

**C.L.R. JAMES IN IMPERIAL BRITAIN, 1932-38**

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## Abstract

This dissertation will aim to advance scholarly understanding of the political and intellectual itinerary of the late Trinidadian intellectual and activist C.L.R. James (1901-89) during the six years he spent in Britain from 1932-38. In the process it will not only revise the existing interpretation of the importance of these years within James's own life and work, but also suggest that James's experience during the 1930s raises wider questions about the nature of British society and politics during this critical decade. This thesis will consider James's early identification with imperial Britishness growing up in a Crown Colony in the British West Indies, and his rejection of this and his radicalisation towards a wider solidarity with forms of black internationalism. James's 'class-struggle Pan-Africanism', developed in partnership with his boyhood friend and compatriot George Padmore, will be examined for the light it sheds on anti-colonialism. James's critically important experience in the Lancashire cotton textile town of Nelson will also be detailed, as will his subsequent relationship with other politically radical intellectuals and the wider British left and labour movement during this period. James's understanding of imperial metropolitan culture in Britain will be explored through a discussion of his early cricket journalism while his other writings for the Trotskyist and Pan-Africanist press illuminate much about race and revolutionary politics in Europe, the Caribbean and America. An attempt will be made to reconstruct the concrete historical context in which James wrote his play *Toussaint Louverture*, his study *World Revolution* and his classic history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*. Overall, this thesis will suggest that during the 1930s James not only intellectually conquered imperial Britain and advanced understanding of the African diaspora but also emerged as one of the most significant and creative revolutionary Marxist thinkers in Britain during the Great Depression.

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

C.L.R. James once suggested that ‘following Heidegger, the current day intellectuals get their PhDs, but what they have written is of no value’ as unless ‘writers and teachers are taking part in the great philosophical conflicts of the day, they are unable to understand the problems and solutions attempted by Socrates, Aristotle, Ibn Khaldoun, etc.’<sup>1</sup> Any value this particular doctoral thesis might have I am of course perfectly content to leave for others to judge, but it is perhaps worth recording at the outset that I fully concur with the sentiments expressed by James on this matter. It would not be impossible to understand many of the problems and solutions attempted by James while a leading member of the early Trotskyist and Pan-African movements in 1930s Britain without being a political activist oneself, but I feel that over a decade’s activism in the Socialist Workers’ Party (S.W.P.) in Britain has given me at least some additional insight into ‘the great philosophical conflicts of the day’ that would not have been possible to gain had I never ventured outside the seminar rooms, libraries and archives. As Rousseau once noted,

I think it is foolish to try and study society as a mere bystander. The man that wants only to observe observes nothing; as he is useless in business and a dead weight in amusements, he is not drawn into anything. We see others’ actions only to the extent that we act ourselves. In the school of the world, as in love’s school, we have to start by practicing what we want to learn.<sup>2</sup>

The intellectual debts I have accumulated during the research and writing of this thesis over six years are far too numerous for me to allow to personally thank everyone who has ever offered me advice or assisted me at some point. The generosity and kindness I have often encountered when I mentioned my research topic is of course in large part testament to the intellectual respect for James himself, and I can only give my sincere apologies in advance to those many scholars,

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Singham, ‘James and the Creation of a Caribbean Intellectual Tradition’, *Social and Economic Studies*, 39/3, (1990), p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> From Rousseau’s *Julie*, Part II, Letter 17, quoted in Karl Kautsky, ‘Foundations of Christianity; Author’s Foreword’, (1908), ‘<http://www.Marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1908/Christ/forward.htm>’ (27 November 2009). Thanks to Paul Blackledge for this reference.

librarians, archivists, admin staff, activists, friends and comrades who provided support at some point but are not named here in person. However, some cannot escape acknowledgement for what follows so easily. Though I have been working at this thesis since 2004, its origins can probably be traced as far back as 2001. when as an undergraduate in the School of History at the University of Leeds, one of my lecturers, David Goodway, kindly gave me a copy of the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) discussion journal *Controversy* dated October 1937, helpfully pointing out an article on ‘Trotskyism’ by James.<sup>3</sup> I knew little of James at the time aside from the fact that he had written *The Black Jacobins*, but within a year I had made my first attempted intervention into the world of ‘James-scholarship’, writing an ambitiously titled 20,000 word dissertation on ‘C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38’ for my M.A. in History and Politics at the University of York, under the supervision of Allison Drew.<sup>4</sup> I would like to re-iterate at the outset my indebtedness to both David Goodway for his insight on James, his continuing encouragement for my work and for his generosity with sharing rare relevant material, and to Allison Drew for helping me to get some of my early work on James published.<sup>5</sup>

At first the University of Leeds and then at the University of York, I have benefited from drawing from across the wealth of knowledge and understanding of a whole range of scholars, but I should particularly like to thank my thesis supervisor, David Howell, who has been everything and more a doctoral student could hope for in such an individual. Not only a model of partisan historical scholarship in his own right, without his tireless and careful attention to detail combined with a rare breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, this thesis would have been immeasurably poorer. I should also like to acknowledge my debts to the other two members of my Thesis Advisory Panel, Henrice Altink and Alan Forrest. They have not only been both great sources of help in their own right, but have like David Howell seen this thesis evolve over the years, as an initially overly-ambitious project on ‘C.L.R. James and British society’ became first narrowed down to an intensive chronologically structured study of James’s years in the 1930s and 1950s, then finally just a thematic study of the 1930s. Aside from acknowledging the influence of many

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<sup>3</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘Trotskyism’, *Controversy*, 2/1, (October, 1937).

<sup>4</sup> Christian Hogsbjerg, ‘“Making an Opening.” C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38’, (Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of York, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Christian Hogsbjerg, ‘C.L.R. James and Italy’s Conquest of Abyssinia’, *Socialist History*, 28, (2006).

of the scholars in the Department of History themselves, including Joanna de Groot, Geoff Cubitt, David Clayton and James Walvin, I would also like to salute the many friends whom I have made over the years among the postgraduate community of 'new imperial historians' both at York and further afield, including Gajendra Singh. Peter Kilroy, Joe Hardwick and especially Gráinne Goodwin, who was also kind enough to proof-read part of this thesis before submission.

Outside York, I have had the honour and privilege to meet or correspond with some of the leading members of the community of James-scholars, above all Robert A. Hill, whose profound understanding of his former mentor and comrade's life and work so inspired me and fired my imagination when I first set out on this project. I should also like to acknowledge my appreciation here in particular for the enthusiastic encouragement of Bill Schwarz and Kent Worcester, both also inspiring models of 'James-scholarship' in their own right. I am also indebted to Marika Sherwood, who not only incredibly kindly and generously shared with me her collection of extremely rare and valuable material relating to James and the Pan-African movement in Britain during this period but also her warm memories of 'Nello' and advice on finding sources. Marika also put me in touch with Gloria Valère (daughter of Learie Constantine), with whom it was a privilege and honour to correspond with. Some of the most insightful moments of my research took place not when in the archives as such, but when meeting some of those people who were closest to James himself including Selma James, Darcus Howe, Stuart Hall, Sam Weinstein, and the late John La Rose. Correspondence with Grace Lee Boggs was a real privilege, while I am equally indebted to Sidney Robinson and the late Len Edmondson for sharing their recollections of James during the 1930s. Sheila Leslie (daughter of Charlie Lahr) kindly facilitated an interview with Mildred Gordon, which I have included as an appendix, while I also spent a memorable and enjoyable day in the company of Raymond Challinor and his wife, Mabel. In 2006, I also had the great honour and privilege of spending a day in the company of Eric E. Robinson, who had attended school in Nelson with Learie Constantine's daughter Gloria during the 1930s and very kindly took me on an extensive guided tour of the town itself.

I have also benefited greatly from discussions and correspondence about James with many other scholars, friends and activists, some of whom not only provided wise counsel but also copies of extremely rare material. I owe particular debts of gratitude here to Talat Ahmed, Anne Alexander, Ian Birchall, Paul

Blackledge, Alex Callinicos, Andy Durgan, Charles Forsdick and Dave Renton. I should like to also thank a number of other scholars, friends and activists for various forms of assistance including Aldon Nielsen, David Austin, Rachel Douglas, Gidon Cohen, Kevin Morgan, Laurent Dubois, Colin Chambers, John McIlroy, Ted Crawford, Paget Henry, Stephen Howe, Carolyn Fick, Robin Blackburn, Julian Harber, Max Farrar, Marcus Rediker, Frank Rosengarten, Margaret Busby, Caryl Phillips, James D. Young, Matthew Quest, Scott McLemee, Peter Fraser, Nicole King, Colin Barker, Gaverne Bennett, Weyman Bennett, Sebastian Budgen, Graham Campbell, John Charlton, Joseph Choonara, Keith Flett, Matt Gordon, Nik Howard, David Parker, Barry Winter, Stephen P. Hill, Ed Rooksby, Christopher Hall, Emily Robins Sharpe, Amalia Ribí, Leslie James, Matthew Caygill, David Berry, Jodi Burkett, Alex Davidson, Merryn Everett, Liz Stainforth, Carole Wright, Phil Goodfield, Sally Kincaid, Marven Scott, John Taylor, Osama Zumam, Ravi Malhotra, Joanne St Lewis, Peter Hudis, Kevin Anderson, and the late Victor Kiernan. The radical bookseller Andrew Burgin kindly allowed me access to James's 'Beyond a Boundary Papers' while they were in his possession. I would also like to pay a heartfelt tribute to the staff at all those libraries and archives I have made use of during my years of research, particularly those at the British Library, in particular the Newspaper Library Colindale. I would also like to thank the staff at Nelson Library, and the libraries at the University of Leeds and the University of York. In terms of archives, William LeFevre at Wayne State University, the staff at the Labour History Archive, British Film Institute, Theatre Museum, Working Class Movement Library, Glasgow Caledonian University Archive of the Trotskyist Tradition, and the archive staff at the University of Hull also went beyond the call of duty in the service of scholarship.

I would like to close with James's belief that to make a useful intellectual contribution 'one must not only be involved in the conflicts of the day, one must have a quite conscious philosophy of history'.<sup>6</sup> Here I would like to again pay tribute to those many comrades in or around the S.W.P. – particularly those in Leeds S.W.P. - who contributed to my intellectual development and understanding of Marxism, a 'quite conscious philosophy of history' that has shaped this thesis for better or worse. On this note, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of Paul Foot (1937-

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<sup>6</sup> Singham, 'James and the Creation of a Caribbean Intellectual Tradition', p. 182.

2004) and Chris Harman (1942-2009), both great revolutionary socialists who in their own ways helped inspire and shape the writing of this thesis. Though I sadly never got the chance to meet Paul Foot, let alone ask him about C.L.R. James, I did have the privilege of watching and hearing him speak at several rallies and meetings, while his passionately felt enthusiasm for *The Black Jacobins* in particular was for me infectious from the first time I heard a recording of a 1991 lecture of his on Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution. If Foot passed away soon after I had embarked on research for this thesis in 2004, then the equally sudden and tragic death of Chris Harman as I was about to submit the thesis in late 2009 was for me if anything a matter of even greater regret. An outstanding Marxist theoretician and impressive populariser of Marxist theory, Chris had been an intellectual mentor for me long before I had the honour of getting to know him a little. Chris had also known James and, I learned, even invited him up to speak to a meeting of the International Socialists (forerunner to the S.W.P.) at the University of Leeds in 1963. I will always be particularly grateful to him for encouraging me to write a brief introductory article on James for *International Socialism* in 2006 while editor of that journal.<sup>7</sup>

Last but very far from least, I would like to take the opportunity to sincerely thank my family, above all my parents, Sue and John, whose unconditional if critical support was vital in allowing me the possibility of undertaking this thesis in the first place.

### **Author's Declaration**

Some of the material contained in this thesis was presented in an earlier form in my two aforementioned journal articles for *International Socialism* and *Socialist History*.

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<sup>7</sup> Christian Hogsbjerg, 'C.L.R. James: The Revolutionary as Artist', *International Socialism*, 112, (2006).

C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain, 1932-38



Plate 1. C.L.R. James speaking in Trafalgar Square, mid-1930s.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [Photograph], Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism; An Interview* (London, 1987), front cover.

*All who are alive today who remember him are old men. Some of them never spoke to him at all. Some saw him once. Some never saw him. Yet his personality still lives vividly with them. Those must be indeed great men, says Hazlitt, whose shadows lengthen out to posterity.*

C. L. R. James, 'Michel Maxwell Philip', 1931.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Michel Maxwell Philip: 1829-1888 [1931]', in Selwyn R. Cudjoe, (ed.), *Michel Maxwell Philip; A Trinidad Patriot of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Wellesley, 1999), p. 103.

## INTRODUCTION

### **‘Revolutionaries, Artists and Wicket-Keeper’: C.L.R. James’s Place in History**

*What is now happening to Marx’s doctrine has occurred time after time in history to the doctrine of revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes struggling for liberation ... attempts are made after their death to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to speak, and to confer a certain prestige on their names so as to “console” the oppressed classes by emasculating the essence of the revolutionary teaching, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it.*

Vladimir I. Lenin, 1918.<sup>1</sup>

*Idiots and bourgeois scoundrels always emphasise Trotsky’s personal brilliance whereby they seek to disparage Trotsky’s method. The two are inseparable. His natural gifts were trained and developed by Marxism and he could probe these depths of understanding and ascend to these peaks of foresight because he based himself on the Marxian theory of the class struggle and the revolutionary and predominant role of the proletariat in the crisis of bourgeois society.*

C.L.R. James, ‘Trotsky’s Place in History’, 1940.<sup>2</sup>

*People continue to probe into his ‘psychology’ and his ‘ambition’ and all sorts of personality refuse, and make no serious attempt to grapple with one of the most profoundly based and sharply organised political personalities of our time.*

C.L.R. James, ‘Dr. Eric Williams, First Premier of Trinidad and Tobago; A Biographical Sketch’, 1960.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (London, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘Trotsky’s Place in History’, in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James, 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘Dr. Eric Williams, First Premier of Trinidad and Tobago; A Biographical Sketch [1960]’, in Selwyn R. Cudjoe (ed.), *Eric E. Williams Speaks* (Massachusetts, 1993), p. 337.

‘One of the abiding ironies of Cyril Lionel Robert James’s intellectual career,’ Grant Farred noted in 1996, is that ‘since his death in London in 1989, and for perhaps half a decade before that, the Caribbean thinker has already been able to secure a status denied to him during most of his life’.<sup>4</sup> One might wonder just how much of an ‘abiding irony’ it is for a revolutionary socialist, who felt towards the end of his life that one of his ‘greatest contributions’ had been ‘to clarify and extend the heritage of Marx and Lenin,’ not to have secured more of a status in late capitalist society.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the belated ‘discovery’ of C.L.R. James since the 1980s has been quite remarkable. Every year it seems a new biography or collection of his writings adds to what we already know, and as Farred noted, ‘with the emergence of fields such as cultural studies, popular culture, and postcolonial studies, James is now an object of research’.<sup>6</sup>

All this attention is welcome and the result of the Trinidadian historian, theorist and activist posthumously becoming a fashionable ‘object of research’ has not been without value for anyone attempting to understand the life and work of a political thinker who, for too long, has often been somewhat overlooked in scholarly literature.<sup>7</sup> Yet what, then, could be the possible justification for adding another doctoral thesis - and on a biographical theme - to the now voluminous secondary literature on James? Surely we know more than enough after multiple biographies on top of nearly thirty years of relatively sustained ‘James-scholarship’? A crucial part of the answer lies in the fact that the recent surge of writing about James has reflected its time and place markedly. The prevailing contemporary intellectual fashion in modern - or perhaps ‘post-modern’ - academia remains set against any attempt to see his life work as a coherent totality with any unity to it beyond a slightly abstract sense in which he ‘rethought race, politics, and

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<sup>4</sup> Grant Farred (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James* (Oxford, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* (London, 1986), p. 164.

<sup>6</sup> Farred (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> There was of course some useful pioneering scholarly writing on James before this point. With respect to James in 1930s Britain, see, for example, the discussion in A.J. MacKenzie, ‘British Marxists and the Empire: anti-imperialist theory and practice, 1920-1945’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 1978). See also Alan J. MacKenzie, ‘Radical Pan-Africanism in the 1930s: A Discussion with C.L.R. James’, *Radical History Review*, 24, (1980), an interview incorporated with one by Paul Buhle and published in M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History* (Manchester, 1984).

poetics' through 'a critique of modernity' and engaged in a 'struggle for a new society'.<sup>8</sup> The tone was set with the very first pioneering biography, *C.L.R. James; The Artist as Revolutionary* (1989), in which Paul Buhle argued that a post-structuralist 'de-centering may bring a reconciliation of the myriad varieties of particular genius, not merely of a few powerful cultures in our own age but of every cultural expression from the past which is still, in any meaningful sense, recuperable'.<sup>9</sup>

This Foucauldian focus on the 'fragment' might seem at first a far more appropriate approach than any attempt to directly make a claim for James as simply, say, a Marxist, or a Pan-Africanist, as his concerns and means of expressing them were extremely broad. As Martin Glaberman once observed, 'it is the very richness of his life that makes an assessment of James more difficult' as we 'have not and could not share the range of what James has done'.<sup>10</sup> Peter Fryer once described how James's 'stature simply bursts any category a writer tries to squeeze him into ... one can no more catch and label the essence of C.L.R. James than one can cage a cloud'.<sup>11</sup> However, a number of problems have since emerged with Buhle's 'de-centered' perspective. Rather than seeing a 'reconciliation' of the 'myriad varieties' of James's genius, as a number of scholars collectively worked towards building up a single portrait, Glaberman noted that what he saw instead emerging in the literature was 'a fragmented James: James as cultural critic, James as Marxist theoretician, James as Third World guru, James as expert on sports, etc.' That scholars would produce 'their own James' was not inevitable, but it was always going to be a danger given the highly specialised nature of modern academia and contemporary pressures to publish, and consequently Glaberman described how

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<sup>8</sup> The quotes here allude to two of the most recent works on James, Brett St Louis, *Rethinking Race, Politics, and Poetics: C.L.R. James' Critique of Modernity* (Abingdon, 2007) and Frank Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary: C.L.R. James and the Struggle for a New Society* (Jackson, 2008). For my brief review of both, see Christian Høgsbjerg, 'Remembering C.L.R. James, Forgetting C.L.R. James', *Historical Materialism*, 17/3, (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Buhle, *C.L.R. James; The Artist as Revolutionary* (London, 1993), p. 172.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Glaberman, 'C.L.R. James: A Recollection', in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994), p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The history of black people in Britain* (London, 1987), p. 336. See also Peter Fryer, 'Introduction', in James D. Young, *The World of C.L.R. James; His Unfragmented Vision* (Glasgow, 1999).

writers have simply ‘taken from him what they found useful and imputed to him what they felt necessary’.<sup>12</sup>

More critically, a general lack of concern for the fine complexities of his life has not been overcome by what Farred celebrates as ‘the centrality of cultural studies within James scholarship’.<sup>13</sup> This has steadily led to one ‘James’ in particular coming to the fore, and some of the consequences of being ‘claimed’ by cultural and post-colonial studies can be usefully seen through a comparison with Frantz Fanon, another towering West Indian revolutionary figure. David Macey, Fanon’s biographer, has described post-colonial studies as ‘a continuation of English literature by other means’, warning ‘the danger is that Fanon will be absorbed into accounts of “the colonial experience” that are so generalised as to obscure both the specific features of his work and the trajectory of his life’. The study of Fanon, Macey continued, now focuses ‘almost exclusively’ on his psychoanalysis and his work *Black Skin, White Masks*. ‘The “post-colonial” Fanon worries about identity politics, and often about his own sexual identity, but he is no longer angry. And yet, if there is a truly Fanonian emotion it is anger.’ However, post-colonial readings of Fanon now ‘studiously avoid the question of violence’, his commitment to the Algerian Revolution and even his classic *The Wretched of the Earth*.<sup>14</sup>

James’s posthumous ‘canonization’ as a ‘pioneering icon’ of ‘cultural studies’ and ‘post-colonial studies’ has not perhaps come at such a price as that paid by Fanon, but this is not to say that it has not come without its price.<sup>15</sup> In his important and insightful 1997 study, Aldon Lynn Nielsen suggested that while ‘James is patently not a “deconstructionist” ... it is equally clear that James’s analyses ... are part of an international theoretical development that brings us to the threshold of poststructuralist, post-Marxist, and postcolonial critiques’.<sup>16</sup> Since then, a recent study by sociologist

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<sup>12</sup> Glaberman, ‘C.L.R. James’, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Farred, (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon; A Life* (London, 2000), pp. 26, 28.

<sup>15</sup> For more on this point, see Pier Paolo Frassinelli, ‘Repositioning C.L.R. James’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 45/1, (2009).

<sup>16</sup> Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *C.L.R. James; A Critical Introduction* (Mississippi, 1997), p. 105.

Brett St Louis, written from a standpoint of unconditional but critical support for what he calls the ‘irresistible march of identity politics and postmodernism’, has insisted that, given the apparent ‘epistemological erosion of the “old” certainties of (organised) class struggle and framework of historical materialism’ signals ‘the death of unitary subjectivity and its explanatory “grand narratives”’, James’s significance lies in the way that he ‘grapples with a proto-post-marxist problematic’.<sup>17</sup> The extent to which such views have become ‘common sense’ in contemporary academia, even among many James scholars, is apparent from Farred’s edited collection, *Rethinking C.L.R. James* (1997). Disparaging ‘earlier modes of James studies’ and the ‘debates that occupied sectarian James scholars’ about such matters as class struggle and revolutionary theory, Farred salutes James’s classic semi-autobiographical cultural history of cricket, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), a work ‘eminently suited to the burgeoning field of cultural studies ... a testament to subtle, heavily coded anti-colonial resistance, a work which maps the problematic trajectory of the postcolonial through the colonial ... a work we can return to again and again’.<sup>18</sup> *Beyond a Boundary* indeed deserves such acclamation, but Farred then goes on to declare the work not simply ‘the major achievement of his cultural activism’ but ‘undoubtedly James’s definitive work’ and a ‘salient’ alternative to James’s ‘texts on “real” politics’ like *The Black Jacobins* (1938). What, a student might in that case justifiably ask, is the point of studying James’s ‘grand narrative’ of the Haitian Revolution (or, heaven forbid, reading his other more directly ‘sectarian’ political writings), if it is the case that, as Farred tells us, that any ‘insight and brilliance’ in *The Black Jacobins* is ‘matched’ by the way *Beyond a Boundary* ‘was able to profile the radical potentialities of the Caribbean proletariat’ open to it through playing cricket?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> St Louis, *Rethinking Race, Politics, and Poetics*, p. 195.

