

Note: In this poem, a cook is lining up at the Town Hall to pay the ‘rates’, i.e. the city house tax, on behalf of her employer. The Town Hall opens at 9 a.m., unlike private businesses where clerks have to open at 7 a.m. Presumably the day is a deadline for payment (quarterly?), hence the long line. *Goodwille* was a well-known Port of Spain grocery store, where the cook could do the shopping before the Town Hall opened.

“Cook at de Town Hall”

“When can we get in at de door?
Not tell de clock strikes nine!
An ef we don’t obey de law
We’s got to pay a fine.
De richest merchants comes to town
At seven in de mornin.
Unless de clerks is down dey frown
While de ’ficials dem is snoring,
Ah bes’ go long to Goodwille
‘Stead a’waiting ’pon de road,
Ah jus’ got time to pay de bill
And get back wid me load.
Ah see is only harf pas’ eight
By de clock in the church steeple,
But watch dem come to pay de rate!
Such a crowd a’mix-up people.
Mus’ stand’ in line?
Me God what time
I go’n fetch de house to-day!
De missis cross like sour lime
She go’n want to dock me pay.
Eh! eh!
’Bajan¹ an’ de bakra²
’Mongst de Creole³ an’ Chinee,
An’ see de ole yaraba⁴
Wide de rhematism knee.
’M, ’m! de coolie⁵ man befo’ me
Smell too strang a’ ile.
Ah isn’t had me corfee
I’s sure he ’rouse me bile!
De gent behind me basket
Leaning ’gainst de sal’fish tail,
Sure after dis I makes a bet

His clos' go'n scent too stale!
At las' me tun is coming but look!
Is nearly ten pas' ten,
Pellau⁶ takes long time to cook
An' she ain' so young dis hen,
Well! taint me fault ef I'se late to-day
When de master calls fer brakefuss,⁷
He's bes' come here hissself to pay
An' den dey'll hear a first rale [rate] cuss!

— D.D.

¹ 'Bajan. Barbadian

² *bakra*. White person

³ *Creole*. Local person of primarily African descent

⁴ *yaraba*. Person of direct Yoruban descent

⁵ *coolie*. Person of East Indian descent (now considered a negative term)

⁶ *Pellau* (*pelau*, *pilau*), a hearty main dish made of seasoned meat and rice.

⁷ The earliest meal of the day was *tea*, usually a hot drink and bread or something similar; *breakfast* was generally the main cooked meal of the day, served several hours later around 11-12 o'clock.

English Version

“Cook at the Town Hall”

“When can we get in at the door?
Not till the clock strikes nine!
And if we don't obey the law
We've got to pay a fine.
The richest merchants come to town
At seven in the morning.
Unless the clerks are down they frown
While the officials they are snoring,
I'd best go along to Goodwille
Instead of waiting on the road,
I've just got time to pay the bill
And get back with my load.
I see it's only half past eight
By the clock in the church steeple,
But watch them come to pay the rate!
Such a crowd of mixed-up people.
Must stand in line?
My God, what time
Will I reach the house to-day!
The missus will be cross like a sour lime
She'll want to dock my pay.
Eh! eh! Bajan and the white man
Amongst the Creole and Chinese,
And see the old Yoruba
With the rheumatism knee.
'M, 'm! the coolie man before me
Smells too strong of oil.

I haven't had my coffee
I'm sure he'll rouse my bile!
The gent behind my basket
Leaning against the saltfish tail,
Sure after this I make a bet
His clothes will smell too stale!
At last my turn is coming but look!
It's nearly ten past ten,
Pellau takes a long time to cook
And she isn't so young this hen,
Well! It's not my fault if I'm late to-day
When the master calls for breakfast,
He'd best come here himself to pay
And then they'll hear a first [rate] cuss!

— D.D.