, riches and betrayals as never before. No longer are they mere servants of capitalism (petit bourgeois compradors): they are now a national bourgeoisie in their own right and possibly, using the "Opec model", on the international scene. Certainly the Jamaican leaders and ruling classes are more than prepared to knife each other in the back for a fast buck, even at the risk of new sub-imperialist dominance by the "big" Latin American capitalists. On February 9, 1989 Mi-

chael Manley, now a chastened social democrat, again became premier.

In 1980 Edward CIAga of the JLP became premier. In 1981 CIAga severed diplomatic ties with Cuba.

There is more than symbolic significance to the story of the son of a white Jamaican ruling class family who was born in the US, graduated from Harvard (and not Britain's Oxford) in the late 1950's and returned home to Jamaica to do anthropological work among the peasants, investigating folk practices such as *obeah* and musical traditions associated with the Pukkumina religion. He soon moved to Kingston, set up a small recording company to document this culture, then turned his attention to the music scene in the West Kingston ghettos and became one of Jamaica's first record producers. This young music entrepreneur was none other than CIAga.

When he entered politics in 1959, CIAga secured a constituency in one of the toughest new ghettos in West Kingston with his musical credentials, and introduced guns onto the street along with systematic gangster-style violence to force "loyalty" among this angry and volatile section of the population. He also put to full use his earlier study of peasant religious practices and superstitions in his slogans and political rallies. CIAga is known internationally for his mafiosa-style services to the US bourgeoisie - which has continually maneuvered for a tighter hold of its "backyard lake". He was publicly denounced for running guns for the CIA into Jamaica in the late 1960's.

American troops regularly train in the hills of Jamaica, American naval vessels compete for space with luxury liners in Jamaica's ports and have been on hand in spades during past elections.

It should be clear that to talk of scientific socialism in the Caribbean is no small matter. What are the resources of land, labour, market, trade, defence that are to be the basis of socialist production? Aimè Cèsaire could almost despair when he described the Caribbean as islands that

are scars upon the water islands that are evidence of wounds crumbed islands formless islands islands that are waste paper torn up and strewn upon the water islands that are broken blades driven into the flaming sword of the sun

But despair is unnecessary: an alternative network of social relations is at hand, a network of relations through which it becomes possible to advance the material and social development of humanity in a way and to a degree precluded by capitalism.

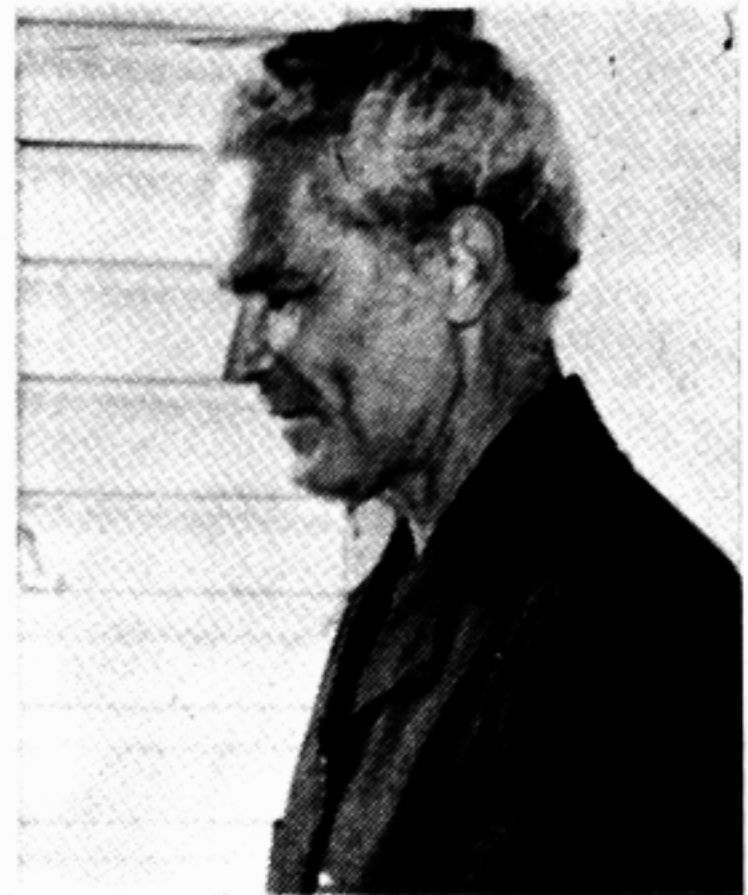
To summarise Michael Thelwell's novel *The Harder They Come*, Ivan, a Kingston "rude boy" (ghetto youth in and around the Jamaican music scene) tries to visit his family's home in the mountains after several years of living in the city:

"Nothing was familiar...Bush-bush full up everywhere. But...Dis couldn't be the right place after all? Right down dere should be the tin roof. You mean say bush-bush grow up, cover it?..."

"There was no evidence of the passage of his generations, the ancestors whose intelligence, industry and skill had created a self-sufficient homestead there. None - at all"

His grandmother who had raised him up there had died several years earlier; his mother was back down in Kingston working at starvation pay as a washerwoman; his uncles were long gone off the land and had met their ends all over the globe. One died in World War II fighting for the British; another went to cut cane in Cuba and was never heard from again; another was serving a life sentence in the Kingston penitentiary for killing his wife.

"Ah shoulda did stay an' tek care of de place, he thought. The worst



insult that people has was sneering, 'Cho, you no come from nowhe'... He wanted to go get a machete, to cut a path to the graves and clear the bush away. But...what de raas is de use... What's the fucken use? He felt empty, and frightened, futile, miserable, and very alone. He would never, he swore, come back ever.