<sup>18</sup> Farred (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> Grant Farred, ‘The Maple Man: How Cricket Made a Postcolonial Intellectual’, in Grant Farred (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 173-74, 181. In all fairness, one should note Farred subsequently detected some possible lessons in *The Black Jacobins* for postcolonial Africa. Grant Farred, ‘First Stop, Port-au-Prince: Mapping Postcolonial Africa through Toussaint L’Ouverture and His Black Jacobins’, in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (eds.), *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (London, 1997).

In 1989 Buhle was optimistic about what he called the emerging 'field' of 'James scholarship', stressing that 'my satisfaction lies chiefly in imagining the myriad creative possibilities to which James's contributions can be put'.<sup>16</sup> Yet more recently, Buhle has not sounded a particularly satisfied note, reflecting on almost twenty years of sustained 'James-scholarship' that 'the very "field" had barely emerged before it veered away from social history and outright political claims, tending toward literary criticism and cultural studies'. Consequently, 'interest in James the revolutionary thinker lagged badly ... mostly, he seemed a prophet neglected if not scorned'.<sup>20</sup>

This then is one important justification for a re-examination of James's intellectual and political evolution in imperial Britain from 1932-38, a period which has long been 'neglected if not scorned' in the literature of James-scholarship. Despite being a period of James's life and work as full of inherent 'creative possibilities' as any other, these were however the fateful years in which James shifted away from 'cultural activism' to embrace 'real' politics. Accordingly, the 'possibilities' that most concerned James from the mid-1930s - socialist revolution and anti-imperialist revolt - are those that no post-modern academic today would even dare admit to 'imagining', let alone committing themselves to agitating for. Yet without a clear understanding of these years there is no possibility of ever fully understanding James, 'the revolutionary thinker'. When asked 'what would you most like to be remembered for' in an interview in 1980, James himself was quite explicit and unequivocal.

The contributions I have made to the Marxist movement are the things that matter most to me. And those contributions have been political, in various ways; they have been literary: the book [on] *Moby Dick* [*Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*] is a study of the Marxist approach to literature. All of my studies on the Black question are [Marxist] in reality ... on the whole, I like to think of myself as a Marxist who has made serious contributions to Marxism in various fields. I want to be considered one of the important Marxists.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical's Story* (Kingston, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Daryl Cumber Dance, 'Conversation with C.L.R. James [1980]' in Daryl Cumber Dance, *New World Adams; Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* (Leeds, 1992), p. 119. In the 1960s, James described how his work on Melville originated in his perceived need for 'a study which sought to

Given this, one might have thought that James's years in 1930s Britain would be considered of critical importance as they were the years in which he, among other things, developed into an important Marxist intellectual. Yet the comparative lack of attention in James-scholarship to this crucial period of his intellectual and political evolution remains striking. As Buhle noted with regret in 2006, reflecting on his own early biography of James, 'the subsequent biographies, up to the present, have not pushed appreciatively further in respect to his Caribbean background (and continuing connections) and his sojourn in the United Kingdom in the 1930s'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the situation here remains much as Buhle found it in the early 1990s, when he noted that 'James's English years, his milieu, political activities, and influences' remain 'the least studied' and 'surely deserve a volume of their own'.<sup>23</sup>

In part this lacuna has arisen out of a supposedly 'Jamesian' lack of serious interest in the history of the Trotskyist movement, the movement in which James learnt and developed his Marxism.<sup>24</sup> Equally, many orthodox Trotskyist historians have tended to avoid concerning themselves a great deal with James outside of a narrow focus on the intricacies and controversies arising from his direct political relationship to other activists in the early British Trotskyist movement, largely because James himself, despite being the intellectual driving force of British Trotskyism during the 1930s, in 1951 became a 'renegade' when he left 'the movement' to form his own independent Marxist current. If even 'Jamesians' and orthodox Trotskyist historians of the early British Trotskyist movement have avoided trying to build up a complete portrait of the intellectual and evolution of James as a political and cultural activist in 1930s Britain, few others are

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make concrete and clear the relation between the superstructure and the economic and social base'. Anna Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive; A Readers' Guide* (New York, 1991), p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Buhle, *Tim Hector*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Buhle, 'From a Biographer's Notebook: The Field of C.L.R. James Scholarship', in Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain (eds.), *C.L.R. James; His Intellectual Legacies* (Amherst, 1995), p. 451.

<sup>24</sup> 'Everything that we learnt and have developed has come out of Trotskyism ... whoever tries to shoo away Trotsky and the Left Opposition and the history of the Fourth [International] betrays thereby a profound philosophical ignorance which is certain to bring dangerous political consequences.' C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (London, 1980), p. 151.

going to labour to do so. The bloody fractious conflict over political principle, strategy and tactics which opened up in the 1930s between Trotskyism and 'orthodox Communism' has for a long time slightly baffled and puzzled many scholars.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, many scholars subsequently have simply shrugged and left the matter alone, perhaps sharing the despair of James's publisher during the 1930s, Fredric Warburg, who reflected with sadness on 'the atmosphere of hate and arid dispute' in James's writings from this period.<sup>26</sup> There is an atom of truth here, and indeed it would be surprising if, given the circumstances which necessitated such 'arid dispute', there was not.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Manning Marable asked James himself in 1987 'whether he regretted any aspect of his political history or involvement with radical journalism':

James pondered the question carefully and responded in a very soft voice. He regretted more than anything else the strident, polemical style of his earlier essays, lacking some of the complexity and irony that his later work represents.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> That there is indeed widespread potential for confusion is not in doubt, as testified by Jacqueline Foster's evocative description of left-wing politics during the late 1930s, made at the time: 'And the Popular Front is united, but the United Front isn't popular - except with the Communists. And there are people called Trotsky-Fascists who are neither Trotskyists nor Fascists, and Trotskyists, who complain that Trotsky isn't Trotskyist, and in Spain all the anti-Fascist parties when they are not fighting the Fascists fight each other, and its all enough to drive you mad - if you let it.' Quoted in Ethel Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade; or, Low-Down on the Left* (London, 1947), p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Fredric Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen* (London, 1959), p. 214. Of Buhle's biography of James, Edward Said thought that 'one would have wanted less about the often arid sectarian disputes James was involved in'. Edward Said, 'C.L.R. James: The Artist as Revolutionary', *New Left Review*, 175, (1989).

<sup>27</sup> As one reviewer noted of James's *World Revolution*, 'Mr. James is always a lively critic. He writes throughout with passionate and lofty scorn for every living Communist, Liberal and Social Democrat, and the utmost contempt for their ideas'. The reviewer also commented on the 'righteous rage which torments his heart and forms his literary style'. 'Books of the Day: A West Indian "Trotskyist"', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 June 1937.

<sup>28</sup> Manning Marable, *Speaking Truth to Power; Essays on Race, Resistance and Radicalism* (Oxford, 1996), pp. ix-x. For one particularly 'stridently polemical' article penned by James during the 1930s, see C.L.R. James, 'Whither the I.L.P.: Centrist Circle about to be completed - The only road to revolutionaries', *Workers' Fight*, (October, 1938), which while in many ways illuminating about the decline of the I.L.P. seems to heap an inordinate amount of blame on one leading left-wing I.L.P. member C.A. Smith.

More typical though has been a wider prejudice held by scholars arising not from matters of taste in literary style but from a sense that the history of the early British Trotskyist movement is, at best, a triviality of only antiquarian interest, not a proper subject matter befitting serious historians. As Peter Shipley asserted, ‘they had no influence and no popular appeal in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War. Indeed in the political history of the 1930s, with slump, national government, the rise of Fascism and its battles with Communism, the Trotskyists do not deserve a footnote.’<sup>29</sup> If it achieves nothing else, the writing of an entire doctoral thesis of political history about the activity of just one member of the early British Trotskyist movement during the 1930s might stand as an attempt to implicitly refute such an assumption.

Yet this thesis will hopefully also go some way to further an understanding of James as a revolutionary thinker. Too often we are prisoners trapped with the prevailing image of James as simply the urbane ‘Grand Old Man of Letters’, perhaps slumbering in an armchair.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, according to Timothy Brennan, James’s lifelong ‘manner of working was to spend his days for the most part in disheveled bedrooms, under sheets, reading T.S. Eliot with the TV on’.<sup>31</sup> It is this seemingly ‘harmless icon’ who has too often alone been commemorated and whose praises have been sung by all and sundry, including shameless and hypocritical careerist New Labour politicians in Britain.<sup>32</sup> Something of the paradox of the veteran revolutionary James in his eighties was well captured by the dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson in his eloquent tribute to the ‘wise ole shephad’, ‘Ol’ Man Socialism’: ‘some sey him is a sage but nobody really know him

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Shipley, *Revolutionaries in Modern Britain* (London, 1976), p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> The most famous photographs of James for example were those taken in his advanced years by Snowdon (on the cover of C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory; Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 1984)), Val Wilmer (on the cover of Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James and Rosengarten’s Urbane Revolutionary*) and Steve Pyke’s photo which adorns the covers of Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford, 1992) as well as recent works such as Farrukh Dhondy, *C.L.R. James; A Life* (New York, 2001) and Dave Renton, *C.L.R. James; Cricket’s Philosopher King* (London, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World; Cosmopolitanism Now* (London, 1997), p. 224.

<sup>32</sup> For criticism of Tessa Jowell and David Lammy on this score, see Christian Høgsbjerg, ‘C.L.R. James: The Revolutionary as Artist’, *International Socialism*, 112. (2006), p. 178.

riteful age ar whe him come from'.<sup>33</sup> This thesis will aim to not just advance general understanding about the 'wise ole shephad' but also go someway to answering the question of 'whe him come from'.

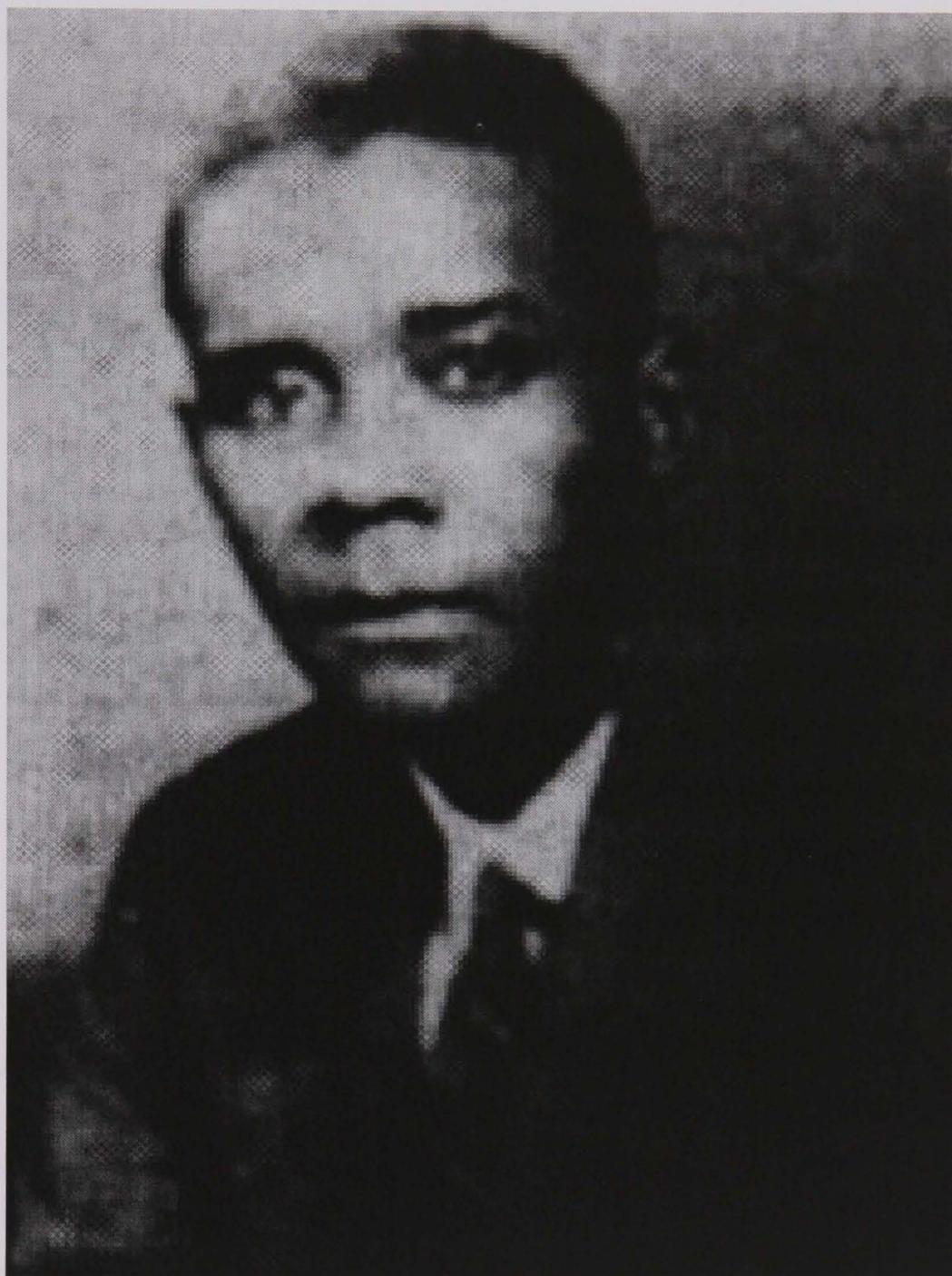


Plate 2. C.L.R. James, 1938.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> 'Ol' Man Socialism' was subsequently renamed 'Di Good Life'. See Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems* (London, 2002), pp. 73-74.

<sup>34</sup> [Photograph] From George Breitman (ed.), *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination* (New York, 1980), p. 32.

## C.L.R. James in 1930s Britain: Image and Reality

If, as David Craven notes in a recent article on James, ‘few defining figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are as famous and as unknown’, then there can be few areas of his life where he is both more ‘famous’ and yet more ‘unknown’ as the six years he spent in Britain from 1932 to 1938.<sup>35</sup> In 1981, in an outstanding article on this period of James’s life, Robert Hill wrote that ‘in order that the full stature of James’s actual accomplishments may be settled and recognized from the outset, it would be best to simply itemize them’.<sup>36</sup> This is a list of just the main achievements and activity, adapted and updated from that provided by Hill in 1981:

1. Author of *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*, (Hogarth Press, 1933), an abridgement of *The Life of Captain Cipriani; An Account of British Government in the West Indies*, (1932).
2. Ghost-writer for Learie Constantine’s *Cricket and I*, (1933), cricket reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*, (1933-35), and author of a weekly column on ‘English cricket’ for the *Glasgow Herald*, (1937-38).
3. Executive member of the League of Coloured Peoples (L.C.P.), 1933-34, Chair of the International African Friends of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) (I.A.F.A.), 1935-36, Executive member of the International African Service Bureau (I.A.S.B.), 1937-38, with primary responsibility as Editorial Director of *Africa and the World* (1937) and *International African Opinion* (1938).
4. Playwright, writing *Toussaint Louverture; The story of the only successful slave revolt in history*, (1934), a play performed by the Stage Society on London’s West End in 1936 and starring Paul Robeson in the title role.
5. Author of *World Revolution, 1917-1936; The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Secker & Warburg, 1937).
6. Chair of the Finchley branch of the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.), 1935-36, Chair of the Marxist Group and Editor of *Fight and Workers’ Fight* (1936-38), International Executive Committee member of the Fourth International, 1938.
7. Author of *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Secker & Warburg, 1938).
8. Author of *A History of Negro Revolt*, (F.A.C.T., 1938).

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<sup>35</sup> David Craven, ‘C.L.R. James as a Critical Theorist of Modernist Art’, in Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (London, 2005), p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> Robert A. Hill, ‘In England, 1932-1938’, in Paul Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* (London, 1986), p. 62.

9. English translator of Boris Souvarine's biography *Stalin* (Secker & Warburg, 1939).<sup>37</sup>

As Hill notes,

... all this was done between March 1932 and October 1938, when he sailed for the United States, a period of just over six and a half years. In method it meant prodigious effort and concentration; in measurement, the results were prolific and gave example of the man's tremendous diversity of interest and capacities; in consequence, it touched all corners of the world-wide revolutionary struggle ... by anyone's standards, it was a monumental achievement, which staggers the mind simply in the recounting of it.<sup>38</sup>

Yet while the significance of the monumental achievement itself can never be dismissed completely, one inevitable consequence that flows from the paucity of serious historical research about this period of James's life is that a number of myths have subsequently arisen to try and explain the manner in which he achieved them. In a 2001 work that was marketed as a 'long-overdue critical appreciation' and 'a biography that is a revelation of the life and work of this legendary intellect and revolutionary', Farrukh Dhondy advanced a highly cynical interpretation.<sup>39</sup> It is known that James arrived in Britain as an aspiring novelist, and so for Dhondy, James's political radicalisation to the Left was not a genuine response to the rising menace of fascism in the midst of the world's greatest economic slump, but simply a realisation that to secure a publishing contract he had to be 'radical and even politically shocking'.

James knew already through publishing his stories in Britain that publishers were more interested in the poor of Trinidad than in the rich.

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<sup>37</sup> Hill, 'In England', p. 62. In addition James also managed to get his first work *The Life of Captain Cipriani* and his novel *Minty Alley*, both of which he had brought with him from Trinidad in manuscript form, published in Britain in 1932 (with Coulton & Co.) and 1936 (with Secker & Warburg) respectively.

<sup>38</sup> Hill, 'In England', pp. 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> Quotes on the dustcover of Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*. For a decent short review of Dhondy's *C.L.R. James*, see Kenan Malik, 'Beyond a boundary', *New Statesman*, 30 July 2001.

He also knew that exotica was fashionable and that political opposition rather than conformity was the calling card that was welcome in liberal and radical circles.<sup>40</sup>

To leave the mass reformist Labour Party for the miniscule, persecuted Trotskyist movement was therefore somehow a career move for James, though Dhondy disputes James's 'claim' to be a serious Marxist intellectual during the 1930s, even casting doubt on the idea he had independently and critically studied works by the likes of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. Rather, James 'picked up the real language of class hatred and class war' second-hand from the I.L.P., and particularly its leader James Maxton (according to Dhondy 'a man possessed'). James apparently 'greedily absorbed the principles of Leninism' from the I.L.P. in order to write *World Revolution* and so satisfy his careerist 'ambition'.<sup>41</sup> If while writing *World Revolution*, 'James brought to his task the flair of his literary prose and the conceit of putting the world to rights', these were also on display in *The Black Jacobins*, which was no doubt also about attempting to satisfy the British public's demand for 'fashionable exotica'. Neither were pioneering works of Marxist history at all. Indeed, for Dhondy, because James only found the time to make a serious analysis of the full three volumes of Marx's *Capital* in America, 'his reputation as a "Marxist" speaker and theorist' in 1930s Britain 'was based on intelligent bluff'.<sup>42</sup>

If Dhondy's mythological portrayal of these years of James's life was just an ill-disguised affront to the honour of a revolutionary socialist by a slightly embittered ex-radical, it would, like the disingenuous portrait of James in V.S. Naipaul's 1992 novel *A Way in the World*, be beneath dignifying by extended comment.<sup>43</sup> Yet even some of the

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<sup>40</sup> Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*, p. 59.

<sup>41</sup> '[James] wasn't going to be just another Trotskyist; he was going to be the foremost one ... He wrote his book to project himself as the most serious thinker on these matters in the world. But he was himself amazed at the speed with which this ambition was realized.' Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 50-51, 56, 59, 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 52, 62, 64. To discuss more of the trivial factual errors that litter just the discussion of the 1930s in Dhondy's work would be embarrassing for all concerned, though it might be noted there was not an 'international conference of Trotskyist parties' in Paris in 1937, and nor did James report the 1936 cricket season for the *Glasgow Herald*.

<sup>43</sup> On Naipaul's misleading fictional portrayal of James in *A Way in the World*, see Buhle, *Tim Hector*, pp. 9, 237, and Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography* (New York, 1996), pp. 173-75.

most sophisticated and scholarly writing on James seems to leave readers with an impression of this period of his life not altogether that far removed from Dhondy's caricature. For St Louis, James 'was unable to privilege the materiality of political praxis over the ideality of cultural and intellectual life'.<sup>44</sup> Even Scott McLemee can write that before James came to America in 1938, he was not a 'professional revolutionist' who saw Lenin and Trotsky as 'chief influences' but was a 'man of letters (on the model of William Hazlitt or Arnold Bennett)'. The move to America was thus more than 'a "turn" in James's career', it 'marks a profound shift in the co-ordinates of his personal identity'.<sup>45</sup>

One would have thought given this dominant image in the literature of James in this period - as a would-be bourgeois dilettante playing around with Marxist ideas while living the high life as a fêted writer - would rest on a considerable amount of evidence. In fact, it appears to rest almost entirely on one sentence in the testimony of one man, James's publisher from 1936-38, Fredric Warburg. Warburg's testimony, written during the 1950s when a member of the C.I.A. funded 'British Society for Cultural Freedom', though well known, remains worth quoting from nonetheless.

James himself was one of the most delightful and easy-going personalities I have known, colourful in more senses than one. A dark-skinned West Indian Negro from Trinidad, he stood six feet three inches in his socks and was noticeably good-looking. His memory was extraordinary. He could quote, not only passages from the Marxist classics but long extracts from Shakespeare, in a soft lilting English which was a delight to hear. Immensely amiable, he loved the flesh-pots of capitalism, fine cooking, fine clothes, fine furniture and beautiful women, without a trace of the guilty remorse to be expected from a seasoned warrior of the class war.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> St Louis, *Rethinking Race, Politics, and Poetics*, p. 94.

<sup>45</sup> Scott McLemee, 'Afterword: American Civilization and World Revolution: C.L.R. James in the United States, 1938-1953 and Beyond' in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James, 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994), p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, p. 214. It is also reprinted in Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 63. On Warburg and the British Society for Cultural Freedom, see Frances Stoner Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The C.I.A. and the Cultural Cold War* (London, 1999), pp. 111, 175-76, 327-28.

The last, particularly evocative sentence about James's love for 'the flesh-pots of capitalism' is the critical one, and the authority given to this assertion by even some of the most dedicated James scholars is quite remarkable.<sup>47</sup> Dhondy obviously manages to make it the basis of an entire chapter of his book, but even McLemee describes Warburg's testimony as 'the most vivid portrait of James during the 1930s', showing him to be not simply 'a revolutionary' but 'a gentleman'.<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that Warburg was not totally misrepresenting James, as he *did* of course love fine cooking, fine clothes, fine furniture and beautiful women (including, it seems, Warburg's wife Pamela De Bayou). After signing with Secker & Warburg in 1936, James would spend odd weekends away at the Warburg's cottage near West Hoathly in Sussex, where as Warburg remembers 'politics were forgotten' and no doubt James did take advantage of the finer things in life. Yet what needs to be remembered is that beautiful women aside, and they should of course be separated from a depiction as 'fleshpots of capitalism', James's access to such things during this period was rather limited.

As Warburg himself noted, James's work covering cricket meant 'it was only between April and October that he was in funds'.<sup>49</sup> As for 'fine clothes', Louise Cripps, another beautiful (and also married) woman with whom James had a relationship during the 1930s, remembered how James's clothing was 'unnoticeable', usually 'a medium-priced, medium-coloured suit, white shirt, and darkish tie'.<sup>50</sup> When James left for America in 1938, he remembered Learie Constantine took one look at his 'literary-political grey flannels and sports jacket' and decided it was necessary to buy him a new

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<sup>47</sup> See Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*, p. 60, Renton, *C.L.R. James*, p. 7, Bill Schwarz, 'Black Metropolis, White England', in Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (eds.), *Modern Times; Reflections on a century of English modernity* (London, 1996), p. 193, and St Louis, *Rethinking Race, Politics and Poetics*, p. 88.

<sup>48</sup> Scott McLemee, 'Introduction: The Enigma of Arrival', in Scott McLemee (ed.), *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question"* (Jackson, 1996), p. xii.

<sup>49</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, p. 215.

<sup>50</sup> Louise Cripps, *C.L.R. James; Memories and Commentaries* (London, 1997), p. 52. 'He never wore flamboyant colours. They were a dull sort of clothes. I had often thought that he must have deliberately changed from the lighter clothes of the tropics to ones reflecting the sober greys of England's rainy climate.'

suit. 'You cannot go to the United States that way ... it wouldn't do.'<sup>51</sup> As for 'fine furniture', Cripps has described the first time she visited James's top floor flat on 9 Heathcote Street in central London, where he lived for several years from 1933 onwards.

We walked up a couple of flights of stairs, and when we went, we found a medium-sized room with a fairly large window looking out onto the street. The room was moderately large, about twenty feet by sixteen feet. The walls had once been a cream colour. Now with age there were tinges of green and brown, not exactly unpleasant, but not in anyway a bright room. Short old curtains hung at the windows, curtains that had turned grey with age ... There was no fireplace, but a gas heater had been installed. It was operated by putting a shilling into a meter ... there was also a single plate heater on a small stool. It was also coin-operated and allowed James to make tea. There was a kettle settled permanently on it. The only other fixture in the room was a small cupboard in which James kept a can of Carnation milk, Lipton's tea, and tins of biscuits ... It was not an attractive room, and James had done nothing to brighten it. He seemed quite content with the way it looked. There were no pictures on the wall, framed reproductions, not any photographs at all ... on the floor was well-worn brown Linoleum. There was a good deal of dust in the room ... [but] not much furniture ... The major piece was the large round table where everyone sat. There was also a divan in one corner and a small bookcase. But books were not confined to that small space. There were books everywhere: books up the walls, books on the floor, books and papers on the table.<sup>52</sup>

A multitude of books aside, James in this period was not first and foremost a literary or cultural 'man of letters', at least not on the traditional English model. This is not to say that James neglected cultural matters - indeed, Warburg's portrait of James omits any mention of not only the production of James's anti-imperialist play *Toussaint Louverture* but also the importance for black radical anti-colonialist activists of developing their own alternative 'counter-culture' of resistance in the imperial metropolis alongside such more directly political campaigning in Pan-Africanist organisations like the I.A.S.B. James's friend and comrade in this struggle, Amy Ashwood Garvey, was also a playwright (and indeed also a theatre producer) who had taken her shows across

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<sup>51</sup> C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London, 1969), p. 128.

<sup>52</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 12-13.

America and the Caribbean in the 1920s. Since moving to London, Amy Ashwood had in 1934 investigated the possibility of taking a company of artists of African descent to the West Coast of Africa. However, when this plan fell through, she and her partner, the Trinidadian musician and actor Sam Manning, together with the Guyanese clarinetist Rudolph Dunbar, opened the Florence Mills Social Parlour in London's Carnaby Street, named in tribute to the black American actress, which quickly became 'a haunt of black intellectuals,' offering food and live music.<sup>53</sup> Delia Jarrett-Macauley gives a vivid sense of the importance of this centre in 1930s London, noting 'a steady stream of black artists was trickling into Britain'. 'They brought jazz, they brought blues ... in the evenings artists, activists, students drank and supped and kept their spirits high at Amy Ashwood Garvey's West End restaurant.' James himself recalled that Amy Ashwood was 'a wonderful cook' and 'if you were lucky, the 78s of Trinidadian calypsonian Sam Manning, Amy's partner, spun late into the night'.<sup>54</sup> In London, Manning, who headed the West Indian Rhythm Boys band, put on black British musical and comic revues with 'singers and actors from Liverpool, Cardiff and the West Indies'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Marika Sherwood, 'Amy Ashwood Garvey', in Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787* (London, 2003), p. 70; Tony Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey* (Dover, 2007); Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance; Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London, 1999), p. 211; Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators': Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* (London, 2008), p. 407; Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (London, 1989), p. 192. See also Errol G. Hill, 'The Caribbean connection', in Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch (eds.), *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 278-79.

<sup>54</sup> Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, p. 407, Delia Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson. 1905-1965* (Manchester, 1998), p. 84.

<sup>55</sup> Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, p. 407. *News Chronicle*, 25 February 1935. The London venues mentioned were the Grand Theatre, Croydon and the Queen Theatre, Poplar.



Amy Ashwood Garvey, 1940s

Plate 3. Amy Ashwood Garvey, 1940s.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> [Photograph]. From Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey*, p. vi.

It was not that James was not offered the opportunity to become a writer full time. Indeed, he later recalled how ‘my publisher’s wife’, Pamela De Bayou, ‘a wonderful woman ... begged me almost with tears to settle down and write’.

I said NO ... a fine sight I would have been with two or three books or a play or two to my credit and hanging around the political world, as all these other writers do, treating as amateurs, what is the most serious business in the world today.<sup>57</sup>

Rather, as Warburg remembers of James, ‘politics was his religion and Marx his god’ and as a tireless propagandist for Trotskyism ‘he was brave’.

Night after night he would address meetings in London and the provinces, denouncing the crimes of the blood-thirsty Stalin ... if you told him of some new communist argument, he would listen with a smile of infinite tolerance on his dark face, wag the index finger of his right hand solemnly, and announce in an understanding tone - “we know them, we know them”.<sup>58</sup>

James’s confidence that he could handle any ‘new argument’ from the Communists, as well as Warburg’s testimony that James could quote from memory ‘passages from the Marxist classics’, should be enough to dispense with the idea that he was any sort of poseur, attempting to wing revolutionary politics while advancing a literary career. Yet such a notion was given additional credibility by one other piece of crucial testimony from a veteran of the early British Trotskyist movement, John Archer. In an article on ‘C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38’, written over fifty years later, Archer critically chose to make much of James’s ‘individualism’ and ‘facility in playing with ideas and words’, noting his early desire to enter ‘into the world of literature’ and by

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<sup>57</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation for a Gentleman*, p. 215, Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *Special Delivery: The letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 104-105. James gave De Bayou a copy of *The Black Jacobins* ‘specially bound in beautiful black morocco’.

<sup>58</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, p. 214.

1938 'his successes in the literary world of London'. Nor did Archer take James's Marxism particularly seriously.

He had been quickly elevated to prominence, without much chance to get a broad political education ... he never seems to have been broken into the day-to-day tasks and hard decisions which fall to the lot of committed cadres in a revolutionary group ... One may doubt how far, despite his enthusiasm and self-devotion at this time, he ever thoroughly grasped what Trotsky and the Trotskyists were trying to tell him. The whole body of his thought suggests originality in plenty, to be sure, but less than elsewhere in the field of revolutionary politics.<sup>59</sup>

Leaving aside the question of whether in reality James was actually rather too 'original' a thinker in the field of revolutionary politics for an orthodox Trotskyist like Archer, what perhaps might be noted here is that Archer only worked closely politically with James for at best six months from mid-1934, when both were members of the Marxist Group. In 1935, Archer left London to move north, as well breaking away from James to join another faction of the British Trotskyist movement.<sup>60</sup> There is an important sense that Archer's rather sour testimony concerning James almost had as much to do with legitimating his own past tactical decisions as a Trotskyist than with contributing to 'James-scholarship'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Archer aside, the theme running through the remaining testimony from those who knew James during the 1930s - both in the British Trotskyist movement and outside it - only confirms if anything just how seriously he took revolutionary Marxism.<sup>62</sup> Charlie Van Gelderen, another veteran of the British Trotskyist movement, for example, thought James 'quickly grasped' the 'essentials' of

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<sup>59</sup> John Archer, 'C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38', *Revolutionary History*, 6/2-3, (1996), pp. 60-62, 73.

<sup>60</sup> John McIlroy, 'John Archer (1909-2000)', *Revolutionary History*, 8/1, (2001).

<sup>61</sup> For more on the problematic nature of Archer's testimony, see Ted Crawford, 'A Statement on John Archer's "C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38"', *Revolutionary History*, 6/2-3, (1996), p. 248.

<sup>62</sup> His former pupil, compatriot and friend during this period, Eric Williams, for example, in 1964 recalled James's 'preoccupation with Marxism and the world revolution'. Eric Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies* (New York, 1994), p. 164.

Marxism, and overall ‘enriched Marxist theory with original ideas’.<sup>63</sup> As Kent Worcester judged in his still unsurpassed 1996 biography of James, ‘there was nothing dilettantish about his commitment to Trotskyism’.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps one of the best known incidents relating to James’s time in Britain came when he was invited to take Sunday afternoon tea at the home of the young socialist feminist novelist Ethel Mannin, a ‘determined collector of “interesting people”’.<sup>65</sup> Her husband, the anti-imperialist writer Reginald Reynolds remembers Mannin ‘had long hoped to meet C.L.R. James, whose intellect and good looks were praised by all except the Stalinists’.<sup>66</sup> Mannin unfortunately was not to know James found the English custom of taking Sunday afternoon tea tiresome, as ‘fidgeting about with tea cups and bits of cake, and saying how many lumps I took, and all that sort of business bored me stiff’.<sup>67</sup> Mannin’s satirical novel, written in 1945, *Comrade O Comrade*, describes how an ‘extremely handsome young Negro’ and ‘eminent Trotskyist’ avoided making small talk as she asked if he took ‘sugar?’ or wanted ‘cake?’ or ‘more tea?’ Instead, James apparently arrived at her home near Wimbledon Common, Oak Cottage, engrossed in a deep political discussion with a fellow Trotskyist that ranged from the French Popular Front, Spain, Ethiopia to ‘the real nature of Imperialism’ and stressed throughout how ‘Permanent Revolution and International Socialism must form the basis of all revolutionary strategy’, a discussion which the two never apparently abandoned during

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<sup>63</sup> Charlie Van Gelderen, ‘C.L.R. James - Thinker, Writer, Revolutionary’, in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James, 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994), pp. 42, 44. Van Gelderen, like Archer, was in a different faction to James but unlike Archer, was in London from 1935-38 and also knew George Padmore. Charlie Van Gelderen, ‘Book Review: *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa*’, *Critique*, 14, (1981).

<sup>64</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 49. For what it is worth, even the Special Branch officers watching James noted on 18 January 1937 that ‘he is a fluent speaker and appears to be very well versed in the doctrines of Karl Marx and other revolutionary writers’. [The National Archives, London] TNA: KV/2/1824/4b.

<sup>65</sup> R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. II: The Arch-Poet, 1915-1939* (Oxford, 2003), p. 511. On Mannin, see Andy Croft, ‘Ethel Mannin: The Red Rose of Love and the Red Flower of Liberty’, in Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals; British Women Writers, 1889-1939* (London, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> Reginald Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes* (London, 1956), p. 117.

<sup>67</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘London First Impressions (no. 2); “The Houses”’, *Port of Spain Gazette*, 27 July 1932, republished in Nicholas Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London; Seven essays by C.L.R. James* (Oxford, 2003), p. 69.

the hour they were there.<sup>68</sup> While admitting that others present were ‘hypnotised’ by James’s ‘dark rich beautiful voice’ which ‘flowed like music’, Mannin subsequently found it easy enough to satirise ‘the non-stop Trotskyists who came to tea’.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, probably the most common criticism from those outside the Trotskyist movement who knew James during this period was not at all that he was too involved with literary and cultural matters to the detriment of his political understanding - rather, quite the reverse. As Reynolds put it in his 1956 memoir, *My Life and Crimes*, while James was ‘a man of brilliant intellect and an excellent writer ... unfortunately he turned his back on the problems of his own people - and also on the much broader cultural interests for which his talents suited him so admirably - to follow the barren cult of Trotskyism’.<sup>70</sup> Even this statement bears examination, for Reynolds would have known that in 1930s Britain James had not ‘turned his back on the problems of his own people’ after becoming a Trotskyist but was a leading campaigner in solidarity with the Caribbean labour rebellions, and an important Pan-Africanist more generally, an aspect of his thought which both he and Mannin greatly admired.<sup>71</sup> And while it seems unlikely that Reynolds saw Paul Robeson star in the title role of *Toussaint Louverture*, Mannin’s interest in Robeson alone meant they would have known about it.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade*, pp. 133-35. See Appendix J. Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*, p. 117. In James’s defence it might be noted that both Reynolds and Mannin confirm the Trotskyist who James was in deep discussion with at their tea party was a white South African, who indeed after the meeting sent Reynolds a copy of his thesis on the liberation struggles in South Africa with comments from Trotsky on them. Though unnamed, it seems most likely that the Trotskyist in question was Ralph Lee, who had arrived in Britain in the summer of 1937. See Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *War and the International; A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain, 1937-1949* (London, 1986), p. 2, and Ian Hunter, ‘Raff Lee and the Pioneer Trotskyists of Johannesburg’, *Revolutionary History*, 4/4, (1993).

<sup>69</sup> Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade*, pp. 134-35, 145. Andy Croft has suggested a shift in Mannin’s own politics from the 1930s, when she even wrote what he calls an ‘explicitly Trotskyite’ novel, *Darkness My Bride*, in 1938, to the time she wrote *Comrade O Comrade*, apparently ‘a renunciation not only of the organised British Left and the labour movement but also of the possibilities of politically engaged art’. Croft, ‘Ethel Mannin’, pp. 221, 225.

<sup>70</sup> Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>71</sup> Indeed Mannin and Reynolds seem to have both been very close to George Padmore. at least from 1937. See Ethel Mannin, *Privileged Spectator: A Sequel to “Confessions and Impressions”* (London, 1939), pp. 150-51, and Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich; Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 92-94.

<sup>72</sup> Mannin discusses her meeting with Robeson in her 1930 volume of autobiography, *Confessions and Impressions*.



*Ethel and Reg in the early years of their marriage*

Plate 4. Ethel Mannin and Reginald Reynolds, late 1930s.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> [Photograph]. From Robert Huxter, *Reg and Ethel: Reginald Reynolds (1905-1958), his life and work and his marriage to Ethel Mannin (1900-1984)* (York, 1992).

Indeed, it is in part only because Reynolds knew of James's sterling anti-colonial work and close connection to cultural life in Britain during the 1930s, epitomized by his professional work as a leading cricket correspondent, that he felt his subsequent career after leaving Britain for the world of American Trotskyism - about which we can presume he knew very little indeed - had been a waste, James having apparently neglected his 'broader cultural interests' to follow a 'barren cult'.<sup>74</sup>

One perhaps might also note the shift in Reynold's politics that had taken place by the 1950s, which were a far cry from the 1930s when he had cut a distinctive figure on the British far-Left. In 1929, aged just 24, as a young middle-class Quaker, Reynolds had traveled to India, met Gandhi, and returned to Britain a hardened anti-imperialist and champion of Indian nationalism who was to be one of Gandhi's leading English supporters. In 1932, his militant Gandhism won him the position of General Secretary of the No More War Movement before he also steadily radicalized politically, supporting the I.L.P. and breaking from pacifism and Gandhism during the Spanish Civil War. He once noted, tongue-in-cheek, that he was so left-wing in the 1930s, 'I could see Trotskyism at some distance to my right'.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, his sense of humour meant that one friend thought he was rather like a character out of a P.G. Wodehouse novel, 'a sort of Bertie Wooster, if you can imagine a Wooster who was a radical revolutionary'. The high point of Reynolds's 'revolutionary radicalism' came in 1937 with *The White Sahibs in India*, a superb historical indictment of British colonialism which had carried an appreciative foreword from Nehru. Yet as Reynold's biographer notes, 'after the Second World War, Reg's disillusionment with politics was complete', and he drifted back to his

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<sup>74</sup> Reynolds, it should be noted, was never a particular fan of Trotskyism. In 1939, in his characteristic style, he asserted that 'A Trotskyist is a Stalinist out of office. Take away his bauble and he will bleat like a lamb of party democracy. But give him an inch and he will play ell. His non-conformist conformity is fed on the Papal Bulls of the Anti-Pope. If he contradict himself he can over-ride intellectual impedimenta on the flood of his own eloquence; and nothing will convince him that Bottom wears the ears of an Ass.' Reginald Reynolds, 'It's Time We Had Some Definitions', *Controversy*, 32, (May 1939).

<sup>75</sup> Huxter, *Reg and Ethel*, pp. 66, 71, 81.

early concern with Gandhi and Quakerism.<sup>76</sup> Yet there was never a chance that James would neglect his 'broader cultural interests'. Shortly before his death, James sat for a painting by the artist Paul Harber, son of Denzil Dean Harber, another veteran of the early British Trotskyist movement. During the sittings, James remarked that 'besides revolutionaries, there are two other lots of people I admire - artists and wicket-keepers'.<sup>77</sup>

### **The aim of this thesis**

In 1981, Robert Hill stressed the importance of the years James spent in 1930s Britain for his overall intellectual development, describing the profound political transformation which took place as 'a leap out of the world of Thackeray and nineteenth-century intellectual concerns into the world of international socialist revolution'.<sup>78</sup> But Hill also suggested that a 'great deal of further research' on this period of James's life was necessary.

It would be trying to reach for the impossible if we sought after a complete description of James's evolution over this pivotal six-year stretch in England. Many separate histories are bound up together in each stage of the work, and each would separately necessitate a great deal of further research. In addition, it would alike be too much to attempt an exhaustive analysis of each work.<sup>79</sup>

Though Hill was writing in 1981, and in an article of only twenty pages, this thesis will not pretend to offer 'a complete description of James's evolution over this pivotal six-year stretch' either, were that even possible within the constraints of a

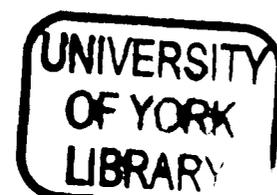
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<sup>76</sup> In 1945, Reynolds wrote that the early Quakers 'let political tides wash over them and I begin to see why, and how right they were. Until a new humanity can be created, politics will be a cynical game - and sinister.' Huxter, *Reg and Ethel*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Personal correspondence with Julian Harber, 12 and 15 November 2006. The painting of James was subsequently bought by the Trinidad Oil Workers' Union, and currently apparently sits in their head quarters. Thanks to Max Farrar for putting me in touch with Julian Harber.

<sup>78</sup> Hill, 'In England', p. 61.

<sup>79</sup> Hill, 'In England', p. 63.



doctoral thesis. Nor will it 'attempt an exhaustive analysis of each work' of James's written during this period, some of which, particularly *The Black Jacobins*, demand whole theses written about them in themselves. That said, this thesis will for the first time have examined in detail some of the 'many separate histories bound up in each stage of the work' during this 'pivotal' period of James's life in Britain, using new sources which have recently come to light including the Special Branch file kept on him.<sup>80</sup> We will look at James's identification with imperial Britain while growing up in colonial Trinidad, then examine James in 'Red Nelson', 'ten months which shook his world'. Two lengthy chapters will follow, on the complexities of James's early revolutionary Marxism and his 'class-struggle Pan-Africanism'. James can be seen as a paradigmatic figure of what Paul Gilroy has called 'the black Atlantic', and with this focus on black internationalism in mind we will examine in some detail James's thoughts on the Caribbean, America and continental Europe, particularly France and Spain. We will also look in detail at his relationship with metropolitan imperial culture in Britain after his 'voyage in' through a study of his cricket journalism before concluding with a brief discussion of his two invocations of the spirit of the Haitian Revolution, his play *Toussaint Louverture* and last, but very far from least, *The Black Jacobins*.