He continued down the road to the former house of Maas' Nattie the man who had raised him like a father, and discovered that two American tourists had taken over the backyard and were lazily smoking ganja and sunbathing, stark naked. Ivan watched while one of them tried to milk a male goat, then jumped on his motorbike in disgust and sped over the mountains and through the foothills choked with bauxite dust, back down to Kingston.

From that moment on, he refused to look back, and with nothing to lose, he shot cops and sang his way to fame and notoriety. He was an outlaw, and a fearless hero to those being ground up in this new urban "promised land" - a concrete jungle where you couldn't even find a clean glass of water, let alone a day's work. It is in the context of Ivan's story that we can better appreciate what is easily Tosh's anthem, "Get Up, Stand Up":

*"And now you see the light
We gonna stand up for our rights*

Come on
 Get Up, stand up
 Don't let them push you 'round
 Stand up for your rights
 Brother
 Get up, stand up
 Be brave now
 Don't give up the fight
 I say
 Get up Stand up
 Stand Up for Your Rights
 Don't let them hold you down
 Get Up Stand Up
 Don't give up the fight"

(Marley/Tosh, 1978)

STEPPIN' RAZOR ...DANGEROUS

Sometime in the late 1950's transistor radios began to appear on the streets of Kingston, Jamaica. On clear evenings when the wind was blowing from the north, the thousands of people who were then streaming in from the mountains could pick up the rhythm and blues (r&b) and early rock 'n roll of Fats Domino, Sam Cooke, Brook Benton, the Drifters and Chuck Berry from US radio stations in nearby New Orleans and Miami.

Youth like Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Peter Tosh, themselves recently arrived from the country to the shantytowns of West Kingston, tuned in.

So did the local mento musicians who would soon merge their Jamaican-style calypso with the r&b sound, along with strains of gospel, jazz, Latin riffs from nearby islands, and the African rhythms of the Rasta Burru drummers. The new hybrid became ska - a speedy dance music with a wicked back beat. The originators of this sound included the Skatallites, made up of the cream of Jamaica's jazz men who had grown tired of answering tourists' requested for "Yellow Bird" and bastardised calypso on the hotel circuit. Ska has been described as a "very small connection that's glowing red-hot" between "two extremely heavy cultures" - Africa and North America.

For years very little of this music was allowed on Jamaican radio, but

meanwhile it pulsed through the nation as people danced to the rolling "sound systems" -trucks stacked with monster speakers and manned by maniac 'deejays who waged a rowdy war among themselves to be the first to spin a new single. The sound systems were people's institutions where the Rasta culture of resistance was developed without restraint. Competition among the legendary DJ's was ferocious, each one vying for the attention of the crowd who demanded the hottest and newest releases from the US.

When, in the early 1960's, this pop music became slick and soft and could not satisfy the demanding appetites of Jamaican youth, DJ's like Coxson Dodd and Duke Reid opened recording studios, and produced ska, later rock steady and finally reggae.

These musical forms challenged the dominance of white American music-Neil Sedaka, Doris Day, Elvis Presley-that had hitherto been so relentlessly plugged and marked a crucial break with the sex and romance themes of this commercial white music. Despite their element of spiritual deliverance, the music of Rasta was pregnant with social criticism.

Beginning in 1963, an historic collaboration took place in Coxson's Studio One between the Skatallites and the Wailers (including Bob Marley and Peter Tosh) who were one of the expert harmony groups then springing up in the government yards (housing projects) among the toughest youth in Kingston. The astonishing music that issued from these sessions would soon put the new generation of rude boys like Ivan on the stage for the first time.

*Jail house keeps empty
 Rudie gets healthy
 Baton sticks get shorter
 Rudie gets taller
 ...Can't fight against the youth/
 Cause it's wrong
 Prediction
 Them people a-going wild
 Dem a rude rude people
 What has been hidden
 From the 'wise' and the polluted
 Will be revealed*

*in the heat of the summer sun
 Oh Rudie, be wise....'*

"Jailhouse (aka "Rudie")

The Wailers c. 1965

Rarely has a song so captured the brooding and insolent confidence of youth coming of age in an uninhabitable place which is itself "new", but already a virtual bomb-site. The musical response at the end of each line came like a threat and a statement of fact- sung in the sweetest of harmonies.

One of Peter Tosh's earliest works "I'm the toughest" (cut originally to a ska beat) virtually canonized the swagger of the Kingston rude boy in the mid-60's. For the people, ska was created by Black musicians and composed exclusively by poor Black musicians.

This type of thing was not at all what the local bourgeoisie had in mind for their "post-Independence" Jamaican culture, and all along the way they tried to redirect it- with CIAga often as pointman. At first the Skatallites were ridiculed for playing "bongo" music, but as early as 1964, CIAga, as Minister of Development, tried to take over ska, introducing it at the New York World's Fair with a hand-picked delegation of musicians, passing over the universally-acknowledged rude boy originators. These youth had already become even more outlawed because of their association with Rastafarian musicians who were neither respectable nor willing to be hired thugs for either the PNP or the JLP gangs. The offi-



cial policy on these unruly "seeds": "Kill it, before they grow..." as one famous song would put it.

But in the next few years, as ska slowed down into the "rock steady" style and finally around 1967-68 reggae, the music became thoroughly dominated by the rude boys. The music took over the sound system dances and jukeboxes, selling huge numbers of singles- but all the while it was almost completely banned from the radio. The national culture was definitely splitting into two, with polite society (to say nothing of the tourist board!) properly horrified at these rebels wearing their hair in thick "natty" dreadlocks (long, thick curls) who were also beginning to gain a little notoriety internationally as well.