In all of this, the advances that have been made over the past decades of James-scholarship again deserve to be acknowledged. For example, in March 1932, after arriving in London, James had taken residence in the district of Bloomsbury, then 'still the Mecca of suburban and provincial intellectuals' according to Reginald Reynolds.<sup>81</sup> While the expensive cost of living in the capital meant he only stayed for ten weeks, until May 1932, James sent his 'first impressions' of London back home to be published (in five parts) in the *Port of Spain Gazette*. These allow scholars a unique and fascinating glimpse into James's 'voyage in' and his mentality at the point of arrival in Britain, though while I have drawn on these, and indeed previously discussed them elsewhere, the customary constraints on word-length in a doctoral thesis mean that some readers

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<sup>80</sup> The British state's files on C.L.R. James and Jomo Kenyatta for this period were made available at the National Archives, London, in 2005 but George Padmore's have allegedly been 'accidentally destroyed'.

<sup>81</sup> Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*, p. 96.

may be surprised there is no extensive discussion of them here.<sup>82</sup> That in 2003 many of them were republished in a well-received collection entitled *Letters from London* with an introduction by Kenneth Ramchand hopefully makes such an absence less critical.<sup>83</sup>

Yet there are inevitably other limitations, aside from those posed by the inevitable restrictions of a thesis and the sad reality that some primary source material from this period is now all but impossible for historians to recover.<sup>84</sup> There is not enough on how James was formed as part of what Selwyn Cudjoe has termed ‘the intellectual tradition of Trinidad and Tobago’, and next to nothing on how the indigenous popular culture and African heritage of the Caribbean shaped his early thinking.<sup>85</sup> One could explore in more depth the impact of Indian nationalism on James, from his early admiration for Gandhi while in colonial Trinidad to his relationship with activists in London such as Krishna Menon.<sup>86</sup> One could also have gone into James’s relationship with international Trotskyism and the British Trotskyist movement in even greater detail. Certainly, this thesis could have been ‘gendered’ more than it has been. For example, there are

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<sup>82</sup> Christian Høgsbjerg, “‘Making an Opening.’ C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38”, (Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of York, 2002).

<sup>83</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*.

<sup>84</sup> One example is that many of the early issues of the I.L.P.’s internal discussion bulletin *Controversy* from before it became a public journal in October 1936 do not seem to have survived, at least in any public archive, the I.L.P. offices having been bombed during the Second World War. Yet James and other members of the Marxist Group including Louise Cripps contributed articles to these missing journals. So the issues of *Controversy* from May to July 1936 for example not only contained an article by Cripps on ‘Terrorism in the Soviet Union’ but also a two part article by James on the national I.L.P. conference in 1936, ‘Keighley: An Analysis’, and one on ‘France Today’ from July 1936. See *New Leader*, 8 May 1936, 12 June 1936 and 10 July 1936. For one early article by James which has survived in the collection of I.L.P. material at the L.S.E., see C.L.R. James, ‘I.L.P. Abyssinian Policy’, *Controversy; Internal Discussion Organ of the I.L.P.*, (October, 1935), Appendix D.

<sup>85</sup> See Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries: The intellectual tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the nineteenth century* (Wellesley, Massachusetts, 2003). This thesis is also perhaps slightly Anglo-centric in other ways, as there probably remains potential to go a little way further with respect to James’s relationship with the respective labour movements of Scotland, Ireland and Wales during this period than I have done.

<sup>86</sup> Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 54, and for details of James’s attendance at a meeting of Menon’s India League in December 1936, see Nicolas Owen, *The British Left and India; Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 244-45. See also TNA: KV/2/1824/34a, a Special Branch report on James dated 12 September 1938, which noted his attendance at another India League meeting on 9 June 1938. George Padmore was also great friends with a variety of Indian nationalists in this period including Menon and K.D. Kumria. James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary; George Padmore’s path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (London, 1967), p. 47.

interesting parallels between James's writing about Caribbean women at work in the barrack yards of Port of Spain in short stories such as 'Triumph' and his relationship to the cotton textile workers of Nelson, mostly women.<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, for the first time this thesis will attempt to evoke a detailed and historical sense of the 'totality' of James's life and work in this period, explicitly rejecting the 'fragmented' and 'de-centered' approach of many previous scholars who have discussed his time in 1930s Britain. Those who would argue that this is in some way not 'Jamesian' might ponder James's own view that 'man has to become a total, complete being, participating in all aspects and phrases of a modern existence, or the modern world would crush his divided personality'.<sup>88</sup> Worcester has insisted that we can construct such a concrete 'totality' of James if we accept that 'no one problematic - Marxism, black nationalism, West Indian history and culture, and so on - can be used by itself'.<sup>89</sup> However, this ignores the fact that only one 'problematic' he lists has any intrinsic interest in explaining the 'totality' of anyone's life and work, the Marxist method which James himself used to construct his great political biography of the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture. There is also perhaps one other way in which this thesis might be said to aspire to be 'Jamesian'. As Paul Le Blanc has noted, 'an essential aspect of James's method is to make links between seemingly diverse realities, sometimes to take something that is commonly perceived as marginal and to demonstrate that it is central. This is done in a manner that profoundly alters (rather than displaces) the traditionally "central" categories.'<sup>90</sup> This thesis aims through a careful historical examination of a particular past reality, one currently perceived as marginal

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<sup>87</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Triumph', in C.L.R. James, *The Future in the Present; Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (London, 1977). On women weavers in Lancashire, see Sue Bruley, 'Women and Communism: a Case Study of the Lancashire Weavers in the Depression', in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan (eds.), *Opening the Books; Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party* (London, 1995).

<sup>88</sup> C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways; The story of Herman Melville and the world we live in* (London, 2001), p. 87.

<sup>89</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. xv.

<sup>90</sup> Paul Le Blanc, 'Introduction: C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism', in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James, 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994), p. 1.

and peripheral, to alter our traditional understanding of what is of central importance about the life and work of C.L.R. James.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **‘We Lived According to the Tenets of Matthew Arnold’: The ‘Britishness’ of the Young C.L.R. James**

It is hard to think of a recent book which, on first sight at least, might represent a more traditional form of ‘Britishness’, or rather ‘Englishness’, than John Major’s 2007 retelling of ‘the story of cricket’s early years’, *More Than a Game*. Yet it is noteworthy that even the former British Conservative Prime Minister chose to register the importance of James as an authority on the game:

The Marxist historian C.L.R. James argued that, in the West Indies, cricket had a magic that was a guiding light for the dispossessed and the disenfranchised. From a polar opposite political position, Lord Harris argued that cricket upheld the values of a nineteenth-century empire. From their disparate viewpoints, James and Harris had instincts in common: both believed that cricket touches deep and conflicting emotions, and offers added value to society. They are right. Sport, and cricket specifically, can have a dynamic effect upon a community, and can spring from the very core of a nation.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is not going to dwell at any length on the contradictory and complex relationship between colonialism and cricket, nor even how the quintessentially English game of cricket came to so profoundly shape the culture of the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> However, it might be worth noting that the connection between the black Trinidadian James and the Old Etonian, Oxbridge educated Lord Harris goes a little deeper than Major noted. Indeed, the very first published piece of writing that James wrote after arriving in Britain in 1932 was actually an appreciation of Lord Harris, written on reading the news of his passing. On 29 March 1932, *The Times* carried the following piece:

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<sup>1</sup> John Major, *More Than a Game; The Story of Cricket’s Early Years* (London, 2007), p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> See Brian Stoddart and Keith A. P. Sandiford (eds.), *The imperial game; Cricket, Culture and Society* (Manchester, 1998).

The late Lord Harris will be regretted in many places, not least in the West Indies, where he was born. He always had a warm spot in his heart for the land of his birth. He visited the West Indies periodically and, when in his seventies, met a negro septuagenarian who had been his playmate in childhood. Of late years he was a staunch supporter of West Indian cricket. He saw some of the games played by the M.C.C. team of 1926 and, his birthday happening to coincide with the Second Test in Trinidad, members of the M.C.C. playing in the match paid the veteran Test cricketer a charming compliment. He was asked to put on the pads and the Hon. F.S.G. Calthorpe, Hammond, Kilner, and Holmes of the M.C.C., and H.B.G. Austin and George Challenor, of the West Indies, bowled at him. Even on the uncertain matting wicket and encumbered by coat and waistcoat, Lord Harris showed good form, playing forward with the left foot to the ball in the old style. There was no trace of the modern habit of getting unnecessarily in front of the wicket - which he condemned in the famous article on Modern Batting written for Wisden's Almanack over 20 years ago. During his short stay in 1926 he of his own accord visited the offices of the *Sporting Chronicle* (the leading sporting newspaper in the West Indies), and in an interview lasting nearly two hours discussed with the editor matters of importance affecting West Indian cricket.<sup>3</sup>

Lord Harris's ability to play forward in defence of his wicket while wearing his waistcoat aside, this short piece, announcing James's arrival in Britain, suggests a few things about James other than his love and knowledge of cricket, cricketers, and his previous part-time employment as a journalist on the *Sporting Chronicle*. That James would write to *The Times* of all papers regarding the passing of the one-time Governor of Trinidad tells us for example that James was not yet quite the revolutionary Marxist and 'class-struggle Pan-Africanist' he would soon become. Yet more fundamentally, it tells us quite a bit about the young James's ingrained 'Britishness', growing up as a colonial subject of the Empire, and it is this imperial identity that this chapter will discuss, with an extended discussion of the influence of Matthew Arnold (1822-88).

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus Williams (ed.), *Double Century; Cricket in The Times*, Vol. 1 (London, 1989), pp. 268-69. The editor of the *Sporting Chronicle* from 1926 onwards was Lloyd Sidney Smith.

## Victorianism

Like other colonial subjects of Britain, West Indians were officially ‘British’ and indeed identified themselves as such, not least since they had to contend with what Bill Schwarz has called ‘the unusually deep penetration of the institutions of Victorian civic life into the cultural organisation of the colonial Caribbean’.<sup>4</sup> James’s praise of that archetypal Victorian, Lord Harris, epitomises his ‘Victorianism’.<sup>5</sup> ‘Victorianism to me is not a thing to be amused at in books, but a very vivid and sometimes painful memory’, James wrote in May 1933.<sup>6</sup> James was born in 1901, while Queen Victoria was still on the throne, into the nascent black middle class in Trinidad.<sup>7</sup> Aged just nine, and trained up by his father, Robert Alexander - a schoolmaster - James became the youngest boy ever to win the necessary exhibition to the elite Queen’s Royal College (Q.R.C.). This institution was modelled on the English public school, and as James noted later, ‘more suitable to Portsmouth than to Port of Spain’.<sup>8</sup> Soon after enrolling in 1911, James demonstrated he was more than capable of fulfilling the massive expectations of him from family and friends, coming second in an island-wide school competition open to all (even those seven years older), when told to write about the ‘British Empire’.<sup>9</sup> V.S. Naipaul in his 1961 novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*, set decades later, contains a ill-disguised spoof of the schoolboy James as an unnamed ‘negro boy’ who had made the ‘biggest surprise’ by winning first place among those competing for school exhibitions:

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Schwarz, ‘Crossing the seas’, in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester, 2003), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> James’s identification with ‘imperial Britishness’ meant he would often praise other unlikely figures during this period, for example describing a white plantation owner Sir John Alleyne as ‘the greatest Barbadian of the eighteenth century’ and paying homage to that Victorian icon, William Wilberforce. See C. L. R. James ‘Barbados and the Barbadians, Part II’, *Port of Spain Gazette*, 22 March 1932 and C. L. R. James, ‘Slavery Today; A Shocking Exposure’, *Tit-Bits*, 5 August 1933.

<sup>6</sup> C. L. R. James, ‘A Century of Freedom’, *The Listener*, 31 May 1933.

<sup>7</sup> James was born on 4 January 1901. Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901.

<sup>8</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 31-32.

He was a negro boy of astonishing size ... he had been loud in his denunciations of crammers; he had taken a leading part in discussions about films and sport; he had a phenomenal knowledge of English county cricket scores throughout the nineteen-thirties; and he had introduced the topic of sex ... he displayed a convincing knowledge of the female body and its functions; and the conception of his life away from school as one of indifference to books and notes and homework was reinforced by his passionate devotion to the novels of P.G. Wodehouse, whose style he successfully imitated in his English compositions.<sup>10</sup>

In reality things were slightly more complicated, despite the essential truth in Eric William's point that colonial Trinidad by the twentieth century was 'politically, economically, socially, educationally, culturally literally a British colony'.<sup>11</sup> As Stephen Howe notes, 'there was nothing inevitable about the Englishness of James's education, or of Trinidad'.

Given its Spanish and French inheritance, the island could have remained a minimally anglicised hybrid, one where the formerly dominant languages remained the preferred, and prized idioms of the elite ... it required conscious decisions, acts of will - on the part of both colonisers and colonised - for a British-model educational system and cultural ethos to take root there.<sup>12</sup>

By the twentieth century, as Schwarz notes, Britishness had become 'hegemonic', and 'worked as a symbolic force-field through which the power of the metropolis operated'.<sup>13</sup> At Q.R.C., James recalled that '*everything* began from the

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<sup>10</sup> V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (London, 1964), p. 440. I am indebted to David Goodway for this reference. During the 1920s, James read all six volumes of the Fabian Havelock Ellis's *The Psychology of Sex*. Worcester, C.L.R. James, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger; The Education of a Prime Minister* (London, 1969), p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Howe, 'C.L.R. James: visions of history, visions of Britain', in Bill Schwarz, (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 155-56. Perhaps mindful of this heritage, Queen Victoria herself apparently in 1897 at her Jubilee asked Emmanuel Mzumbo Lazare, a black Trinidad-born solicitor, 'Do you speak English in Trinidad?' only to be informed that 'Madam in Trinidad we are all English'. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism; The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (New Jersey, 1991), p. 401.

<sup>13</sup> Bill Schwarz, "'Shivering in the noonday sun.'" The British world and the dynamics of 'nativization', in Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Melbourne, 2007), pp. 22-23.

basis that Britain was the source of all light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn'. Yet the young James himself, who had inherited a love of reading from his mother, certainly also wilfully embraced the British educational and cultural ethos. Britain, he later recalled, 'was the beacon that beckoned me on'.<sup>14</sup>

James emerged from Q.R.C. in some senses irrevocably shaped as a 'Victorian'.<sup>15</sup> 'I began to study Latin and French, then Greek, and much else ... I learnt and obeyed and taught a code, the English public-school code', he recalled in *Beyond a Boundary*.<sup>16</sup> After graduating with a classical education fit for the rulers of the world's most powerful empire, it is noteworthy that James spent much of the following decade teaching English and History back at Q.R.C. as a schoolmaster before moving on to teach at the Government Training College.<sup>17</sup> Yet if James was a 'Victorian', he was as George Lamming put it, 'a Victorian with the rebel seed'.<sup>18</sup> This 'rebel seed' was perhaps first sown through James's reading of English literature in general and Victorian writers critical of Victorianism in particular. In his study of James, *Urbane Revolutionary*, Frank Rosengarten draws particular attention to four English writers with the first name William 'whom he especially enjoyed - Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Thackeray'.<sup>19</sup> James's early love of

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<sup>14</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>15</sup> James's second wife, Constance Webb, noted that 'in London, among friends, he was often called *the last of the Victorians*'. Constance Webb, *Not Without Love; Memoirs* (London, 2003), p. 171.

<sup>16</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 33. See also C.L.R. James, 'Fanon and the Caribbean', in *International Tribute to Frantz Fanon* (New York, 1978), p. 45. 'I learned Latin, Greek and French, elementary mathematics and advanced Mathematics, Roman history, Greek history, a whole lot of things that were of no use to me in the Caribbean.'

<sup>17</sup> On leaving Trinidad in 1932, James wrote that 'It is a pleasant thing to be no longer that model of all propriety, a teacher, and that model of subservience, a Government servant'. C. L. R. James, 'Barbados and the Barbadians', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 20 March 1932.

<sup>18</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London, 2005), p. 151. The American labour historian George Rawick thought James a 'Victorian hippy'. Personal information from Marcus Rediker, 6 November 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 17. James's relationship to all these writers but in particular to William Hazlitt warrants more attention, though there is some discussion in Consuelo Lopez Springfield, 'What do men live by? Autobiography and intention in C.L.R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 35/4, (1989). In May 1989, the last month of James's life, Michael Foot paid James a visit and later wrote that 'I can still recall the fresh radiance that spread across his face and renewed vigour in his voice when I raised the name of William Hazlitt'. See Michael Foot,

Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is well known, and almost certainly provides the inspiration for Naipaul's jibe about the 'passionate devotion to the novels of P.G. Wodehouse' by the 'negro boy'.

However, for James it seems that Thackeray paved the way for a dangerously subversive critique of the strict hierarchy of colonial society.<sup>20</sup> James recalled of *Vanity Fair* - itself rich in colonial and imperial themes - that he had 'no notion that it was a classical novel' but just 'laughed without satiety at Thackeray's constant jokes and sneers and gibes at the aristocracy and at people in high places'.<sup>21</sup> The prestige of the monarchy in particular, so important in a Crown Colony like Trinidad, lost any power it might have had over the young James. 'I have been a republican since I was eight years old. An Englishman, William Makepeace Thackeray, taught it to me', James later recalled.<sup>22</sup> Further reading of the likes of Thackeray and Dickens ensured James would steadily become critical of what E.P. Thompson called 'that shallow culture in which both sentimentality and hypocrisy flourished', 'the characteristic "Victorian" middle-class sensibility' which was so widespread among the black and coloured middle class of Trinidad.<sup>23</sup>

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'C.L.R. James', in Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain (eds.), *C.L.R. James; His Intellectual Legacies* (Amherst, 1995), p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> There is probably more behind James's later remark that it is 'Thackeray, not Marx, who bears the heaviest responsibility for me' than meets the eye. In a private letter in 1851, Thackeray summed up his general outlook, noting 'the present politics are behind the world; and not fit for the intelligence of the nation. The great revolutions a coming a coming ... the present writers are all employed as by instinct in unscrewing the old framework of society and getting ready for the smash. I take a sort of pleasure in my little part in the business and in saying destructive things in a good humoured jolly way.' See James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 47; J.Y.T. Greig, 'The Social Critique', in A. Welsh (ed.) *Thackeray; A Collection of critical essays* (New Jersey, 1968), p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 27, 47. For more on the colonial themes of *Vanity Fair*, see Robert Giddings (ed.), *Literature and Imperialism* (London, 1991), pp. 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> Howe, 'C.L.R. James', p. 167. In the British socialist periodical, *Plebs*, I came across a letter from one E.A. Nash in April 1934 on 'Thackeray and Socialism', which noted that 'Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* is, I think, the finest satire of the "society" of the age that has ever been written. In *Vanity Fair*, *Henry Esmond*, *The Virginians*, *The Newcomes*, etc., he exposes the wholesale jobbery-snobbery-hypocrisy of the ruling classes ... All Thackeray's morality showed that he loved humanity, could understand and sympathise with every individual. Personally, when a youth, it was Thackeray's books that turned me to Socialism.'

<sup>23</sup> E. P. Thompson, *William Morris; Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, 1976), p. 139. For Karl Marx's 1854 appreciation of Thackeray's exposure of 'political and social truths' about 'The English Middle Class', see Lee Baxandall (ed.), *Documents on Marxist aesthetics, Vol. 1, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on literature and art* (New York, 1974), p. 106.

## Liberal Humanism

One particularly profound influence on James was another great Victorian critic of Victorianism, Matthew Arnold.<sup>24</sup>

I had a circle of friends (most of them white) with whom I exchanged ideas, books, records and manuscripts. We published local magazines and gave lectures or wrote articles on Wordsworth, the English Drama, and Poetry as a Criticism of Life. We lived according to the tenets of Matthew Arnold.<sup>25</sup>

Arnold's tenets were perhaps most clearly laid down in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) where he stressed the humanising role culture could and should play in society. Culture was about 'the passion for sweetness and light', but also 'the passion for making them *prevail*' everywhere, even among 'the raw and unkindled masses of humanity ... we must have a broad basis, must have sweetness and light for as many as possible'. But it must be '*real* sweetness and *real* light. Plenty of people will try to give the masses, as they call them, an intellectual food prepared and adapted in the way they think proper for the actual condition of the masses' and 'plenty of people will try to indoctrinate the masses with the set of ideas and judgments constituting the creed of their own profession or party'. But 'culture works differently' from both 'ordinary popular literature' and 'religious and political organisations'.

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<sup>24</sup> This chapter is unable to fully trace the influence of Arnold on James, though Arnold's respect for the French Revolution (and general Francophilia) is discussed further in the chapter on Europe. It might be enough here to note Arnold's 'Hellenism' - his admiration of the civilisation of Ancient Greece - and his respect for Edmund Burke as a writer and one who 'treats politics with ... thought and imagination' (if not with respect to France 'there is much in his view of France and her destinies which is narrow and erroneous'). See Stefan Collini, *Arnold* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 49, 82-85, 90-91.

<sup>25</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 70-71. See also C. L. R. James, 'Discovering Literature in Trinidad: the 1930s [1969]', in C. L. R. James, *Spheres of Existence; Selected Writings*, Vol. 2 (London, 1980), p. 237. Aside from brief discussions by Kent Worcester and Aldon Lynn Nielson, the influence of Arnold on James is all but absent from the current literature. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 7, 246, and Nielsen, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 152, 173, 175.

It does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, - nourished, and not bound by them. This is the *social idea*; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and the learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore of sweetness and light.<sup>26</sup>

James's extensive reading and encyclopaedic memory enabled him to use ideas 'freely, nourished and not bound by them', while his background as a member of the black middle class coupled with his relatively privileged position as a schoolmaster ensured he was able carry his liberal humanist ideas 'from one end of society to the other', from members of the white colonial elite to the materially impoverished black residents of the 'barrack-yards' in Port of Spain. As James later remarked of himself and his group of friends, 'we spread sweetness and light, and we studied the best that there was in literature in order to transmit it to the people - as we thought, the poor, backward West Indian people'.<sup>27</sup> As he once recalled, 'in time, before long, when anyone in Trinidad wanted to know something about literature, they came to me. James was the man.' Even other teachers 'looked upon me as an exceptional person ... the person to whom they applied for knowledge of literature, history, local history and so forth'.<sup>28</sup>

How many of Arnold's tenets James's group of friends took to heart can be seen from an examination of the independent Trinidadian cultural journal, *The*

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<sup>26</sup> P. J. Keating (ed.), *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose* (Middlesex, 1970), pp. 225-26.

<sup>27</sup> James, 'Discovering Literature in Trinidad', p. 237. For an affectionate portrait of James during this period from one of his friends, see Ralph de Boissière, 'The Rise of the Beacon Group: extract from Ralph de Boissière's (as yet unpublished) autobiography', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 9/2, (2000), pp. 10-11.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Buhle, 'The Making of a Literary Life: C.L.R. James interviewed', in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.), *C.L.R. James's Caribbean* (London, 1992), p. 58.

*Beacon*, which they helped to found in 1931 and which billed itself as ‘A Guiding Light For All Who Are in Intellectual Darkness and Who Seek Great Things’.<sup>29</sup> The first issue carried the banner slogan ‘Lux et Veritas’ - Light and Truth - and the editor Albert Gomes explicitly declared that his journal was about diffusing culture not political propaganda. ‘The customary “editorials” have been purposely omitted. There is no desire to give any definitive “personality” to “The Beacon” - to associate its name with any policies or ideals.’ In his autobiography, *Through a Maze of Colour*, Gomes remembered how within a few issues ‘*The Beacon* became much more than just a literary magazine and mouthpiece of a clique’.

Indeed, it became the focus of a movement of enlightenment spearheaded by Trinidad’s angry young men of the Thirties. It was the torpor, the smugness and the hypocrisy of the Trinidad of the period that provoked the response which produced both the magazine and the defiant bohemianism of the movement that was built around it.<sup>30</sup>

James’s Arnoldianism comes out clearly in one short article for *The Beacon*, a portrait of a former member of Trinidad’s free-coloured population who rose to become Solicitor-General during the nineteenth century, Michel Maxwell Philip (1829-88). As James wrote, ‘true he was a distinguished lawyer ... a man of conspicuous public service. But ... his chief claim to remembrance is because in addition to all these things, he was a man of that varied intellectual power and breadth of culture which make him and such as he the fine flower of a civilized society.’ In other words, Philip was a ‘great man of culture’, and indeed James praised Philip’s mastery of ‘the grand style’, a phrase coined by Arnold.<sup>31</sup> James singled out an after-dinner speech Philip made in 1886, when in the company of the great and good of the

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<sup>29</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Reinhard W. Sander, ‘Introduction: *The Beacon* and the Emergence of West Indian Literature’, in Brinsley Samaroo (ed.), *The Beacon, Volumes I-IV, 1931-1939* (New York, 1977), p. xvii.

<sup>31</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘Michel Maxwell Philip: 1829-1888 [1931]’, in Selwyn R. Cudjoe (ed.), *Michel Maxwell Philip: A Trinidad Patriot of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Wellesley, 1999), pp. 87, 103. The ‘grand style’ for Arnold was used ‘when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject’. See Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (London, 1963), p. 173.

West Indian legal establishment who, after a lifetime of service, had snubbed him of his rightful position of Attorney-General because of his colour. It was, James declared, ‘one of the finest speeches of his career’, and he quoted the following extract, noting they were ‘words which it is difficult to read today without sharing the feelings of him who spoke them’.

I am not a Chief Justice. I am not a Puisne Judge. I do not aspire either to be one or the other. I am not even an Attorney-General. It will suffice me in the afternoon of my life (whether attended with good or evil fortune) when, broken with the conflicts of the Forum, I should seek ease in retirement, I shall be able to express my contentment in the language of the Roman wanderer to Sextilius, “Tell him you have seen Caius Marius, though not a fugitive, sitting on the ruins of Carthage.”

As James commented, ‘it is a passage to linger over’.

First the simple reiterations of all that he was not, driving home to his audience all that he was, for he knew and they too knew that even in that talented assembly there was not one his peer; then the great phrase, “broken with the conflicts of the Forum,” leading to the classical allusion, instantly comprehensible to every intelligent member of his audience, as any oratorical allusion should be, and yet with the characteristic touch of scholarship in the precision of the reference; the tremendous words of Marius himself; and behind it all, the disappointment of a lifetime, charging the words with emotion and so lifting the passage from rhetoric into literature.<sup>32</sup>

As James continued, ‘the most serious criticism made against him is that he did little for his people. It is true that Mr. Philip was not a man possessed by that passionate desire for the welfare of the poorer classes which distinguishes the present tribune of the people, the member for Port-of-Spain’, Captain Andre Cipriani, leader of the nationalist Trinidad Workingmen’s Association (T.W.A.). Yet for James this was not crucial as ‘it takes all sorts to make a world and it takes it all sorts to make a Government, a thing which extremists on both sides cannot realise. Conservatism

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<sup>32</sup> James, ‘Michel Maxwell Philip’, p. 94. The classical allusion is from Plutarch’s account of the life of Marius.

unprodded hardens into tyranny, radicalism unchecked degenerates into chaos.’ The fact Philip stood between the ‘anarchy’ of the mass and also the ‘tyranny’ of the few meant that he fulfilled the Arnoldian ideal of how a great man of culture should act.

As a people we are young and rather raw so that we do not understand these things ... he set a standard to which young men might aspire and by which older men might be judged. Always in the minds of his contemporaries loomed the gigantic figure of Mr. Maxwell Philip, to keep pretentious small men in their places and - a far more necessary task - presumptuous big men too.<sup>33</sup>

James himself in this article was possibly drawing on his own experience of how ‘conservatism unprodded hardens into tyranny’ when he found himself giving part-time English lessons to the French consul to Trinidad. The French consul was, James remembered, an ‘intimate friend’ of Governor Sir Claud Hollis, a reactionary figure once described by the *Negro Worker* as ‘the Mussolini of Trinidad’. One day the French consul asked James point blank, “‘What do you think would happen if the Government arrested Cipriani?’” Like a flash it hit me that this step was being discussed in the circles he frequented.’ James, who had been inspired by the growing nationalist fervour to begin a study of West Indian political history, conjured up the spectre of a repeat of the ‘Water Riots’ of 1903, that left sixteen shot dead by the government and the home of the Legislative Assembly destroyed. ‘Arrest Cipriani! Why, the people would burn down Government House. They did it before, you know.’<sup>34</sup> James was obviously convincing enough in portraying to the French Consul a picture of the anarchy and chaos that would unfold if ‘radicalism’ was allowed to ‘degenerate unchecked’ without Cipriani’s leadership. Arnold himself, who had

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<sup>33</sup> James, ‘Michel Maxwell Philip’, pp. 102-103. For more on Captain Cipriani, and James’s relationship to him, see the section on ‘Parliamentary Socialism’ in this chapter and chapter six on the Caribbean.

<sup>34</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 117-18. *Negro Worker*, (June, 1932). On the ‘Water Riots’, see Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire: An Introduction* (London, 1988), p. 100. The Communist *Negro Worker* was banned in Trinidad in April 1932 under the Seditious Publications Law, and all Communist literature was banned in September 1932.

personally deplored the working-class riots in London's Hyde Park in 1866, would doubtless have been proud of James's 'timely prod' of a 'presumptuous big man'.<sup>35</sup>

## Colonialism

Moreover, Arnold's method of understanding metropolitan British society was taken up by James and used to analyse colonial society in Trinidad. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold had divided British society up by class with the aristocratic 'Barbarians', the middle-class 'Philistines' and the working-class 'Populace'. Arnold reserved his particular energies for undermining the philistinism, pomposity and parochialism of the newly enriched English middle class, those who 'believe that our greatness and welfare are proved by our being so very rich' and 'who most give their lives and thoughts to becoming rich'.<sup>36</sup> Arnold's judgment seemed confirmed by what James found from his observation of his fellow teachers at Q.R.C., as he noted in his first book, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, published in 1932.

If anyone happens to meet fairly frequently any group of Englishmen, even of university education, he will find that as a rule they dislike civilised conversation and look with suspicion, if not positive dislike, upon anyone who introduces it into their continual reverberations over the football match, the cricket match, the hockey match or the tennis match.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> On Arnold and the British working class, see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 132-34.

<sup>36</sup> Keating (ed.), *Matthew Arnold*, p. 211. As Arnold continued, 'Culture says: "Consider these people then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice; look at them attentively; observe the literature that they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth out of their mouths, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become just like these people by having it?"'

<sup>37</sup> C. L. R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani; An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Nelson, 1932), p. 3. However, in the 1920s James himself was a sports journalist as well as a teacher and so it is perhaps not that surprising that James's teaching colleagues made conversation about cricket with him rather than literature or politics. As James admitted later there was no college master 'who talked more about cricket than I did in the common-room'. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 125.

In a slightly regretful passage in *Beyond a Boundary*, looking back at his writing of *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, James remembered that ‘Matthew Arnold still had possession’ of him at the time, and accordingly ‘throwing every brick to hand at the arrogance of English colonialism, I had indicted the English as a whole of being an unintellectual people’, before he had actually been able to meet a wider cross section of them.<sup>38</sup> However, *The Life of Captain Cipriani* was original in the important sense that while James perhaps too uncritically accepted Arnold’s judgment of British society, he creatively adapted Arnold’s class categories of Barbarian aristocrats, Philistine middle class and an unenlightened Populace to fit colonial Trinidad. ‘The white people are the richer people, and naturally form what for the sake of a better term may be called the local aristocracy. This society is on the whole of no particular value, containing as it does little of the element of real culture.’<sup>39</sup> Any young middle-class Englishman who arrived in the colonies from England to play a role in governing colonial society soon underwent a transformation.

Bourgeois at home, he finds himself after a few weeks at sea suddenly exalted into the position of being a member of a ruling class. Empire to him and most of his class, formerly but a mere word, becomes on his advent to the colonies a phrase charged with responsibilities, it is true, but bearing in its train the most delightful privileges, beneficial to his material well-being and flattering to his pride ... He owes his place to a system, and the system thereby becomes sacred ... the Colonial Office official worships the system of Crown Colony Government ... How he leaps to attention at the first bars of “God Save the King!” Empire Day, King’s Birthday, days not so much neglected in England as ignored, give to the colonial Englishman an opportunity to sing the praises of the British Empire and of England, his own country, as its centre ... this excessive and vocal patriotism in an Englishman is but the natural smoke of unnatural fires burning within. That snobbishness which is so marked a characteristic of the Englishman at home, in the colonies develops into a morbid desire for the respect and homage of those over whom he rules. Uneasily conscious of the moral insecurity of his position, he is further handicapped by finding himself an aristocrat without having been trained as one. His nose

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<sup>38</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 125. On first arrival in London in 1932, James could still note, with a characteristically Arnoldian flourish, that he thought Englishmen were ‘usually Philistines’. Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 53.

for what he considers derogatory to his dignity becomes keener than a bloodhound's, which leads him into the most frightful solecisms.<sup>40</sup>

In short, the necessities of colonial domination had turned the colonial Englishman from a sanctimonious Philistine into a reactionary Barbarian. A system where the power of the ruling elite was legitimated by ideas of white supremacy meant an otherwise rational and educated Englishman in the colonies now felt he had some automatic or god-given right to govern because of his breeding, rather like some blue-blooded aristocrat lording it over his serfs. As James wrote,

It is not surprising that the famous English tolerance leaves him almost entirely. At home he was distinguished for the liberality and freedom of his views. Hampden, Chatham, Fox, who has so little to his credit on the Statute Book of England and yet whose memory is adored by so many Englishmen, Dunning and his famous motion: "The power of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished," these are the persons and things which Englishmen undemonstrative as they are, write and speak of with a subdued, but conscious pride ... But in the colonies any man who speaks for his country, any man who dares to question the authority of those who rule over him, any man who tries to do for his own people what Englishmen are so proud that other Englishmen have done for theirs, immediately becomes in the eyes of the colonial Englishman a dangerous person, a wild revolutionary, a man with no respect for law and order, a person actuated by the lowest motives, a reptile to be crushed at the first opportunity. What at home is the greatest virtue becomes in the colonies the greatest crime.<sup>41</sup>

After exposing the inherent hypocrisy and brutality at the heart of British colonial rule, James then turned his attention to his fellow black West Indians in Trinidad. 'What sort of people are these who live in the West Indies and claim their place as citizens and not as subjects of the British Empire?'<sup>42</sup> James tore into the British Government's line of 'self-government when fit for it', amply demonstrating

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<sup>40</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, pp. 4, 6.

<sup>41</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 10.

that the people of Trinidad had always been manifestly 'fit' to govern themselves.<sup>43</sup> That said, James's own class - the black middle class - were too often also fundamentally Philistines.

Between the brown-skinned middle class and the black there is continual rivalry, distrust and ill-feeling, which, skilfully played upon by the European people poisons the life of the community ... the people most affected by this are people of the middle class who, lacking the hard contact with realities of the masses and unable to attain to the freedoms of a leisured class, are more than all types of people given to trivial divisions and subdivisions of social rank and precedence.<sup>44</sup>

Hope for James therefore lay in breaking from his middle class background and facing up to the reality of colonial rule, and crucially making 'hard contact with [the] realities of the masses'. As for the West Indian masses themselves, James followed Arnold in stressing the 'populace' were still in need of enlightenment and education as it was in the interests of colonial rule to ensure 'there is much ignorance'.<sup>45</sup>

While Matthew Arnold himself was not an anti-imperialist by any means, and he did not really think that ideas of liberty, democracy and so on were fit for subject peoples of the empire, his tenets did perhaps constitute an implicit challenge to imperial ideology when taken up by James's little group of Trinidadian nationalists. As Arnold put it in *Culture and Anarchy* 'the happy moments of humanity', the 'marking epochs of a people's life', 'the flowering times for literature and art and all the creative power of genius' come when 'the whole of society is in the fullest measure permeated by thought, sensible to beauty, intelligent and alive' and you get

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<sup>43</sup> In this James was following in the footsteps of other Trinidadian nationalists. See Selwyn R. Cudjoe, 'C.L.R. James and the Trinidad and Tobago Intellectual Tradition, Or, Not Learning Shakespeare Under a Mango Tree', *New Left Review*, 223, (1997).

<sup>44</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 15. In an interview in 1987, James remembered how his father was a 'a philistine of note'. When James began writing short stories, James's despairing father would ask him 'Well, where are you going?' 'That is all very well, but what money?' See Buhle, 'The Making of a Literary Life', pp. 56-57.

<sup>45</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, pp. 13-14.

‘a *national* glow of life and thought’.<sup>46</sup> A national glow of the life and thought of the people of Trinidad was not what the white colonial elite desired but James saw glimpses of it in indigenous popular cultural traditions such as calypso and Carnival, and together with his group of friends he tried to foster it in the sphere of literature, writing short ‘barrack-yard’ stories and of course his wonderful novel, *Minty Alley*. As Caryl Phillips has noted of James’s writing, it was ‘characterised by an unsentimental concern with the life of the working-class poor of Trinidad’, and did not ‘resort to rhetorical flourishes in form or narrative technique’. Moreover, while attempting to give voice to the voiceless, James embraced ‘the Trinidadian vernacular’ as opposed to ‘the usual imitations of metropolitan English’ and so his dialogue ‘provided his successors, most notably V.S. Naipaul, with a model’.<sup>47</sup> After all, as James cheerfully noted in 1931 in an article in *The Beacon*, ‘Trinidadians are, as I have good cause to know, and as the educated traveller can easily see from their book-shops, music-stores, newspapers, and conversations, a highly refined and cultured people’.<sup>48</sup>

### **Modernity**

There are, however, significant factors which mean that James’s ‘Britishness’ was something far more complex than simply an imitation of the liberal humanism of Matthew Arnold transplanted to, and reinvented in, colonial Trinidad. While this chapter has focused on Arnold, it should not be forgotten that there were of course other important influences and inspirations on the young James in this period, such as Cipriani, Marcus Garvey, and Gandhi.<sup>49</sup> Critically, James’s blackness and his identification of himself as not just ‘British’ but as a ‘West Indian Negro’, is vital with respect to understanding what W.E.B. Du Bois called the ‘double consciousness’

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<sup>46</sup> Keating (ed.), *Matthew Arnold*, pp. 226, 233. On empire, Arnold opposed Gladstone’s scheme for Home Rule in Ireland. See Collini, *Arnold*, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> Caryl Phillips, ‘C.L.R. James: Mariner, Renegade and Castaway’, in Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order: Selected Essays* (London, 2001), p. 155.

<sup>48</sup> C. L. R. James, ‘The Problem of Knowledge’, *The Beacon*, 1/1, (March, 1931).

<sup>49</sup> On Gandhi, see C.L.R. James, ‘Review of *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story*’, *The Beacon*, 1/5, (August, 1931).

of the oppressed in a racist climate.<sup>50</sup> The importance of race should not be understated, even though James had been able to cultivate his passion for history and literature while at Q.R.C. and, so, as Stuart Hall points out, turn the ‘double consciousness’ into a positive thing, ‘a gift,’ and ‘his colonial education - which has unhinged so many - into a source of intellectual strength’.<sup>51</sup>

Crucially, there is also the question of modernity, and indeed to some extent modernism as a cultural movement.<sup>52</sup> As Schwarz notes, ‘to become modern, for the colonised in the British world, was to become British’.<sup>53</sup> In *Beyond a Boundary*, James described how during the 1920s, ‘intellectually I lived abroad, chiefly in England’.

To my house on personal subscription came a mass of periodicals from abroad. I have to give the list. Not only *The Cricketer*, but the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Times Educational Supplement*, the *Observer*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Criterion*, the *London Mercury*, the *Musical Review*, the *Gramophone* ... the editions of the *Evening Standard* when Arnold Bennett wrote in it,

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<sup>50</sup> Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom; The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James* (London, 1997), p. 13. Some of the complexities of this ‘double consciousness’ come through well in James’s 1933 statement that ‘People who are governed from abroad often feel that they are considered in some way inferior, backward or immature, and that many of us resent. Education and all intellectual and political life take their colour and direction from those who have power’ but ‘there is no treason in this. The West Indian Negro in the West Indies is the most loyal subject in the British Empire, and any move towards giving the island to any other country would immediately cause revolution.’ See James, ‘A Century of Freedom’.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Breaking Bread with History: C.L.R. James and *The Black Jacobins*’, interviewed by Bill Schwarz, *History Workshop Journal*, 46, (1998), p. 24. Stuart Hall, ‘C.L.R. James, 1901-1989’, *History Workshop Journal*, 29, (1990), p. 213. It is worth remembering while James was a schoolboy at Q.R.C. schools in Britain were happily using textbooks such as C. R. L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling’s *A School History of England* (1911), which casually denigrated black West Indians as ‘lazy, vicious and incapable of any serious improvement’. See John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire; The manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1985), p. 184. See also Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, pp. 77-81.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick Williams has commented that modernism as a movement had a more uneven impact on colonial countries than it did in the metropolis, and that ‘one reason for the somewhat weaker or slower growth of modernism in the Anglophone Caribbean would be the perceived political and cultural need for realism as a more appropriate means of responding to the situation at that time’. James’s writing in the 1920s - barrack-yard stories - were in an important sense definitely ‘social realism’, though this deserves more attention. See Patrick Williams, ‘“Simultaneous untemporalities”: theorizing modernism and empire’, in Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (eds.), *Modernism and Empire* (Manchester, 2000), p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> Schwarz, ‘“Shivering in the noonday sun”’, p. 23.

and the *Daily Telegraph* with Rebecca West. I read them, filed most of them, I read and even bought many of the books they discussed.<sup>54</sup>

Yet after the horrors of the Great War and the hopes raised by the Russian Revolution, English intellectual life and culture itself during the 1920s was more radical than it might seem from such an austere list. As Maurice Cornforth notes, 'left wing ideas were then associated and mixed up with protests against social conventions, respectabilities and inhibitions which the war ... had done much to bring to a head, and which for free-thinking intellectuals were enshrined in new literary and artistic movements'.<sup>55</sup> As James's good friend Alfred Mendes declared in his cultural journal *Trinidad* in 1930,

... we have only to be acquainted with contemporary literature to find ourselves face to face with the fact that the *Zeit Geist* is one of revolt against established customs and organic loyalties. Since the War, this revolt has been directed not so much against the Puritanism of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as against a degenerate form of it popularly known as Victorianism.<sup>56</sup>

## Puritanism

This is a telling quote, for it gives both a clue as to why Arnold's ideas were taken to heart among James's group but also suggests another important difference between themselves and Arnold - the question of Puritanism. For Arnold, the tragedy of 'the great English middle class, the kernel of the nation, the class whose intelligent sympathy had upheld Shakespeare,' was that after the Elizabethan period it had

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<sup>54</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>55</sup> Maurice Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes; Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton* (London, 1978), p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Alfred H. Mendes, 'A Commentary [1930]', in Reinhard W. Sander (ed.), *From Trinidad; An Anthology of Early West Indian Writing* (London, 1978), p. 21. On Mendes, see Michèle Levy (ed.), *The Autobiography of Alfred H. Mendes, 1897-1991* (Kingston, 2002).