Browsing through bins of old reggae singles, one is struck by a common graphic theme- a clenched fist in several variations- with label names to match. The influence of Black Consciousness was decidedly unforeign in Kingston.

While reggae, like any musical form, has also produced its share of insipid love songs and boring pop re-makes throughout its history, what is striking is that the best reggae musicians (and the pioneers on this side of reggae history are Bob Marley, Bunny Wailer and Peter Tosh) have always considered themselves "warriors against Babylon", as they refer to the oppressive and exploitative system. And the sound of the music has from the beginning attracted the ears of thousands of youth like Ivan who know from tortuous experience that there is no going back to "simpler times."

1983: Peter Tosh cuts a version of Chuck Berry's rock & roll classic "Johnny B Goode", the story of a feisty country boy they can't keep down on the farm- this time he's on his way to becoming a reggae star in the city. The tune is exuberant, words hardly changed, just the places ...and the sound. There's a menacing rumble bubbling up this time around. You hear it in the chunka-chunka rhythm and cascading bass line, in those synthesised keyboards that

swoop down like a flock of ravens- and there's that wild guitar wail first brought to life in the post-Berry era by the "star bways" living in some far northern cities, most notably Jimi Hendrix.

1984: It was seven in the morning and the sun was just peeking above the sea in Montego Bay, Jamaica. A crowd of several thousand Jamaicans, Americans and assorted international travellers were assembled before the empty stage at the water's edge. They had spent four days at this World Music Festival- the finale promised to be worth waiting for.

Dreadlocked Jamaicans began moving up towards the stage chanting "Teacher, teacher..." The musicians took their places, the groove set in, and a deep and familiar baritone sang out from backstage:

*"Steppin 'razor/
Better watch your step/
I'm dangerous, dangerous."*

Peter Tosh strode in, elegant and menacing in white martial arts gear. A roar went up. As he stalked the stage, brandishing a curved scabbard, light broke and a rainbow suddenly materialized behind him. There were ahs, cheers and laughter. He ended the song and went into a rap.

It was an angry lecture to the Jamaican authorities to start playing more reggae on the radio, to stop harassing the people for smoking ganja: "Everytime I drive ten yards Babylon try stop you! What kind of ting is dat? And in this twenty first century they lock you up for a spliff." As he moved back into the music, the crowd broke into a spontaneous "We want the truth...we want the truth!" The set ended with a hypnotic twenty-minute rendition of "Get up, stand up!" the sun dancing brightly now with a jubilant crowd singing along with their anthem.

Tosh was well-known for his real-life ferocity against the powers-that-be, and any feckless representatives of the authorities (he used to swing a machete in the face of reporters he didn't like, just for fun).



What made Tosh so threatening to some people and so immensely entertaining to others, was his music and performance. When he took the stage you came face to face with the "arrogant" Blackman who made no apologies to the oppressor: one simply cannot imagine Tosh in a white suit graciously serving drinks poolside!

In "Glass House" on *Mama Afrika* Tosh reserved the Golden Rule (a toughened up version) for relations among the "brethren": "Harm no man, let no man harm you." But there's merciless ridicule for all the "baldheads" and "ghosts" of the world who think they're safe and secure in their glittering glasshouse empires "built on lies and illusions"- when all the while "the truth is showing" to "those who keeps it a-going" and who might be getting some ideas about shattering this house of glass with some well-placed stones of their own.

Tosh's "Steppin' Razor" provided the backdrop for one of the unforgettable sequences in reggae cinema history, the gathering of dreads from all corners of Kingston as they embark on an anti-Babylon caper in the film *Rockers*.

Peter once described himself as "optimistic". This is usually the sentiment either of blind pollyannas or people who have some sense of what they are up against and are rising to meet it. Peter clearly fell into the latter

category; there is a charging high spirit to his music which seems devoted to popping certain illusions of the oppressed. As he said in 1976: "You see they have removed the chains from off our feet and hands and have placed them on our minds, so there are many things that we have to unlearn in order to be free".

While Peter laboured under certain illusions of his own, he remained, until his death, a militant seeker and fighter for the Black cause whose art was always worthy of that cause.

Peter's music stands as living testament that the Yankee imperialists, with all their well-laid plans and years of hegemony in the world, are still constantly being beat at their own game.

Culture from America, both what's helpful to the oppressed and especially what isn't, gets beamed out to all points of the empire and beyond, with the hope of spawning simple-minded sycophants of everyting Yankee.

Instead, they've been met with the blistering reply of those they oppress, who have more than once transformed these sounds into new art forms- in the case of reggae, creating music as untamed and inspiring as much of the early r&b and rock 'n roll, and even fiercer to match the intensified heat of the teeming ghettos thrown up on this colonized island.

Reggae music has infiltrated the repertoire of millions of enemies of this world system in literally every part of the globe- from the bazaars of Morocco to the remote deserts of Mali to Japan to Poland- itself a phenomenon only possible in this era of imperialist development, which, lopsided as it is, knits the world tighter than ever before.

When reggae gets carried around the planet to places where there are only batteries to power the rare tape recorder, it is beyond doubt that a very deep chord has been struck among the masses.

No artist of the stature of Peter Tosh could exist outside the swirl of con-

troversy, and among reggae fans and critics this extended to tempestuous debate over his style of music. The tired bromide "gone commercial" got trotted out here usually in reference to Tosh's habit of incorporating funk, soca, blues, disco and especially rock into his brand of reggae, which some condemned as "abandoning the roots." When this came out of the mouths of certain American and British pop critics ("The music has lost its simplicity and raw power that were its most attractive quality"), it sounded like a scolding for overstepping the bounds of some notion of "third world sensibility"- and, rephrased, might well have read "What's become of our noble savage?"