‘entered the prison of Puritanism, and had the key turned on its spirit there for two hundred years’.<sup>57</sup> As Stefan Collini notes, Arnold

... was less concerned with the details of the seventeenth century denominational strife than with the way the severest strains of Protestantism - those sects which had refused to acquiesce in the Anglican Settlement and hence were known as Nonconformist and more commonly, Dissenters - had coloured in drab and sombre hues, the textures of English life more generally. Ultimately, the importance Arnold assigned to Puritanism in English history was itself a reflection of his preoccupation with the part played by its descendants in Victorian Britain.<sup>58</sup>

However, in the twentieth century, such divisions in Christianity in Britain began to lose much of the significance they once might have held, while in a place like Trinidad they were all but meaningless.

Yet James, whose mother Ida Elizabeth in particular was a devout Anglican, later recalled Puritanism as an ‘inheritance’.<sup>59</sup> Though it seems unlikely few would assume this of James, it might be recalled that the term Puritan for most of the twentieth century, as Matthew Grimley has noted, ‘did not usually denote sexual prudishness but, rather, the more positive attributes of independence, adherence to conscience, tolerance, high seriousness, and hard work’.<sup>60</sup> While James had become agnostic by his mid twenties, in 1932, on his journey to England, James described how he stopped in Barbados and visited St James church, ‘the oldest church in Barbados’.

This is the kind of place that makes me wish I lived here ... there is a bell over two hundred years old ... there is an old font, 1684 ... But I liked most the inscriptions commemorating the dead

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<sup>57</sup> Keating (ed.), *Matthew Arnold*, p.165.

<sup>58</sup> Collini, *Arnold*, p. 79.

<sup>59</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 17. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 7, 246. James was enrolled as an Anglican at Q.R.C. by his father.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew Grimley, ‘The Religion of Englishness; Puritanism, Providentialism, and “National Character,” 1918-1945’, *Journal of British Studies*, 46, (2007), p. 896. In colonial Trinidad, where the Roman Catholic Church remained a powerful conservative force, Puritanism was perhaps also still essentially tied up with the older tradition of radical dissent.

on the walls and on the stone floor. Splendid pieces of prose they are. One marks a family gravestone “beneath which the ashes of Samuel the youngest reunites in one common mass with those of his father.” Reunites in one common mass - a phrase full of the ultimate destiny of all human things.<sup>61</sup>

What James in *Beyond a Boundary* called his ‘Puritan soul’ which ‘burnt with indignation at injustice’ never really left him.<sup>62</sup> Even after he crossed the metaphorical ‘river of fire’ and became a revolutionary Marxist, James remained profoundly understanding of the power and contradictions of religious belief.<sup>63</sup>

### Parliamentary Socialism

James recalled in *Beyond a Boundary* that he first began to take an interest in politics when a mass nationalist movement started to crystallise around Captain Cipriani, the former Commanding Officer of the British West India Regiment (B.W.I.R.) during the Great War and self-declared champion of ‘the unwashed and unsoaped barefooted men’. In 1925, the popular T.W.A. leader was elected to the twenty-six strong predominantly appointed Legislative Council and Cipriani soon rallied an effective movement around him.<sup>64</sup> As James recalled, ‘this was *real*. I was caught up in it like many others and began to take notice.’<sup>65</sup> The T.W.A. had fraternal relations with the British Labour Party, and when Labour came to power in 1929 in Britain, James must have entertained at least some hopes that Labour would

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<sup>61</sup> James, ‘Barbados and Barbadians, Part II’. On James’s turn to agnosticism, see Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>62</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 71.

<sup>63</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, pp. 14-16. Here it might be interesting to compare James to another Marxist historian, Christopher Hill. See Penelope J. Corfield, “‘We are All One in the Eyes of the Lord’: Christopher Hill and the Historical Meanings of Radical Religion”, *History Workshop Journal*, 58, (2004). See also Raphael Samuel, ‘British Marxist Historians, 1880-1980: Part One’, *New Left Review*, 120, (1980).

<sup>64</sup> Selwyn D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 34-35.

<sup>65</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 117. Stuart Hall, ‘A Conversation with C.L.R. James’, in Grant Farred (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James* (Oxford, 1996), p. 17. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (London, 2001), p. 315.

deliver on its declared commitment to self-government for the British West Indies.<sup>66</sup> Though Labour betrayed such hopes - as James angrily noted at the end of his work *The Life of Captain Cipriani* - it seems that the ideas of reformist, parliamentary socialism and perhaps in particular Fabianism made an impression on the young James nonetheless.<sup>67</sup> In 1929, one of the founders of Fabianism, Sidney Webb, Lord Passfield, had become Colonial Secretary and in August 1929 the British government appointed a commission under the chairmanship of another Fabian, Lord Sydney Olivier, to investigate the crisis in the West Indian sugar industry.<sup>68</sup> Paul Breines has drawn attention to the intellectual attraction for independent socialist intellectuals of Fabianism, noting it offered ‘a non-dogmatic and vigorously practical approach to socialist reform centering around a program of public education and enlightenment’. Indeed, one strand of Fabianism was its ‘activism and philosophically eclectic anti-determinism’.<sup>69</sup> In some ways, it would not have been much of a shift for someone like James who lived by Arnoldian tenets to become a Fabian or ‘democratic socialist’ as both Arnold and the Webbs distrusted *laissez faire* and believed in social reform and public enlightenment from above through the state.<sup>70</sup>

Overall, it is important to remember that while in Trinidad James had no sense that he was going to end up primarily a political figure as his aim in moving to Britain

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<sup>66</sup> For background on the T.W.A., see Brinsley Samaroo, ‘The Trinidad Workingmen’s Association and the Origins of Popular Protest in a Crown Colony’, *Social and Economic Studies*, 21/2, (1972).

<sup>67</sup> Kent Worcester has noted that the young James embraced ‘Fabian’ political values. See Kent Worcester, ‘“A Victorian with the rebel seed”; C.L.R. James and the politics of intellectual engagement’, in Alistair Hennessy (ed.), *Intellectuals in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean*, vol. 1 (London, 1992), p. 115.

<sup>68</sup> Neal R. Malmsten, ‘The British Labour Party and the West Indies, 1918-39’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 5/2, (1977), pp. 179-82. Lord Sydney Olivier (1859-1943), a member of the Labour Party’s ‘Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions’, had been an early Fabian who had then worked in the Colonial Office and he was author of several books including *White Capital and Coloured Labour* (1906) and *The Anatomy of African Misery* (1927). From 1907 to 1913 he had been a reforming Governor of Jamaica and in 1924 was a rather reactionary Secretary of State for India in Ramsay MacDonald’s first minority government. See John Saville, ‘Olivier, Sydney Haldane (1<sup>st</sup> Baron Olivier of Ramsden) (1859-1943)’, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, VIII, (1987), and for the results of the commission into the sugar industry, see Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 72, 78, and F. Lee, *Fabianism and Colonialism; The Life and Political Thought of Lord Sydney Olivier* (London, 1988), p. 210.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Breines, ‘Karl Korsch’s “Road to Marx,”’ *Telos*, 26, (1975), p. 46. Interestingly, Breines notes that Korsch’s early Fabianism would ‘serve as the beginning of his later revitalization of the “subjective factor” within Marxism’.

<sup>70</sup> For Arnold, the State was the ‘centre of light and authority’, the organ of ‘our best self’. Keating (ed.), *Matthew Arnold*, pp. 246-47.

in 1932 was to find an audience as a novelist. The limitations of James's politics, such as they were, in this early period are also all too apparent, as he later readily acknowledged. 'My sentiments were in the right place, but I was enclosed within the mould of nineteenth-century intellectualism.'<sup>71</sup> E.P. Thompson has noted the elitism and moralism of even the most powerful Victorian critics of Victorianism like Matthew Arnold.

In truth, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold - all were too ready to appeal to the working class to lead the nation forth in battles for objectives which they themselves had at heart, which were derived from their own special discontent, but which had little relevance to the immediate grievances under which working people were suffering. They were too inclined to see the workers as the rank and file of an Army of Light, struggling valiantly for culture or for a new morality, under the generalship of themselves and a few enlightened leaders who had broken free from the philistine middle class.<sup>72</sup>

In *Beyond a Boundary*, James would himself come to describe Matthew Arnold's ideas as themselves 'philistine' in nature.<sup>73</sup> Yet we should not forget how James's sincere attempt to live by the ideals of liberal humanism exposed the hypocrisy at the heart of British colonial rule, and there is an important sense in which Arnoldianism never entirely left him. James's famous declaration in *Beyond a Boundary*, that 'it is not the quality of goods and utility which matter, but movement; not where you are or what you have, but where you have come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there' has echoes of Arnold's insistence that 'Culture is not a having but a being and becoming'.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps the legacy of Arnold then also left its imprint in the subsequent intellectual shaping of James as, to quote E.P. Thompson again, one of the foremost 'Marxists with a hard theoretical

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<sup>71</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 117.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 245.

<sup>73</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 167.

<sup>74</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 116-17. Arnold also influenced the famous socialist Oscar Wilde, who, in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', noted that 'The true perfection of man lies not in what man has but what man is.' Quoted in S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford, 1978), p. 81. On Wilde and Arnold, see David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool, 2006), p. 74.

basis' who were also 'close students of society' and 'humanists with a tremendous response to and understanding of human culture'.<sup>75</sup>

As James later noted, 'the basic constituent of my political activity and outlook' was already set out in 'the "human" aspect' of *Minty Alley*, the unpublished novel he wrote in 1928 about the working people of one 'barrack-yard' he stayed in that summer.<sup>76</sup> James's humanist spirit would not be diminished when he left Trinidad. After all, colonial Trinidadian society with its clear divisions of race, class and power, which James had been able to view in its totality, from top to bottom, was in a sense only a microcosm of the world system, where white supremacy ruled under the flags of competing European Empires.

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<sup>75</sup> Tony Topham (ed.), *Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Workers' Control and Industrial Democracy held at Transport House, Coventry on June 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 1967* (Hull, 1967), p. 55. It is perhaps interesting to note that Arnold's most famous biographer, Lionel Trilling, himself was from 1934 a Trotskyist sympathizer while researching Matthew Arnold for a PhD. Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals; The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (London, 1987), pp. 11, 35, 61, 102.

<sup>76</sup> Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive*, p. 94.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 'Red Nelson': The English Working Class and the Making of C.L.R. James

'He feels himself one of the people. But it isn't that he likes workers. It is that he hates authority and respectability of any kind.'<sup>1</sup> So wrote C.L.R. James of Ishmael, the young writer who joins the crew of the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's classic novel *Moby Dick*. In his 1953 work of literary criticism, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways; The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*, James argued Ishmael was representative of 'a completely modern intellectual', and there are similarities between Ishmael and James himself in 1932, when he boarded a ship, the *M.S. Columbia*, heading across the Atlantic for Britain.<sup>2</sup> James later described how back then he himself felt 'one of the people' and 'I had been taught to look. I had an instinctive prejudice against what the establishment and authority was telling me.'<sup>3</sup> This chapter will examine what happened when that 'completely modern' young black writer from the Caribbean met the close-knit English working class community of Nelson in North East Lancashire. James arrived in late May 1932 and left in late March 1933, and these ten months in Nelson are widely acknowledged to be 'ten months that shook James's world'. Yet, as James D. Young noted in his 1999 'biographical study', *The World of C.L.R. James*, 'our knowledge of James's first two or three years in Britain remain obscure'.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will use the letters from Nelson that James sent home for publication in the *Port of Spain Gazette*, his correspondence with William Gillies (1885-1958), then International Secretary of the British Labour Party, as well as James's later reminiscences of the period in *Beyond a Boundary* and elsewhere to try to illuminate this overshadowed but critical moment in James's political and intellectual formation.

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<sup>1</sup> James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, p. 40. Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. xxx.

<sup>3</sup> C. L. R. James, 'The Old World and the New [1971]', in C. L. R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory: Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 1984), p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> James D. Young, *The World of C.L.R. James; His Unfragmented Vision* (Glasgow, 1999), p. 59.

While ostensibly about James, this chapter will also by necessity be about the legendary Trinidadian cricketer Learie Constantine (1902-71).<sup>5</sup> A year younger than James, Constantine had been part of the West Indies team that had toured Britain in 1923, and when he returned in 1929 this great all rounder had been invited to stay and turn professional by Nelson Cricket Club, to play in the Lancashire League.<sup>6</sup> He would return to his native country most winters, and James, who by 1930 had set his sights on Britain, would listen avidly to his friends descriptions of the highs and lows of adjusting to life there. As the first black player to make it in English league cricket, Constantine had been looking for someone to help him with an autobiography, and the literary minded James was only too happy to write up his memories. In the winter of 1931, when Constantine heard James wanted to come to Britain, he was enthusiastic. 'You come onto England. Don't put it off. Do your writing and if things get too rough I'll see you through.'<sup>7</sup> Six months later, James turned up at the doorstep of the tiny four-roomed house on Meredith Street in Nelson that Learie shared with his wife Norma and their four-year-old daughter Gloria.<sup>8</sup>

Nelson in 1932 was a small town of about 38,000 people set among the Pennine hills and built around one industry - cotton.<sup>9</sup> The meteoric rise of that

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<sup>5</sup> On Constantine, see Gerald Howat, *Learie Constantine* (Devon, 1976), Angus Calder, 'A Man for All Cultures: The Careers of Learie Constantine', *Culture, Sport, Society*, 6/1, (2003), pp. 19-42, and Neville Cardus, *Good Days: A Book of Cricket* (London, 1934), pp. 37-41.

<sup>6</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 365. A list of all 'The Professionals' playing in the Lancashire League at this time can be found in the *Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 May 1932. Another West Indian Professional at this time was Edwin St. Hill, who played for Lowerhouse from 1931-33. As a professional cricketer for Nelson, Constantine was reputed to earn £1,000 a year. See Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures; England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), p. 334.

<sup>7</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 114. Constantine seems to have encouraged James to study law and the *Nelson Leader* refers to James as a 'law student' while in Nelson in this period, as does the *Port of Spain Gazette*. See the *Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 September 1932, which describes James as 'a brilliant Trinidad writer now in England pursuing studies in law and literature'. James later noted that 'the deep West Indian in those days had law and medicine as the foundation of an independent existence. I was a little uncertain, in fact, very uncertain of this law business. Perhaps because of the early pressures, and such like from what I have seen of it, I have always detested the profession. But here was a chance and I saved some money and in March 1932 landed in England.' From C.L.R. James. 'Beyond a Boundary Papers', 'handwritten notes, File 'F'. I am grateful to Andrew Burgin for allowing me access to these papers while in possession of them.

<sup>8</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 27. Gloria Valère (née Constantine) has informed me that they lived at 3 Lea Green Terrace, Meredith Street. Personal correspondence, 12 September 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel; Selina Cooper 1864-1946* (London, 1984), p. 384. Jeffrey Hill, *Nelson; Politics, Economy, Community* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 20. In 1976, James would return to Nelson for a B.B.C. Omnibus documentary, and he was briefly interviewed by the *Nelson Leader*. 'From what I hear, Nelson has changed a lot; when I came it was

industry in Britain during the nineteenth century, in particular after the development of the power loom in the 1840s, led to small farming hamlets with easy access to coal and stone and rail lines like Nelson growing rapidly into small weaving towns. Rural labourers had flooded in to work manufacturing cotton cloth in the new mills mushrooming up in such areas. As Jill Liddington has noted, ‘immigrants made towns like Nelson’.

The textile communities stretching up the valley from Burnley to Colne all came to boast the same kind of pioneering roughness of far-flung frontier towns. The abrasive newness, coupled with the scarcity of large-scale paternalistic mill owners, became grafted onto existing democratic traditions that flourished locally.

In Nelson, these existing democratic traditions were rooted in religious Non-conformity, and Independent Methodism in particular, which stressed self-government and self-education. This, together with a large proportion of (increasingly independently minded and organized) women in the workplace as weavers, meant that political Radicalism (ranging from Gladstonian Liberalism to the ethical and idealist Socialism of the new I.L.P.) had flourished.<sup>10</sup> As Jeffrey Hill notes, ‘the status of women in Nelson was not structured in inferiority through the operations of the labour market’, ensuring a relatively good ‘family wage’ which ‘gave Nelson weavers in general, and women weavers in particular, a sense of importance and self-confidence’, shaping the distinctive ‘cultural life of the town’.<sup>11</sup>

Yet when James arrived in Nelson in 1932, it must have seemed very far from the bustling little ‘frontier town’ of perhaps fifty years before. Just as the rise of the Lancashire cotton industry had shaped the making of towns such as Nelson, the steady decline and fall of ‘King Cotton’ since the Great War as a result of rising foreign competition and a contraction in world trade threatened to be the ‘breaking’ of such weaving towns. With the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s cotton

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all cotton. My friend Learie Constantine was a great cricketer and a great man and after I left Nelson I came back to see him playing cricket at regular intervals.’ See *Nelson Leader*, 21 May 1976.

<sup>10</sup> Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, pp. 34, 37-38.

<sup>11</sup> Hill, *Nelson*, p. 28. For more on the experience of women weavers, see Bruley, ‘Women and Communism’.

exports halved in value and capacity in the industry fell. One in three cotton weavers in the region found themselves thrown onto the dole, not that the Means Tested unemployment benefit added up to much when there was rent to be paid. Liddington notes that ‘the whole region was rapidly becoming derelict’.<sup>12</sup> While Nelson, which specialised in high quality cloth for the home and Dominion markets, escaped the worst of it with a level of unemployment half the regional average, there were still no jobs to be had in those mills that had not already been shut down and boarded up.<sup>13</sup> In 1931, a quarter of Nelson’s weavers were out of work, and by the time James arrived in 1932, local unemployment was still barely below twenty percent.<sup>14</sup> Darcus Howe remembers James once told him about ‘the poverty of the English working classes’ in this period and ‘the suffering of it ... they had to wrap their feet in cloth’.<sup>15</sup>

Yet if James could not help but be struck by the general poverty in Nelson at this time, he was soon distracted by the particular nature of the company he kept for by 1932, Learie Constantine - or ‘Connie’ as he was known locally - had become something of a local legend. If Salem, the Independent Methodist chapel, was perhaps Nelson’s spiritual centre, the Weaver’s Institute, the base of Nelson Weavers’ Association, its social centre, the I.L.P.’s Vernon Street headquarters perhaps its political centre, then Seedhill, home of Nelson C.C., was arguably its artistic centre.<sup>16</sup> Formed in 1890, and imbued with a democratic spirit, Lancashire League cricket was hugely popular, feeding off and contributing to inter-town rivalries, and crowds of eight to ten thousand were common when Nelson played at home. Hundreds of

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<sup>12</sup> Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, p. 357. John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *Britain in the Depression; Society and Politics, 1929-39* (London, 1994), pp. 66-67.

<sup>13</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 17 June 1932.

<sup>14</sup> David Mayall, ‘Rescued from the Shadow of Exile: Nellie Driver, Autobiography and the British Union of Fascists’, in Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn (eds.), *The Politics of Marginality; Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 1990), p. 31. For slightly different figures, and a discussion of *underemployment*, ‘one of the chief difficulties in Nelson’, and the difficulties women weavers had in this period, see Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>15</sup> Darcus Howe, ‘Great Lives: C.L.R. James’, B.B.C. Radio 4, 1 November 2002, ‘[bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/greatlives/howe-james.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/greatlives/howe-james.shtml)’ (5 October 2005).

<sup>16</sup> The I.L.P., which had its headquarters in Vernon Street and also owned Clarion House, was also an important social and cultural phenomenon in Nelson. For this, as well as for more on Salem Chapel and the Weavers’ Institute see Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 31, 45-47, 49, 110, 113.

people would even gather to watch the weekday evening practices in the nets.<sup>17</sup> Matches would generally take place at a time and place convenient to almost all, every Saturday afternoon during summer, always starting roughly at 2pm and finishing at about 7pm (with a fifteen minute interval between innings), earning it a large working-class following. Unlike more prestigious matches, where play would regularly stop and start according to the light conditions and in case of rain, Lancashire League cricketers continued playing in all but the worst of conditions, another factor contributing to its popularity.<sup>18</sup>

Constantine's outstanding performances in particular, whether batting, bowling or fielding (especially his short range catching - 'as quick as a cat after a mouse' - and speed, acquiring the nickname 'electric heels'), not only established Nelson's dominance over the rest of the League, but also inspired people at a time of economic hardship.<sup>19</sup> As one Nelson resident, Ken Hartley, remembered, Constantine's cricket took people away from 'the drudgery of cotton weaving and the insecurity that was in the area at that time ... he was a light at a time of despondency. The majority of people worshipped him.'<sup>20</sup> Hartley recalled Constantine was 'the first black person to come to Nelson. He lived opposite Whitefield school and the children used to stand outside his house and peer through the window to try and see him.'<sup>21</sup> Yet despite the economic hardship, Hartley remembered only one notable

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<sup>17</sup> When Nelson played Bacup in 1930, 14,000 watched at Seedhill (Nelson's ground) but 8-10,000 was far from unusual. See Howat, *Learie Constantine*, p. 85. For more on Lancashire League cricket, see Roy Genders, *League Cricket in England* (London, 1952), pp. 34-53 and Alan Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work, 1900-1950. A Social History of Lancashire Cotton Operatives* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 67-69. While Nelson had had a professional football team since 1921, by 1931 Nelson F.C., like many other teams in Lancashire, the North East and South Wales, had had to withdraw for financial reasons, so football did not seem to catch James's attention. Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 117-19.

<sup>18</sup> See the article on Lancashire League cricket reprinted in the *Port of Spain Gazette*, 28 October 1938.

<sup>19</sup> Hill, *Nelson*, p. 120. James used to play cricket with Constantine (and Constantine's father) back in Trinidad, and once noted of Constantine's catching ability that 'his anticipation is almost psychic'. See *Glasgow Herald*, 18 May 1938. In 1933, Constantine became the first Nelson player to score 1,000 runs in a season, a feat only once previously accomplished, and also took 96 wickets that season. In 1934 Constantine took 10 Accrington wickets for 10 runs. See Genders, *League Cricket in England*, pp. 47-48 and Howat, *Learie Constantine*, pp. 91, 94.