First of all, it can be categorically stated that a Tosh concert was indeed a riotous celebration of music from around the globe, rooted in the Kingston sound. The texture was dense, the arrangements full, the tempo hot. Like any artist with vision and curiosity in these times, Peter Tosh inevitably heard many voices, both from his "roots" and from people singing around the world - and his music reflected this experience and evolved: "As long as instruments exist, they must be used in music, and you must know how to use the music so that it does not dilute the roots of your music, seen?"

It was this approach that cleared the decks for many true masterpieces - as well as contributed to Tosh's vast popularity internationally. As Tosh's audience broadened out, and had come to include some people whose idea of liberation did not extend much past "Legalize it" (marijuana), Tosh was accused by some of becoming 'white-washed'. Apparently these days it is the fate of any artist with something profound to say that the minute they create art of such universal beauty and depth that it attracts a large and contradictory audience, they will face charges of "treason" even (and in some cases especially) from the very folks who are most dramatically represented in the art, and have every reason to defend such artists.

For all his ferocity Peter was also a very funny and whimsical man. In one

evening, he might show up on stage playing his famous guitar shaped like an M-16, then disappear and a moment later ride in on a unicycle. He had a way of redesigning vocabulary, sometimes patching in folk proverbs and Biblical references to punch up the real meaning of things for the sufferers: there is the "shitstem" and the "downpressors".

Mikey Chung remembers: "Peter was very spontaneous. Things just happened. He worked best on stage with no rehearsal. When we recorded you had to catch him the first time around, or you're late. Word Sound and Power with me and Sly and Robbie and Robbie Lynn, we were a very tight band, a studio band so we could go on the road and just jam, different every night. This was the best way - Peter was real lay back, always trying to make us laugh on stage, in the bus, telling stories. Those times were good."

Peter used to keep birds at his home in Jamaica - some were wild ones that he had caught by hand. And he was known to laugh about how one day he would really surprise people - like the tales told by African slaves about the ones with secret wings who flew to freedom. And people would say: "Look at that Peter Tosh now - he's flying!"

Peter Tosh demonstrated to a lot of people the worthlessness of living on your knees - if you hold your head up and look Babylon in the eye, you can often make him blink. And while there's no flying back to the past, the future and the whole world beckons. **IF ALL THOSE STEPPIN' RAZORS DECIDE TO COME TOGETHER WE JUST MIGHT SOAR!!!**

THE ROOT IS THERE

"You can cut down the tree,
But you'll never,
You'll never succeed,
Cause- The root is there,

And you cannot get rid of
All of I and I now..."

- "The Root is There"
(Mighty Diamonds)

It may strike some revolutionaries as peculiar, or even unbelievable, that some of the most rebellious people in the cultural arena on the planet today read the Bible for daily guidance and regard a now-dead despotic Ethiopian ruler as leader and holy man.

That this is the case reveals something about our moment in history: the world at a treacherous pass, the way forward not very clear... many roads of resistance are taken.

The doctrine of Peter Tosh was the Rastafarian religion.

The system of out-migration in Jamaica served to bring new ideas to the society and, by the turn of the century, Jamaicans were learning more and more about the resistance of African leaders to the partition of Africa.

The exploits of Shaka Zulu, the Abyssinian defeat of the Italians in 1896 and the resistance of King Ja Ja of Opobo to the British grabbed the imagination of and inspired Black people in Jamaica.

Ja Ja himself, risen from the ranks of African traders, had by 1873 driven away all British traders from Calabar, a central trading point in West Africa. By 1881 he had taken full control of the lucrative trade in palm oil and threatened British plans to annex the West African coast from Lagos to the Cameroons. Ja Ja was ultimately defeated only by British treachery – the offer of a false peace treaty thorough which he was tricked and deported to St Vincent in the eastern Caribbean.

Ja Ja's struggle began a legend throughout the Caribbean, and his martial (and marital) exploits were celebrated and transmitted in calypso.

The defeat of the Italians in 1896 was also etched into popular consciousness: white people had failed to subdue one of the only independent African societies.

That the independence of Ethiopia should stand as symbol of African resistance was hardly unique to Jamaica. Ethiopianism and the independence of the Ethiopian Orthodox

Church had its origins in occupied Azania in the 1870's where Black people set up their own churches.

The Pan Africanist call of "Africa for the Africans" rang from the white highlands to the gold mines of Johannesburg. One of those who heard this rallying call was Marcus Garvey, one of the 126 000 workers who between 1902 and 1919 escaped the drudgery and abysmally low wages in Jamaica and migrated to Britain.



Bob Marley.

Garvey organized the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the US: the UNIA cemented the bonds of racial consciousness as an important component of class consciousness. Garvey and the UNIA stood in direct confrontation with capital, hence the *Negro World* was banned, UNIA's mushrooming economic enterprises were economically sabotaged, and Marcus Garvey was first incarcerated and then deported from the US in 1927.

Garvey returned to the poverty-stricken society that was Jamaica with a call for the poor to struggle and free themselves and channeled organised opposition and resistance into the People's Political Party. The Party called for self-government and for breaking with the fawning imitation of everything British.

To many workers and farmers Garvey was a prophet, one of whose important prophecies concerned the crowning of a Black King in Africa. When in 1930 Rastafari, son of Ras Makonnen of Harar, was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia, as Haile Selassie, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of Judah, those for whom the Bible held all the answers concluded that the Emperor was literally and biblically King of Kings.

The crowning of Selassie came as a welcome diversion from the constant reminder of the white King George and his wife whose portraits were on the walls of all public buildings.

The fusion of the Bible, where the works of Ja were praised in the Psalms, with the exploits of King Ja Ja, the message of Garvey and the crowning of the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah was to provide the framework for a new deification, replacing the white god in heaven and his white representatives in Buckingham Palace with a Black king and a god held to have been prophesied in the Book of Revelations in the New Testament.

Leonard Howell, Archibald Dunkley and Joseph Hibbert were the first Rastafarians. Howell was incarcerated for two years for selling pictures of Selassie. Howell and Dunkley were both subsequently sentenced to imprisonment in mental institutions for their continuing cultural resistance.

This was the colonial answer to the Black Consciousness of Rastafari.

To compound the "insanity", the men began to wear their hair like the Masai warriors of East Africa and called themselves locksmen or Nyamen. In a society where Black women spent hours straightening their hair with hot combs (*fryhead*), where Black girls were given white dolls and where schoolchildren instantly recreated a white image when called upon to draw a picture, the first Rastafarians were branded as violent criminals whose communes could be raided with impunity in the search for ganja.

Workers throughout the Black world

opposed the fascist invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. The Rastafari raised funds, wrote to newspapers and called meetings to oppose fascism. The Ethiopian ruling class sought to mobilize this favourable international response via an organisation called the Ethiopian World Federation.

Evidence of the callous neglect of the Ethiopian peasants led Garvey to write in the *Blackman* in 1936: "Mussolini of Italy has conquered Haile Selassie of Abyssinia, but he has not conquered the Abyssinians or Abyssinia. The Emperor of Abyssinia allowed himself to be conquered by playing white, by trusting white advisors and by relying on white governments including the white League of Nations..."

Garvey foresaw that, if Selassie on his return did not end the exploitation of his own people, he would be swept away by them: "As far as we can see the Emperor's term of usefulness is at an end for the present in Ethiopia. Abyssinia must be saved by the Abyssinian youth." Forty years later the contradiction of feeding meat to lions while people starved culminated in the slavemaster Selassie's overthrow and thrust Ethiopia into a long class struggle. It was this type of foresight, derived from a revolutionary perspective, which led many Jamaicans to regard Garvey as a prophet, a perspective whose continued relevance is evidenced in the words of the reggae group Burning Spear: "Marcus Garvey's words come to pass, can't get no food to eat, can't get no money to spend."

The Rastafarian movement can be compared to the movement of the Jewish people at the time the Book of Revelations was written ie circa 60 AD. This book of the New Testament, often quoted by Rastas, predicted the destruction of the Roman Empire and reflected the position of the Jewish people then – a people sorely oppressed but in many ways marginal to the Empire.

Similarly, the Rastafarian movement today to a significant degree finds its basis among sections of society that

have been reduced to a largely marginal existence by the workings of imperialism – particularly peasants driven off the land in Jamaica into the cities, or even into other countries such as imperial Britain or the USA, finding themselves in a declassed or semi-declassed situation.

The development of the Jamaican Proletariat has been severely stunted by imperialism, confined largely to miners and workers in the tourist industry or government – many of whom are *relatively* well off. Both the JLP and the PNP were strong in the miners' unions while Rastafarianism grew up among the landless peasants forced to hustle in the city.

Rasta groups sprang up all over Jamaica: they had no clear central institution. The democratic and free-wheeling nature of the movement had the major deficiency that anti-social elements could take on the physical appearance of the brethren while carrying out acts of intimidation against the working class.

In 1960, Ronald Henry repaired to the hills and issued a call for Jamaicans to rise up against JLP/PNP manipulation. A joint police-military operation brought this revolt to grief.

In April 1963, Rastafarians insisted on their right to pass over the land, in protest against the segregation of the Jamaican north coast. In the violence that ensued, eight people were killed. The demonstration had been organised by a group of young men, former students of Cornwall College, one of the more pro-British schools both in terms of its curriculum and staff, who had totally rejected their miseducation.

The state's response was simple and brutal: on the morning of 10 April 1963 all Rastafari in Jamaica were made subject to arrest. Troops had licence to shoot those who resisted. These draconian measures were reinforced by a hysterical press campaign on ganja, claiming that its users were prone to violence – a campaign which legitimated continuing police raids on Rastafari settlements and the arrest of hundreds of Jamaicans under the dangerous drugs law. Brethren were

further humiliated by being forced to have their locks shorn.

By 1960 Norman Manley had commissioned the first report on Rastafari – the first of many documents which sought to stereotype the people's culture as millenarian and 'cultist'. This approach appealed to those who had been lobotomised by their Oxford or Cambridge miseducations.

This disparaging attitude was profoundly altered by the visit of Haile Selassie to Jamaica in 1966. A barrage of studies promoting the religious and metaphysical aspects of Rastafari followed. Young brethren who declared "I and I no ina politricks" were encouraged and religious groups such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Twelve Tribes of Israel became "respectable organisations."

The work of Rex Nettleford in *Mirror, Mirror* and Leonard Barnett in *The Rastafarians* has given the lead to the crude interpretation of the brethren as "escapists", drug smokers and revivalists, or as forming some deviant sub-culture.

The response of Jamaica's ruling class to Rastafarianism provides a vivid example of the *ad hoc* sophistication of neo-colonial politics in the Caribbean. In the early days, the state characterized them and treated them as lunatics and criminals. In its first panic it institutionalized, brutalized and murdered Rastas. But then it studied them, cleansed the Rasta public image and, with university cultural reports, attempted to co-opt and woo them. This certainly did not succeed in subverting the emergence of the ideology, but it has definitely diverted its development.

The work of Walter Rodney in the gullies of Jamaica was a direct continuation of Marcus Garvey's, but using the tools of historical materialist analysis. Rodney talked to and grounded with the Rastas: he elucidated, informed and strengthened the progressive content of Rastafari.