<sup>20</sup> Phil Smith, *This century speaks; Recollections of Lancashire over the last 100 years* (Lancaster, 1999), pp. 46, 133.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *This century speaks*, pp. 46, 133. James recalled of his time with Constantine that 'the children were always intrigued at our unusual appearance and often came up to make acquaintance'. One time, 'a very friendly little boy came up to me, sat on my knee and asked me where was my spear'. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 120.

racist incident, which occurred during a cricket match between Nelson and visitors (and great rivals) East Lancashire in 1929. Jim Blanckenburg, a white South African batsman who had been Nelson's professional from 1925-28 before playing for East Lancashire, turned his back when Learie tried to shake his hand on coming out to bat. Learie recalled that he was 'hurt, insulted, but above all furious'.

And that day I bowled "bodyline" before the term had been invented ... I gave him a terrible beating and at the end of it he walked into our dressing room, naked except for a rain coat, and said to our skipper "Look what that bloody pro of yours has done to me." I am a black man, but that day he was black and blue.<sup>22</sup>

Constantine himself acknowledged the lack of hostility or suspicion towards him or his family within Nelson in a speech he gave back home in Trinidad in 1936, which was reported in the *Port of Spain Gazette*.

In Nelson there are about four negroes. There are three in my family (laughter), and Mr. Alfred Charles whom we all know, makes up the quartet, and I may tell you nobody tries to make us feel inferior ... in Nelson I can go to the best home and the poorest home and the reception I get in both is very good.<sup>23</sup>

James remembered he 'travelled' that first summer in Nelson in Constantine's 'orbit' (an 'orbit' he never quite left throughout his time in Britain), and he soon warmed to the town of Nelson.<sup>24</sup> Nelson C.C. granted him permission to play for them, and on Friday 27 May, the local *Nelson Leader* confirmed that James, a 'West Indies student' and 'gifted literary and sporting writer', was 'practicing at the Nelson

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<sup>22</sup> Jack Williams, *Cricket and Race* (Oxford, 2001), p. 46. See also Hartley's reminiscences of this incident in Smith, *This century speaks*, p. 46. East Lancashire was the name of Blackburn's Cricket Club, and, heavily patronized by the rich mill owning Hornby family, had a much more conservative culture to that of Nelson and were seen as somewhat 'cuff and collar'. See Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work*, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> *Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 March 1936. This was a report of a speech entitled 'The West Indian youth and his Aspirations' which Constantine delivered to the Trinidad and Tobago Literary Club Council on 9 March 1936.

<sup>24</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 122.

nets last night, and created a good impression'.<sup>25</sup> A week later, on Saturday 4 June, James duly turned out for Nelson 2nds at home against Todmorden. James came into bat at no. 3, got out for nothing, and so contributed to Nelson's defeat, but he did redeem himself somewhat with his bowling, taking two wickets in seven overs for sixteen runs.<sup>26</sup> Next weekend, James played in a friendly against Radcliffe which, thanks partly to Constantine making fifty, Nelson won. James bowled ten overs, taking one wicket for thirty five, before coming in to bat (this time at no. 6) to score another disappointing score (six runs) before being bowled out.<sup>27</sup> However, James remembers that amid all the 'discoveries and excitements' of settling in Nelson, 'one disastrous consequence' was that Constantine's batting had, like his, got off to a poor start.<sup>28</sup> Nelson were only just holding their customary spot at the top of the League, and Constantine's form had become a topic of anxious discussion around the town. As the *Nelson Leader* noted, 'if Constantine could recapture the batting form he showed last season, when he headed the league with an average of 50, there would be little doubt as to the destination of the cup'.<sup>29</sup> Though intrigued by cricket's huge local following, seeing at close hand the pressure on Constantine meant that when Radcliffe, after the game, asked James if he wanted to play for them as a professional, he turned them down. 'I badly needed some money and I loved to play cricket. But my reply was instantaneous: "Who? Me? To go out there to bat, knowing that they have paid me, and to make nought. No, thank you!"'<sup>30</sup>

The Constantines were well known and respected throughout Nelson, and Constantine 'knew cricket officialdom and the Press', 'mill owners, professional

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<sup>25</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 27 May 1932.

<sup>26</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 10 June 1932. Todmorden was a small weaving town like Nelson.

<sup>27</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 17 June 1932. Radcliffe was a small spinning town in central Lancashire. The news that James 'of Maple C.C.' had been admitted to Nelson C.C. and had played in this match was reported back home in Trinidad. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 1 July 1932.

<sup>28</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 124.

<sup>29</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 1 July 1932. Constantine's batting average for 1932 (just over 20 runs) was to be by far his lowest in his career for Nelson. For figures on Constantine's bowling and batting at Nelson from 1929 to 1936, see *Port of Spain Gazette*, 16 June 1937.

<sup>30</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 126.

men'.<sup>31</sup> However, James found that, cricket aside, conversation with these people did little to change his low opinion of the English. In conversation with novelist Edith Sitwell in London earlier in the year, James had declared that D.H. Lawrence 'would be judged by most people as the finest English writer of the post-war period', and James may well have been reminded of one of Lawrence's poems, 'How beastly the bourgeois is', now.<sup>32</sup> 'The fresh clean Englishman,' Lawrence wrote, was

... nicely groomed, like a mushroom standing there so sleek and erect and eyeable - and like a fungus, living on the remains of bygone life sucking his life out of the dead leaves of greater life than his own. And even so, he's stale, he's been there too long. Touch him, and you'll find he's all gone inside just like an old mushroom, all wormy inside, and hollow under a smooth skin and an upright appearance.<sup>33</sup>

However, wormy old fungus aside, James felt Nelson had 'as pretty a cricket ground as you could see anywhere'.

I had imagined a small piece of grass, fighting for its life against the gradual encroaching of cotton factories, menacing with black smoke, machine shops and tenement houses. The ground is nothing of the kind. It is full-size, level and when you sit in the pavilion, you see on three sides a hill rising gradually covered with green grass, clumps of trees, houses here and there, beautiful as it seems only the English countryside can be beautiful.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 115. Nelson C.C. was dominated by a committee of Liberals. Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 123-24. The possibly surprising friendships the Constantines made with middle-class families in Nelson are noted in Howat, *Learie Constantine*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>32</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 137. In a letter to Constance Webb in 1948, James refers to this poem, albeit in a slightly different context. 'I remember some poems by D.H. Lawrence in Poesies. One of them said "See that British bourgeois, washed and clean and strong. But put him in a situation where a little human understanding are required. He is a good for nothing".' See Grimshaw (ed.), *Special Delivery*, p. 374.

<sup>34</sup> C. L. R. James and Anna Grimshaw, *Cricket* (London, 1989), p. 5. James's description was originally published in Trinidad's *Sporting Chronicle* on June 19 1932 and the *Nelson Leader* republished an extract from this on 8 July, noting that 'Mr. James's description of the Nelson ground will be of interest locally'.

Given James's belief that the English were unsurpassed in their 'love of the beauties of nature, of gardens, of flowers, of the countryside,' seeing Seedhill must have restored his faith in the English people a little after what he had thought were the steel and concrete 'monstrosities' of London.<sup>35</sup>

More important, however, in restoring James's faith in the English was meeting a wider cross-section of them than had been previously possible, and as Gloria Valère (née Constantine) remembers 'our home in Nelson was like Grand Central Station - we had lots of visitors'.<sup>36</sup> James remembered that some of Constantine's closest friends were 'humourously cynical working men', who would visit the home and 'found congenial company in me, apart from cricket ... some of the best friends a man could make I made during my first weeks in Nelson'.<sup>37</sup> James also 'quite by chance' made friends with Harry Spencer, who had inherited a bakery (with a tea room upstairs) which he ran with his wife Elizabeth. The Spencers had three children at the same school as Gloria Constantine, and James remembers Harry Spencer was a 'cultivated man' who shared his love of literature, history and music.<sup>38</sup> James later gave a vivid portrait of Spencer:

Harry Spencer was one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met or hope to meet. He wasn't extraordinary in any dramatic way but he was a man of sterling English character, an intellectual of the first order and a man of great generosity ... the bakery and tearoom were in the centre of Nelson and he himself lived with his wife and three children in a detached cottage on the outskirts of Nelson, with a wonderful view of the moor and mountain.

I got to know him early and quite by chance. We at once discovered our common interest in books and music, and a critique of society generally, and before long I spent hours every day at the bakery talking to Harry or reading, and night after night and at weekends I would be at his house where I became a member of the

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<sup>35</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 115.

<sup>36</sup> Personal correspondence with Gloria Valère, 12 September 2006.

<sup>37</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 122, 127.

<sup>38</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Harry Spencer', p.1. I am indebted to Charles Forsdick for providing me with a copy of this unpublished manuscript, which he had gathered while at the University of West Indies. James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xv. Harry Spencer (c1894-1965) was elected President of Nelson's Chamber of Commerce in February 1933. See *Nelson Leader*, 17 February 1933 (which includes a photo of Spencer) and an obituary notice in *Nelson Leader*, 23 December 1965. Gloria Valère remembers she knew the Spencers 'quite well'. Personal correspondence, 12 September 2006.

family. He was a shortish, rather stout man and you had to watch him carefully to see the intelligence and alertness of his face ... He had a good library, not much but well chosen, and a vast collection of gramophone records - Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert - classical, in which he and his whole family delighted.

Elizabeth Spencer, 'a very gracious woman, devoted to Harry, and of course to me as a friend', gave James 'my first and few appreciations of English cooking - potatoes, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, lamb, all sorts of vegetables which she grew herself'. James in particular describes how it was through Harry Spencer that he was able to develop his understanding of England and English history, and they even went for trips outside Lancashire, visiting York Minster and Warwick Castle.

We were great walkers. On Sundays and public holidays we would set off in the morning at about 9 o'clock and walk ten or fifteen miles, talking all the way about what we saw or the relation between different parts of Lancashire. He would point out to me and talk with immense knowledge of farmhouses, mills, old castles, churches, cathedrals, and what happened there 100, 200, 500, 600 years before.<sup>39</sup>

Through his new friends, James soon discovered something in particular of the living tradition of class struggle and socialism in Nelson's history, and soon learnt 'Nelson is a town where most of the working people are pretty closely united'.<sup>40</sup> A stronghold of the I.L.P. since the 1890s, it had come to be known as 'Red Nelson' and even 'Little Moscow' since the 1928 lockout designed to break the power of the militant Nelson Weavers' Association.<sup>41</sup> The labels stuck, despite the fact that they owed more to the militant trade unionism of the weavers and a Labour dominated Council that, driven by local I.L.P. members, often women, instituted an effective 'municipal socialist' programme of good housing, than to the influence of Marxism

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<sup>39</sup> James, 'Harry Spencer', pp. 1-3, 5. James recalls Spencer once arranged the chance for him to speak one evening to 'nearly a dozen headmasters and other important teachers elementary and secondary in the Nelson area' on 'the relation between [the] political, economic and literature. I held forth on the relation between Shakespeare, Dickens, T.S. Eliot, and the development of Western Organisation. They expressed themselves as very pleased' to hear a new perspective from James.

<sup>40</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 123. Originally published as 'London First Impressions (no. 5)', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 28 August 1932.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 77-78, 81, 86. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, p. 35.

or the tiny local branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.).<sup>42</sup> That said, in 1920, Nelson I.L.P. had been described as ‘Communist’ at the Second World Congress of the Communist International, and as Jeffrey Hill notes, the I.L.P. had ‘fashioned a socialist culture’ in Nelson which ‘provided entertainment, enjoyment and recreation for politically minded people ... [and] ensured that socialist politics were as much to do with the nurturing of good comradeship and moral commitment as with electoral decision-making in smoke-filled rooms’.<sup>43</sup>

James was so taken by what he soon learnt of this local history of working-class solidarity and activism that he related a remarkable story about a recent mass cinema boycott in Nelson to the readers of the *Port of Spain Gazette*. Cinema was very popular as ‘for many, apart from the beauties of nature, an abiding love of the English people, the cinema is the only recreation’. Sometime before James arrived, a company who owned several cinemas in Nelson had tried to cut the wages of their local projector operators, who seem to have launched a campaign through their union. ‘One day I got into conversation with a quite ordinary person’, James remembered, who told him how

... the whole town of Nelson, so to speak, went on strike. They would not go to the cinema. The pickets were put out in order to turn back those who tried to go. For days the cinemas played to empty benches. In a town of forty thousand people you could find sometimes no more than half a dozen in the theatres. The company went bankrupt, and had to leave. Whereupon local people took over and the theatres again began to be filled. It was magnificent and it was war. I confessed I was thrilled to the bone when I heard it. I could forgive England all the vulgarity, and all the depressing disappointment of London for the magnificent spirit of these north country working people. As long as that is the stuff of which they are made, then indeed Britons never, never shall be slaves.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, p. 345. See also Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 96-98, and Stuart Macintyre, *Little Moscows; Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London, 1980), p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21; The Origins of British Communism* (London, 1969), p. 423. Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 98-99, 110.

<sup>44</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, pp. 123-25. There seems to have been another smaller scale dispute with a cinema company in Nelson which was resolved in September 1932. See *Nelson Gazette*, 27 September 1932. For how the cinema gradually replaced the music hall as a popular form of entertainment in Lancashire at this time, see Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work*, p. 71, and Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 115-16. For how cinema had more generally become ‘an indispensable part of working-class life’ in England by this period, see McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 187, 419-23.

Such lively stories of working-class history therefore directly challenged James's moralistic and elitist Fabian vision of social change from above. As he remembered, discussions with his new friends 'brought me down to earth' as previously 'my Labour and Socialist ideas had been got from books and were rather abstract'.<sup>45</sup> Cedric Robinson has suggested that while in Nelson, 'physically remote from the more typical sites of middle class radicalism and organised politics, James was enveloped by a more contemplative work and a more mundane politics'.<sup>46</sup> Yet James did not only pass the time engaged in 'contemplative work' watching Constantine play cricket, or 'enveloped' in discussion of the poetry of D.H. Lawrence in Harry Spencer's teashop. James had read the anti-colonial declarations of the British Labour Party while researching his biography on Cipriani, and soon joined the strong local Labour Party.<sup>47</sup> However, while Nelson Labour Party may well have been slightly 'mundane' politically much of the time, it is likely that in 1932 it was almost certainly a 'site' of 'radicalism'. Since the disaster of the October 1931 General Election, the 'forward march of Labour' in Britain had been well and truly halted, as the parliamentary Labour Party was almost completely wiped out, and was now retreating in some disarray. Ramsay MacDonald, the former Labour Prime Minister, Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (who had once lived in Nelson), and others had already jumped ship to join the Conservatives and Liberals in a new coalition, contributing to the near destruction of their old party in the General Election of October 1931.<sup>48</sup> While MacDonald now became Prime Minister again at the head of the new 'National Government', Labour lost their old leadership, as two hundred of their most experienced M.P.s (including the then Party leader, Arthur Henderson) lost their seats.<sup>49</sup> In Nelson itself, David Mayall has described how Labour's majority was overturned and 'the monocled, cigar-smoking, bowler-hatted

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<sup>45</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 122.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 374.

<sup>47</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 118, 122.

<sup>48</sup> Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, p. 35. Snowden migrated to Nelson from Cowling in 1879 and worked as an insurance clerk there until 1886. He regularly returned to speak at meetings of Nelson I.L.P. until his death.

<sup>49</sup> Stevenson and Cook, *Britain in the Depression*, p. 120.

Linton Thorp unseated Arthur Greenwood by a margin of 7,686'.<sup>50</sup> Now with only fifty two M.P.s, which included an I.L.P. contingent, some of the new Labour leadership swung to the left dramatically, reflecting the wider Party's dismay at the betrayal of MacDonald, and the sense that the 1929-31 Labour Government had been brought down by the economic power of a hostile capitalist class, using extra-parliamentary means. By 1933, Sir Stafford Cripps, one of the most prominent Labour M.P.s, would even go as far as to declare that it was wrong to say that 'the capitalists will permit the change to be made within capitalism,' and indeed wrote a pamphlet 'Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Methods?'<sup>51</sup> Cripps here repudiated the Fabian Sidney Webb's influential reformist perspective, noting 'it is not now a question of "the inevitability of gradualness." The one thing that is not inevitable is gradualness.'<sup>52</sup> About the time James joined the Labour Party, the 16,000 strong I.L.P. had just left it, calling on the working class to unite under the 'red banner of revolutionary socialism'.<sup>53</sup>

The shift of Labour to the left after the debacle of 1931 was a political expression of the wider economic crisis gripping British, and indeed, world capitalism. As world trade continued to fall long after the Wall Street Crash in October 1929, the only thing growing in the British economy were the dole queues, which by August 1932 hit the three million mark. Almost one in four insured workers remained out of work until early 1933.<sup>54</sup> As the British historian Arnold Toynbee noted in 1931, 'men and women all over the world were seriously contemplating and frankly discussing the possibility that the western system of society might break down and cease to work'.<sup>55</sup> James had picked up on this

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<sup>50</sup> Mayall, 'Rescued from the Shadow of Exile', p. 30.

<sup>51</sup> Gidon Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream; The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II* (London, 2007), p. 244. Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, *The Labour Party; A Marxist history* (London, 1996), pp. 168-69. In January 1933, the *New Statesman* could note that the Socialist League was holding a meeting with Cripps on 'Can Socialism come by Constitutional Methods?' See *New Statesman*, 18 January 1933.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*, pp. 15, 73. In Nelson all the Labour Party councillors had been members of the I.L.P. but when the I.L.P. voted to disaffiliate, none of the councillors left the Labour Party.

<sup>54</sup> David Howell, *British Social Democracy; A Study in Development and Decay* (London, 1980), p. 47. See also Stevenson and Cook, *Britain in the Depression*, p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 49.

ideological crisis in his reading, and while looking around for explanations happened to make the acquaintance of a fellow bibliophile in Nelson, Mr. Frederick Cartmell.<sup>56</sup> James remembered he became 'rather friendly' with Cartmell, who owned a small printing business, and was 'fanatically interested in books and bought regularly books which he had no time to read'.<sup>57</sup> In June 1932, the first volume of Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* had been published in England, and Cartmell lent James a copy.<sup>58</sup> James was eager to understand the October Revolution (having 'missed' it in Trinidad), but recalled in the *History*, Trotsky 'was not only giving details of the revolution itself, but he was expounding the Marxist theory of historical materialism'. All this naturally appealed to a former History teacher like James, but 'Trotsky referred not only to historical events and personalities, but he made references to literature as expressing social reality and social change'.<sup>59</sup> Trotsky's references to James's other love, the literary classics that he had devoured in his youth, acted then like a 'hook' that ensnared him and he remembers he 'was able automatically and without difficulty to absorb his argument and the logical line that he presented'.<sup>60</sup> In his *History*, Trotsky explained why workers, especially those in Britain, could follow conservative ideas much of the time, yet retain the possibility of transformation into agents of their own destiny. One can imagine the thrill James

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<sup>56</sup> Frederick Cartmell (c1890-1975), described by the *Nelson Leader* in their obituary as 'a courteous man of high standards', had been a Tank officer in the First World War, and would be a Major in and 'keen member' of the local Home Guard in the Second World War. Before his retirement in 1960, Cartmell had been a master printer at the Every Street works of Coulton & Co. and then proprietor of the *Nelson Leader*. 'He was an avid reader on a variety of subjects, including the history of printing'. See *Nelson Leader*, 19 September 1975.

<sup>57</sup> C. L. R. James, 'Charlie Lahr' (1975), p. 1. This is an unpublished manuscript in the possession of David Goodway, which James sent to Goodway about the German anarchist bookseller Charles Lahr, who James later met in London. I am indebted to Goodway for providing me with a copy of this valuable document.

<sup>58</sup> Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Against the Stream; A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1924-1938* (London, 1986), p. 111. In a lecture in 1971, given to the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta, Georgia, James described how a Nelson bibliophile he met, Mr. Cartnell [sic], told him about Trotsky's *History*. See C.L.R. James, 'Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*', *Small Axe*, 8, (2000), p. 67. See also James, 'Charlie Lahr', p. 1. 'Mr. Cantrell [sic] lent me many books, among them *The History of the Russian Revolution, Volume 1* by Leon Trotsky and *The Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler.'

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Robert A. Hill, 'Literary Executor's Afterword', in C.L.R. James, *American Civilization* (Oxford, 1993), p. 297.

<sup>60</sup> Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 29.

must have felt as he read Trotsky's bold prediction that 'Great Britain is headed for gigantic revolutionary earthquake shocks, in which the last fragments of her conservatism, her world domination, her present state machine, will go down without a trace. MacDonald is preparing these shocks no less successfully than did Nicholas II in his time, and no less blindly.'<sup>61</sup>

The other book that Cartmell lent to James around this time was *The Decline of the West* (1918) by the German Oswald Spengler (1880-1936). When an English edition of this massive work was published in 1932 its prophetic title alone assured it was popular with a wide range of British intellectuals, and it also captivated James's imagination. H. Stuart Hughes notes that the work 'marked the full formulation of a cyclical theory of historical change and a comparative approach to culture which had been gradually establishing themselves among the implicit presuppositions of early twentieth-century thought'. For Spengler, the era of 'individualism, humanitarianism, intellectual freedom, skepticism' - which had come to define 'western civilization' - was coming to an end, to be replaced by 'restrictions on individual freedom, a revival of faith ... and an increase in the use of force'.<sup>62</sup> Having been encouraged by meeting class conscious 'western' workers in Nelson, James remembered he 'did not accept the decline that Spengler preached,' but like Trotsky's *History*, the work did 'illustrate pattern and development in different types of society. It took me away from the individual and the battles and the concern with the kind of things that I had learned in conventional history.'<sup>63</sup> James remembered he 'read and reread these two tremendous tomes' and 'these books and the periodicals I read occupied me hour after hour for most of 1932'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1977), pp. 119-20. James quoted this particular point of Trotsky's in an article on British politics he wrote in 1945. See C. L. R. James, 'The British Vote for Socialism', in C.L.R. James, *The Future in the Present; Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (London, 1977), p. 107.