After attending the historic Black Writers Conference in Montreal during October 1968, Rodney was

barred from returning to Jamaica by the Shearer regime: Michael Manley of the PNP never raised a murmur over this ban and once in power, he maintained it.

The big-time herb dealers imported guns and supplied them to street gangs (known as "possess"). A culture of violence in essential contradiction to Rastafari was used as a political tool as was the systematic introduction of hard drugs into Jamaica.

Not only has this imperialist contribution made certain broken elements in the population act in even more desperate ways, it has opened up the reggae scene to manipulation by international gangster rings who both collude with and compete for control of the *sub rosa* market with various bourgeoisies internationally.

Despite this, by the mid-1970's Rasta had become in many ways the culture of the masses. Everyday church-goers spoke of the liberation of Africa and denounced the eating of the pig. Rastafari taught the people about *Ital* food, condemning the high levels of chemicals used in food processing and promoting self-sufficiency.

Rasta challenged the colour-class gradations of the social hierarchy and opposed the distinction between town and country. It spread throughout the eastern Caribbean: the Dreads of Dominica were a variant of Rasta which, since it emerged after Selassie's fall from power, did not have to deal with the issue of his deification.

In 1975 the Dominican leadership passed a law entitling every citizen to shoot on sight any suspected Dreads found on their property. Desmond Trotter was framed and given a death sentence for murdering a white tourist: Trotter was the leader of the Dreads.

In Grenada over 400 Rasta were involved in the People's Liberation Army of the New Jewel Movement which overthrew the Eric Gairy dictatorship. Imperialism sought to mobilize backward elements using Rasta under Ras Nna.

From Fort de France to Paris, from Kingston to Brixton, Afro-Caribbean youth, alienated and oppressed by the racism and imperialism of societies that bred the Nazis, don the red, gold and green as the symbolic identification with Rastafari.

Rastas are united in their need to assert their own culture, their own Black dignity. As Amilcar Cabral said: "The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological plane of the physical and historical reality of that society that is dominated or to be dominated. Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history, by the positive and negative influence it exerts on the evolution of relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as differing societies. (from "National Liberation and Culture" in *Return to the Source* New York, 1972).

To see the Rastafari world view as limited to some religious proclivity is to ignore the vitality of the culture in Jamaica, in the eastern Caribbean and in the metropolitan cities where the children of Black immigrants are alienated from the servile culture of consumption.

The struggles of Black people inevitably appear in an intensely cultural form because the social formation in which their distinct political traditions are now manifest has constructed the arena of politics on ground overshadowed by centuries of metropolitan capitalist development, thereby denying them recognition as legitimate politics. Blacks conduct a class struggle *in and through* race. The BC of race and class cannot be empirically separated. The class character of Black struggles is not a result of the fact that Blacks are predominantly proletarian, though this is true. Classes are not static or continuous subjects of history, they are made and remade in continual struggle.



Haile Selassie.

It is only the heresy of economism which stipulates that the relations of commodity production alone determine class relations. The struggle for hegemony cannot be reduced to economic determinations or vulgarised to refer to solely cultural phenomena, and class analysis cannot be restricted to those positioned in the immediate processes of production.

Indeed, avowed Rastas maintain that all Black people are Rasta whether they realize it or not, pointing to Rastafarianism being a distinct expression of the contradiction between Black people and the power bloc (Babylon). Certainly, Rastafarianism is an authentic oppressed class ideology, the property of the oppressed masses of the Caribbean. To preoccupy oneself with Rasta's negative paradoxes is to blind oneself to the fact that there was *no other way* for an oppressed ideology to emerge among people who were left to fend for themselves and build their own livelihood.

Rasta's sharing of linguistic devices and political concepts marks the limits of a community bonded by a particular conceptualisation of "the people". The confrontation in style which has developed where open signification of dreadness transforms the unacceptable attribute of Blackness into a source of collective strength and inspiration acts as a focal point for dread and baldhead alike.

Rastafarianism and reggae music arose among people who were well

aware that they were suffering from the blows of a very long stick, but doubted that this monster could be taken down by the forces of this world alone. It all surfaced on a cusp of history – a time in Jamaica when, as a Tolstoyan character once put it, "everything has been turned upside down and is only just taking shape again."

Leo Tolstoy, the novelist, wrote during an earlier upheaval in peasant life – in Russia in the late 1800's. On his death V.I. Lenin commented: "His heated, passionate and often ruthlessly sharp protest against the state and the official church that was in alliance with the police conveys the sentiments of the primitive peasant democratic masses among whom centuries of serfdom, official tyranny and robbery, and of church Jesuitism, deception and chicanery had piled up mountains of anger and hatred."

"By studying the literary works of Tolstoy the Russian working class will learn to know its enemies better, but in examining the doctrine of Tolstoy, the whole Russian people will have to understand where their own weakness lies, the weakness which did not allow them to carry the cause of their emancipation to its conclusion. This must be understood in order to go forward."

Peter Tosh and other great reggae musicians have also created startlingly beautiful art which rages against four hundred (400) years of slavery and the draconian new order of the neo-colonial US master and their dogs in Jamaica. At the same time, their doctrine, like Tolstoy's, holds tight to and even resurrects certain traditions and mystical trappings from the past in an attempt to explain and do battle against the savage assaults of this modern world.

This contradictory position leads the Rastas on the one hand to throw out the basic Christian pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die routine, while demanding and fighting for Black redemption here on earth (an advance, too, over Tolstoy's ultimate goal of transcending the horrors of the material world). The anthem ringing in this new creed, by Tosh and Marley, today

stands with perhaps a handful of songs which have been taken as their own by rebels around the world and stands as ample warning not to underestimate the degree of political transformation represented by Rastafarianism:

*"Most people think that great good
will come from the skies
Take away everything, and make
everybody feel high.
But if you know what life is worth
You will look for yours on earth.
And now we see the light
We're gonna stand up for our
rights."*

–"Get Up, Stand Up"
(1978)

Rastafarianism had no patience with Christian promises of the good life when you're dead and gone. If the times were "dread", the possibility of overthrowing the whole order was also alive in the world, if presently out of reach. The denial of God flowing from the belief that "God is I and I and has always been" are the kindling of the process in which: "The criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics." (Jerry Hirsch "To 'unfrock the Charlatans'" *Saga Race Relations Abstracts* Volume 6 Number 2, 1981)

Taking the circumstances of the 1930's with the complete blocking of socialist thought from the colonies, Rastafarianism is a profound and forward-looking response to the sickness of colonialism.

In the established Christian churches God the Father is white, God the Son-Jesus- is white, the angels were white, the Holy Ghost was white- and Lucifer, of course, was black, being the embodiment of evil.

Those who preached the divinity of Ras Tafari were rejecting the link between Christianity and whiteness, and were inexorably breaking with the philistine white West Indian society, thus linking their cultural and spiritual roots with Ethiopia and Africa. As a first step, this was undoubtedly progressive.

African traditions do not recognize the separation of politics from other spheres of life. Armand Mattelart, quoted by Jon Frappier in 'Chase goes to Harlem: financing black capitalism' *Monthly Review* (Volume 28, Number 11: 1977), reminds us that: "Acquiring and developing class consciousness does not mean obligatory boredom. It is a question of transforming what used to be used exclusively for pleasure and leisure into a means of instruction."

The negative paradox about Rastafari lies in the fact that using the past to overturn the present can mire one in the swamps of "anciency". Rastafarianism is bound to rely on mysticism and non-scientific explanations which blind one's origin and to some degree one's destiny to a Creator and his emissaries on the planet earth.

Rastafari culture remains, however, an indelible link between the resistance of the Maroons, the Pan-Africanist appeal of Marcus Garvey, the materialist and historical analysis of Walter Rodney and the defiance of reggae. The cultural resistance of Rasta remains an integral part of the struggle against imperialism and commodity fetishism, which attempts to reduce human beings to zombies.

I'M THE TOUGHEST

In the chorus of "Maga Dog", Tosh makes a powerful statement on the folly of not kicking an enemy when he's down:

*"You sorry for Maga Dog/
Him turn round bite you
You jump out the frying pan, you
know,
You jump in the fire, yeah..."*

But the lyrics of the same song pack a reactionary diatribe on a particular "enemy" – a woman and her "ways".

It is on the Woman Question that the negative and positive aspects of elements within Rastafari culture emerge most sharply. The Rastafarians generally uphold peasant customs regarding the woman as childbearer and obedient mate.

In Kingston, less than a quarter of the mothers are legally married, but pressures are so intense in the ghetto that a whole vocabulary has sprung up to describe the most common familial relations: "baby-mother" or "baby-father" referring to the parent. And conversation is littered with expressions like "He bred her," "He control her," "He rule her," to describe "normal" love relations.

To be sure, Rasta men were the first to denounce *fryhead* women and those aspects of capitalist society which led to the alienation and self-hatred of Black women. Many Rasta brethren and sisters grew up in the hills where the exploits and leadership of Nanny, Harriet Tubman, Angela Davis and Josina Machel are retold.

These brethren denounce the Anglo-American culture which glorifies sex, violence and the insecurity of those who make sex a commodity. As Black men, the brethren were the children of those whose mothers had suffered sexual abuse, they understood that sexual coercion was an essential element of the social relations between masters and slaves.

Rastafarianism "honours" the woman as a "queen" but attempts to maintain male hegemony in the household. To quote Tosh: "Don't come tell me say you are equal to me cause it's impossible until you have two seeds and a wood... A woman keeps the house clean, make the food nice and do these things a woman must do. Seen. But it's how the world makes it today, my dear, in this western hemisphere. Ministers of these shitstems design it that the woman see herself as the dominant figure. Everytime seen... The man have to swear blind that he will have to do such and such... until death do us part... See when you talk about the Rastaman, it is like going in the jungle and seeing the lion. The lion is the king of the jungle. All other animals are under him. Well it is like seeing the Rastaman, the king of man. And can you imagine the king of man must have one little piece of woman."

The Jamaican state, with its Bureau of Women Affairs under the Prime

Minister's office, discussed woman as an undifferentiated mass, without class differences. Sister Beverley (Manley's wife) was elevated as the leader of Black women in Jamaica when she and her class employ poor Black women as house servants.

Middle-class feminist slogans and generalisations about the Rasta do not touch the lives of these Black working class women who have to be liberated from the drudgery of carrying water on their heads, who have to fend for their youths, whose "baby father" is a migrant labourer.

But the barbaric legacy of feudalism inherent in Tosh's words, slicked up with Old Testament dicta and enshrined as part of the "African tradition", represents the opposite of a "righteous rebellion" against the "Western Ministers" and in fact can only help to keep them in power.

While it would be completely wrong to confuse Tosh and other Rastas with the *real* maga dogs, Rastamen need to be liberated from the mythology about women and the vestiges of inequalities in the family.

The byzantine sentiments expressed by Tosh and other Rastamen on the Women Question need to go under the wrecking ball in order to go forward.

This "weakness" among the oppressed once again underlines Marx's comment: "Everything that exists has this much worth, that it will perish."

BURY THE SHITSTEM

The Jamaican "left" and right are popularly considered to be limited to pedagogic "do-gooders" or US lackey dictators, both of whom enforce neo-colonial rule ultimately through terror.

It is in this context that people have been forced to look elsewhere for their radical spokespersons and ultimately for real revolutionary leadership.

Tosh and other reggae musicians were "recruited" to fill the vacuum, and their songs, performances, inter-



views, and lives are scrutinized by the people as though they were the works of political leaders.

This has made for headaches all around.

While of course all art has political content, and all artists objectively represent different classes on stage – and artists of the calibre of Tosh represented quite a fierce section of the masses internationally – this still begs the question.

In order to "bury the shitstem" the people need revolutionary leadership which artists (who have another job to do) can never wholly or mainly provide. Artists as *artists* are simply not equipped to lead the revolutionary movement. The demand that they do so only undermines the process by which actual revolutionary leadership is developed, and simultaneously drags down their art to the level of tedious pedagogy: people need real propaganda and agitation on the political problems of the world, and instead get an article set to music.

Art fulfills a different human requirement from political education. Marley put it best: "These songs, people understand them, or they cyann (can't) understand them, but ya have fe sing them just the same. What the people want is the *beauties*, mon."

In Jamaica, however, the situation is further complicated by the fact that many reggae musicians are also looked upon as *spiritual* guardians, and their art as spreading the mess-

age of "Jah" to people cast out of their African homeland. Tosh: "The singers and players of instruments are the only true prophets in this time".

This confluence of contradictions was epitomized by Tosh when, after the Uprising of West Indians and punks in Brixton, England in 1981, some baiting fool of a music critic asked him if he thought his music "encouraged violence with its militant image". Tosh shouted back, "Militant? Me don't join the army, I'm missionary, not a military. When you're talking about military you're associating me with guns and missiles and those kinda things... when you call me, you must say missionary, 'cause I deal with righteousness."

This is no plea for pacifism: Tosh is simply laying claim to being a teacher and preacher who believes that the movement that will "bury the shit-stem" is a spiritual one: "No politician can stop the prophecy, they all die at 78."

The contradiction cuts both ways. Under pressure to "lead a movement" or at least to be "more" than an artist, Tosh and other reggae musicians have nonetheless created soaring works of art.

How can this be? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the very strivings of these musicians for something better than more ackee and breadfruit have had the effect of lifting the music out of the boring and depressing litany of complaints and "explanations" so typical of "protest music" internationally. At its best, reggae music represents a rejection of this degraded brand of art and the contemptible welfare worker politics which inform it. Tosh: "They know I don't support politricks and games, because I have bigger aims, hopes and aspirations."

But if the sights of many reggae musicians go beyond the "fussing and fighting" of Jamaican bourgeois politicking, they still largely figure in the class struggle there exactly because they command battalions among the masses on the basis of their political and spiritual authority.

Reggae musicians are caught in the see-sawing grip of a ruling class which must try to associate itself with the Rasta movement, emphasizing only its nationalistic aspects, but simultaneously must try to co-opt or annihilate its most radical expressions, particularly as the society gets stretched to its economic and political breaking point.

The international press and even the international music press does not usually find the harassment, detentions, bannings of music or outright murder of reggae musicians "newsworthy". As Bob Marley said in 1972: "These things are heavier than anyone can understand. People that are not involved don't know it..."

The ruling class hypocritically claims artists like Marley and Tosh as "national treasures" but their only hope in doing this is to reduce these artists and their powerful messages to mere icons and to protect themselves from the wrath of the masses for their role in snuffing these artists out.

RISE UP, FALLEN FIGHTERS

"... rise up fallen fighters
unfetter the stars
dance with the universe
& make it ours
oh, make it/ make it ours
oh, make it/ make it ours..."

— Ntozake Shange
"From Okra to Greens"

Tosh's *Equal Rights* album cover wryly depicts that the spirit of those who refuse to back down simply cannot be suppressed: it depicts a Tosh profile in rude boy welder glasses, repeated over and over.

Back in 1976, Tosh put it this way: "So all o' my tune dem is just reality. If is not me feel it is me bredda a feel it. And I am my bredda's keeper. Me 'ave fe think fe whole heap o' thousands o' people. So when you see I mek a tune, man, is just action and reaction. Reality".

Closing the book on reggae music is

manifestly absurd. G. Piekhanov, when he was still a Marxist, commented in 1898: "A given trend in art may remain without any remarkable expression if an unfavourable combination of circumstances carries away, one after another, several talented people who might have given it expression. But the premature death of such talented people can prevent the artistic expression of this trend only if it is too shallow to produce new talent. However, the depth of any given trend in literature and art is determined by its importance for the class or stratum whose tastes it expresses, and by the social role played by that class or stratum; here too, in the last analysis, everything depends upon the course of social development and on the relation of social forces". (*The Role of the Individual in History*)

It is a sure bet that Tosh and the rest of the reggae greats, the "creation rockers" will find their way into the hearts and cassette players of the Ivans of Azania and the world, right on through to when the "right time" really does come, and when we can give meaning to the lyrics of "Where you gonna run":

"Where you gonna run/Where you gonna hide?
Who you trying to seek? What you tryin to find?
We're all in this race, everybody,
trying to keep the pace
You can't get away, there is no escape."

The power of Tosh's music flows in the final analysis from the understanding that there is no painless movement forward, and no way out either — not in some mythical afterlife, not in phoney promises offered up by "Babylon" to keep us shuffling in deadly confusion, and not even in Afrika — Peter always paid tribute to the African struggle (witness "Fight Apartheid") but never called upon Blacks to retreat to Afrika.

The spirit of Tosh will walk into the future, the Azanian people and their allies on this planet will see to that. We have work to do bury this shit-stem, and we will do it. ■