<sup>62</sup> H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society; The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (Brighton, 1979), pp. 375, 378. Eric Williams was less impressed with the work than James, and in 1964 would denounce Spengler's 'doctrine of Caesarism'. Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies*, p. 148.

<sup>63</sup> Hill, 'Literary Executor's Afterword', p. 297. M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 270. In 1940, James noted that 'it is to be hoped that the fog of mysticism does not obscure for Marxists the colossal learning, capacity of synthesis, and insight of Spengler's book'. See James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', p. 109.

<sup>64</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', p. 1.

The search for some sort of understanding of this crisis-ridden system led James, while a guest of the Constantines, to give up playing cricket for Nelson, and even miss watching them on occasions.

I was reading hard. Night after night I would be up till three or four. I must have seriously discommoded that orderly household. Often I was abstracted and withdrawn. Literature was vanishing from my consciousness and politics was substituting itself. That was no easy transition.<sup>65</sup>

Constantine's daughter Gloria has vividly recalled one incident.

My mother and I were in the living room and his bedroom was directly above the living room and my mother said to me "Do you smell something burning?" and so I said "I think so". She said "Oh my goodness" and so she went up the stairs. There is Nello very busy writing or doing something or reading or doing something, sitting in a cardigan near an electric fire and his cardigan is on fire. And when my mother pointed out to him "Nello, you are on fire" he said "Oh my goodness, oh my goodness" but the thing is he hadn't a clue ...

When Gloria was asked by Darcus Howe whether she knew or had any sense that she was in a house with a man of great importance, she replied: 'No. Just remember that in our house, in Nelson, my father was the man of great importance.' But as for James, 'he always treated you, even though you were very small, as a person, he didn't talk down to you'.<sup>66</sup>

Arguably, James's political attention at this time was still primarily focused on the West Indies 'back home' as opposed to Britain, or indeed Europe. Until he moved in with Constantine, James recalled that 'I doubt if he and I had ever talked for five consecutive minutes on West Indian politics. Within five weeks we had unearthed the politician in each other.'<sup>67</sup> When James showed the manuscript of his

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<sup>65</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 124-25.

<sup>66</sup> Darcus Howe, 'Beyond a Boundary', B.B.C. Radio 3, 19/2/2006. James was known by friends and family as 'Nello', from Lionel.

<sup>67</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 119.

biography of Cipriani to Constantine and told him he hoped one day to get it published, Constantine was again supportive. 'Go ahead. Find out what it will cost and I'll pay. When you sell the copies at home you can pay me back.'<sup>68</sup> Frederick Cartmell agreed to publish *The Life of Captain Cipriani; An Account of British Government in the West Indies*, and copies were sent back to Trinidad. James now thought it an appropriate time to get in touch with the British Labour Party's International Secretary, who he had been supposed to meet in London, and on 10 August 1932 he wrote to 'William Gillies Esq'.

In suggesting that I should call on you Captain Cipriani of Trinidad informed me some weeks ago that he had written to you about me. Unfortunately an attack of writer's cramp caused me to leave London hurriedly and I am likely to be in the North for a considerable time. I have had printed for circulation at home a Life of Captain Cipriani, designed to place before the reader the essentials of the political situation at home. I am hoping to get an English edition which would reach the few who are interested in West Indian affairs. May I send you a copy?<sup>69</sup>

On 16 August Gillies replied.

I would certainly be pleased to receive a copy of your Life of Captain Cipriani. It was in April that Captain Cipriani wrote to me about your proposed visit. Now it is August. Towards the end of the month, I shall probably be going on holiday. But, in any event, I should like you to call upon us when you are passing through London.<sup>70</sup>

Gillies duly received a copy of the book and a covering note from James, who promised to visit when he was next in London, and noted he would have made

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<sup>68</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 122.

<sup>69</sup> Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester (LHA), William Gillies Papers: WG/TRI/27, James to Gillies, 10 August 1932. Gillies was the Labour Party's first International Secretary, appointed in 1920.

<sup>70</sup> LHA: WG TRI/28, Gillies to James, 16 August 1932.

contact in April, but ‘having to leave London suddenly I decided to conclude and print the first half of my book before writing to you about it’.<sup>71</sup>

Now a published author, and with encouraging notices about his book in the Trinidadian press, James ventured outside the Constantine household again. On 27 August 1932, as the cricket season drew to its dramatic close, James went to watch Nelson playing away to local side Rawtenstall, whose team included the legendary veteran bowler Sydney Barnes. Barnes, aged 59, was playing his last match and James remembers ‘I was profoundly impressed by him, both as a cricketer and as a man. Coming home that evening the old journalistic spirit stirred in me.’ Paying homage to ‘the greatest of all bowlers’, James wrote a report on Barnes’s last match and showed it to Constantine, who suggested James send it to a friend of his on the *Manchester Guardian*, the famous cricket writer Neville Cardus, to see if any local papers might be interested. Cardus published the article in the *Manchester Guardian* itself on 1 September and called James in to see him.<sup>72</sup> As Stuart Hall notes, Cardus discovered James ‘had a phenomenal memory and knew the scores every touring team had made since about 1901’, and made him an offer he could not refuse, to help cover next year’s cricket season.<sup>73</sup> Coupled with the fact that at the same time, on 3 September, Constantine scored fifty runs to ensure victory for Nelson in that year’s Lancashire League (getting a standing ovation in the process), it is not surprising James remembers there was ‘much rejoicing in our camp’.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/29 and LHA: WG/TRI/30, James to Gillies, 22 August 1932.

<sup>72</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 123. The article, ‘The Greatest of All Bowlers: An Impressionist Sketch of S.F. Barnes’ was reprinted back in the Caribbean, in the Sporting Section of the *Daily Chronicle* of Demerara, 10 September 1932. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 September 1932. The article has since been reprinted in Grimshaw and James, *Cricket*, pp. 7-10. In declaring Barnes one of the all time great bowlers, James was in keeping with the consensus of contemporary cricket opinion. See for example Colonel Philip Trevor’s article, ‘Great Bowlers of All Time’, published in the *Strand Magazine* (1928) and reprinted in David Rayvern Allen (ed.), *Cricket’s Silver Lining, 1864-1914* (London, 1987), p. 39. For a photo of Barnes, see Genders, *League Cricket in England*, p. 33.

<sup>73</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘C.L.R. James: A Portrait’, in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.), *C.L.R. James’s Caribbean* (London, 1992), p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 9 September 1932. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 123. In 1932, Nelson won not only the Senior League title but also the Junior League title and the Worsley Knock-out Cup Competition. From 1929, when Constantine had joined Nelson, to 1938, Nelson won the League Championship on a record eight occasions, including four consecutive seasons in a row from 1934 to 1937. Genders, *League Cricket in England*, pp. 42, 46-47.

## The Great Lancashire Cotton Strike

However, it is doubtful that such celebrations lasted long. In August 1932, mill-owners across Lancashire started to tear up existing agreements and bring in scab labour to try and restore profitability in the cotton textile industry, forcing cotton workers and weavers to take strike action to save their livelihoods. This was merely the latest in a series of attacks on wages and conditions in the industry since the Great War, and followed an attempt by employers to force weavers to mind not just the standard four looms but six or even eight for an increase in pay - the 'More Looms' system. In early 1931, employers in Burnley had tried to introduce the new system without union agreement but this had sparked a county-wide lockout of 100,000 weavers. Under pressure from not just trade unions but also the then Nelson M.P. and Minister of Health Arthur Greenwood, employers had been forced to back down within a month. On 11 May 1931, protests in Nelson against the 'More Looms' system (and against local blacklegs in particular) had culminated in 'the Battle of Pendle Street' when two thousand weavers were charged by mounted police. One demonstration held a few days later in solidarity with those arrested on that protest saw over half the town, over twenty thousand people, condemn the violence of the police and the injustice of the 'More Looms' system.<sup>75</sup> On 24 July 1932, the struggle between employers and cotton operatives in Lancashire once again came into the open with a strike in Burnley. By mid-August, the *Nelson Leader* noted that while Nelson was still all quiet on the industrial front, 'the scenes that have taken place at Burnley and Brierfield, however have been unprecedented ... nothing less than guerilla warfare has been in progress between strikers and police'.<sup>76</sup> In the same few days that James secured his job, almost all cotton workers in Nelson were suddenly forced to fight desperately for theirs. On Monday 29 August 1932, 16,000 Nelson cotton workers (over 12,500 of them weavers) went on strike, bringing the town to a complete halt. Torrential rain and flooding had initially kept the mood subdued and as the *Nelson Leader* noted, 'never in the history of the town when a dispute or strike

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<sup>75</sup> Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work*, p. 90-91, and Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, pp. 361, 364. One banner read 'Unemployed can't get 4 looms - what about 8 looms?'

<sup>76</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 19 August 1932. James knew Burnley, describing it in June 1932 as 'about 20 minutes' run from Nelson'. See *Nelson Leader*, 8 July 1932.

has been in progress has such a tranquil and calm spirit prevailed'. However, while the paper insisted it was just like a 'holiday', this was not how either the desperate workers engaged in mass picketing of the mills, or the British state who called up extra foot and mounted police to protect the blacklegs, saw it.<sup>77</sup>

The mass strike, which raged for over a month across Lancashire, was a powerful reminder of the power and resourcefulness of the working class for James, something he had not witnessed since the General Strike of 1919 in Trinidad. On 8 September, Nelson Labour Party organised a demonstration in solidarity with the strikers, and it is likely James joined it, marching behind the Colne Borough band and banners expressing the bitterness and anger of those marching, demanding 'Reinstatement for all weavers', 'Union pay for all strikers' and 'Down with the Means Test'. Others proclaimed 'This is a Grand National Government', '1914-18 heroes - 1932 zeroes' and 'We refuse to starve in silence'.<sup>78</sup> As the working people of 'Little Moscow' once again proved themselves worthy of their best traditions by throwing themselves behind the strikers, one doubts the validity of Robinson's notion that James was able to 'meet with British workers for discussions removed from super-heated circumstances' in Nelson.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, Dave Renton has gone as far as to suggest that 'it is hard to think of a town in Britain that was more radical at this time'.<sup>80</sup>

In September 1932, while the strike was going on, an English edition of James's *The Life of Captain Cipriani* was published by Cartmell's printing firm, Coulton & Co. Having been written in Trinidad, however, the book was essentially a moral appeal to the British Government's better conscience. Yet witnessing the desperate struggles of Nelson's striking weavers had made it all too clear to James that the 'National' Government simply did not have a 'better conscience' and, as he

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<sup>77</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 2 September 1932.

<sup>78</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 9 September 1932, and Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, pp. 380-81. Nelson's Relief Committee in August 1932 had disbanded itself in protest at the iniquities of the Means Test for unemployment benefits. Selina Cooper, a leading socialist feminist in Nelson, addressed the demonstration in September, congratulating the weavers on 'the magnificent display of determination and solidarity' and demanded 'the abolition of the Means Test, believing it to be ... deliberately designed by the National Government to crush the workers into complete subjection'. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, p. 42.

<sup>79</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 374.

<sup>80</sup> Renton, *C.L.R. James*, p. 47. The strike ended with a compromise - a small cut in pay in return for full union recognition and a promise of no victimisations.

remembered, 'my Labour friends made merry with it'. Nevertheless, James now saw a way of helping repay Constantine for publishing it. As he remembers, 'the people in Lancashire had an inordinate appetite for asking Constantine to come to speak to them, most often in church and similar organisations. It was something of a strain on him, but he was always ready to oblige.' James began to go along with Constantine to these talks about the West Indies, and soon took much of the strain off his friend, giving meetings himself. 'By the winter we were in full cry all over the place ... we were educating thousands, including ourselves.'<sup>81</sup>

James certainly found speaking on West Indian self-government a political education, as he remembers he would introduce himself as being from the Caribbean, and say 'we want independence, you know, and we hope the Labour Party will give it to us'.<sup>82</sup> Yet the Lancashire working class were sceptical. 'My audience was not wide but it was interested in politics.'<sup>83</sup> Gandhi had visited Lancashire in 1931, and many of these workers knew that even under the last Labour Government, those battling for national liberation in India had been imprisoned.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, they themselves were highly cynical having recently experienced MacDonald's Labour Government. In May 1929, millions of workers have voted Labour into power with 287 M.P.s, establishing it as the largest party in the House of Commons.<sup>85</sup> However,

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<sup>81</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 119-22.

<sup>82</sup> C. L. R. James, *Eightieth Birthday Lectures* (London, 1984), p. 55.

<sup>83</sup> C. L. R. James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', in B. Parekh (ed.), *Colour, Culture and Consciousness* (London, 1974), p. 158.

<sup>84</sup> James, 'The British Vote for Socialism', p. 113. In 1937, James's Trotskyist paper, *Fight*, 1/8, (July 1937) noted that 'in 1930, when the Indian masses revolted against British Imperialism, the Labour Party shot down the militants and jailed 60,000 of our Indian comrades. On top of this we had the Meerut Trial, when Indian and British workers, after four years without trial, were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from 10 to 12 years. Some were sentenced to transportation for life. The crime these workers had committed was that of supporting strikes, attempting to build Trade Unions, advocating "depriving the King Emperor of his sovereignty in India".' For more on the hidden history of the Labour Government with respect to India from 1929-31, see John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried; A People's History of the British Empire* (London, 2006), pp. 144-47. In 1933, Nelson Labour Party voted to condemn the 'cruel sentences passed upon the Meerut prisoners for attempting to organize the workers of India'. Working Class Movement Library, Salford, Nelson and Colne Divisional Labour Party Papers, Fifteenth Annual Conference of Nelson and Colne Divisional Labour Party, April 28 1933. As well as imprisoning 60,000 Indians, the Labour Government of 1929-31 also authorised the R.A.F. to bomb villages in Iraq and Transjordan (now Jordan). See *New Leader*, 11 February 1938.

<sup>85</sup> Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (London, 1973), p. 159. The Conservatives had 260 M.P.s, and the Liberals 59.

the promised return to prosperity was dashed amidst the ‘Great Slump’, as what MacDonald called ‘the economic blizzard’ blew any pledge to tackle unemployment off course. In August 1931, with unemployment now affecting more than one in five workers, MacDonald and Snowden attempted to implement a ‘solution’ to the crisis, making savings by decimating the benefit paid to the unemployed.<sup>86</sup> A minority of the Cabinet, however, rebelled strongly at the apparent attempt to force the working class to pay for the capitalist crisis, and the Labour Government collapsed in disgrace. As James remembered, when he told the Lancashire workers of his hopes in the Labour Party in 1932, they said ‘you make a mistake. Ramsay MacDonald, [Arthur] Henderson, Phillip Snowden, [Herbert] Morrison, they never gave us anything and we put them there; why do you think they would give you any?’<sup>87</sup>

Answers to questions like these demanded serious attention from James, and he remembers that while ‘I was a Labour Party man,’ increasingly ‘I found myself to the left of the Labour party in Nelson, militant as that was’.<sup>88</sup> He had joined them, in part, as a way of showing solidarity with his comrades back in Trinidad, but now his belief that Labour was the best organisation to deliver support for the struggle for West Indian self-government was being challenged. In 1928, Labour had pledged that in ‘Colonies with a Higher Form of Civilisation’ such as the British West Indies, where the population was ‘culturally more advanced ... such measure of self-government or form of administration is as demanded by the inhabitants of these territories shall be granted immediately’. Cipriani, a delegate at the British Commonwealth Labour Conference where this pledge had been made, had announced on his return to Trinidad: ‘We have this as a dead certainty, that the Labour Government will stand aback of the claim for self-government by any one of the Colonies asking for it.’<sup>89</sup> At a time when ideas of West Indian autonomy and Federation were spreading in the West Indies, in 1930, Cipriani moved a resolution in

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<sup>86</sup> Howell, *British Social Democracy*, pp. 11, 38.

<sup>87</sup> James, *Eightieth Birthday Lectures*, p. 55.

<sup>88</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism; An Interview* (London, 1987), p. 1. Part of James’s loyalty to Nelson Labour Party may have resulted from the way in which in the 1930s, as Jeffrey Hill notes, it ‘consolidated a cultural base’ and even ran the ‘Nelson Socialist Dramatic Society’. Hill, *Nelson*, p. 111.

<sup>89</sup> Malmsten, ‘The British Labour Party and the West Indies’, pp. 176-78.

the Trinidadian Legislative Council calling for a Royal Commission to investigate granting 'self-government' to the colony.

However, as Neal Malmsten notes, while the Governor of Trinidad was not overtly hostile - recognising the popular mood - 'permanent officials at the Colonial Office were strongly opposed to the proposal'. In February 1931, Sir Gilbert Grindle, an assistant under-secretary and former head of the West Indies Department in the Colonial Office, was quite unequivocal about the matter. 'The vivid imagination of the negro tends to hypnotize him with words that he uses without understanding their meaning. I suggest, therefore, that the despatch should explain what "self-government" means and tell them plainly they are not going to have it.' In any case, Secretary of State Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb) overruled those inside the Colonial Office 'who wanted to hold out the hope of a future inquiry'.<sup>90</sup> The only positive 'action' taken with respect to the West Indies by the Labour Government before it collapsed had been the appointment of a commission in August 1929 under the chairmanship of Lord Sydney Olivier to investigate the crisis in the sugar industry.<sup>91</sup>

West Indian nationalists had therefore every right to be aggrieved after the Labour Government collapsed in ignominy without fulfilling their pledge. In March 1931, Lord Passfield had mooted the idea of a commission to discuss the possibilities for Federation in the West Indies. In February 1932, out of power, Labour's 'Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions' now asked Cipriani to draw up his vision for Federation, receiving an angry retort in response.

What did the Noble Lord Passfield mean to convey by the statement that he would not appoint a Commission to enquire into and report on the Constitution of the British West Indies with a view to granting them Self-Government? Did the Noble Lord find it impracticable to assert his individuality as against his underlings in the Colonial Office? Did His Lordship find it inconvenient to divorce his baronial mantle from his Socialist and Fabian creed?<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Malmsten, 'The British Labour Party and the West Indies', p. 182. Grindle is quoted in Albert Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour* (Port of Spain, 1974), p. xi.

<sup>91</sup> Malmsten, 'The British Labour Party and the West Indies', p. 182.

<sup>92</sup> See LHA: WG/BWI/1. See also Frederick Madden and John Darwin (eds.), *Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth, Volume VII; The Dependent Empire, 1900-1948; Colonies, Protectorates, and Mandates* (London, 1994), p. 75. On Labour's 'Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions', see Nicholas Owen, 'Critics of Empire in Britain', in

In September 1932, the Colonial Secretary Cunliffe-Lister, a ‘diehard red-neck Tory slave driver’ according to the Communist *Negro Worker*, had appointed a ‘Commission for West Indies Closer Union’ under General Sir Charles Ferguson and Sir Charles Orr that explicitly ruled out looking at the question of self-government. Cipriani warned Gillies in late August 1932 that as a result, ‘the Commission’s visit will only make the situation more farcical than it now is’, and progressive and labour organisations were likely to boycott it.<sup>93</sup>

Yet as a result of their failures in power, in opposition Labour were determined to try and make some amends and their national conference in Leicester in October 1932 showed something of the Party that James was a member of at this time. The Socialist League had formed to rally what was left of the Left of the Labour Party after the departure of the I.L.P., but the conference backed public ownership of joint stock banks and passed a resolution without discussion in any case which declared ‘the main objective of the Labour Party is the establishment of socialism’. The conference also endorsed a resolution asking that ‘on assuming office, either with or without power, definite Socialist legislation must be immediately promulgated, and that the Party shall stand and fall in the House of Commons on the principles in which it has faith’.<sup>94</sup> *The Times* reported that ‘Gradualism is dead ... the next Labour Government will be all red, and pledged to ride for an ignominious fall if it takes office a day before the country is as Socialist as the Labour Party Conference’. Perhaps partially in dismay at this radicalism, Arthur Henderson, no longer an M.P., resigned as Party leader to be replaced by George Lansbury, an avowed pacifist who already led the parliamentary Labour Party.<sup>95</sup> Cipriani seems to have been somewhat boosted by this conference, and extolled the virtues of socialism at a meeting of other West Indian progressives in Dominica, a

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Judith M. Brown and W.M. Roger Louis (eds.), *Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. IV; The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 194-96.

<sup>93</sup> See LHA: WG/BWI/7. *Negro Worker*, (May 1932).

<sup>94</sup> Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, p. 201.

<sup>95</sup> John F. Naylor, *Labour's International Policy; The Labour Party in the 1930s* (London, 1969), pp. 26-27. See also F. M. Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989), p. 208. Henderson returned to parliament in 1933.

‘counter-conference’ which committed itself to drawing up an alternative ‘suggested constitution’ for the official Commission. He assured his fellow militants that ‘in the British Labour Party, and Trades Union Congress, alone lie your safety and salvation’.<sup>96</sup>

In early November 1932, James travelled back down to London to meet up with Gillies, and for the rest of his time in Nelson the two corresponded frequently. The main theme that emerges from their correspondence is the seriousness with which James took his campaigning work for West Indian self-government, seeing to it that Gillies was kept up to date on all the latest political developments. While in London in early November, as the long awaited ‘Commission for Closer Union’ set off from London, James met a delegation from Grenada which had succeeded in forcing the Colonial Office to consider evidence on matters of self-government during the Commission’s inquiry, even if they could not rule on it.<sup>97</sup> James ensured Gillies got a copy of the Dominican West Indies Conference proposals for responsible government in a federal Dominion.<sup>98</sup> James himself worked to stay informed about quite detailed and complex constitutional and economic matters.<sup>99</sup>

Gillies clearly appreciated James’s assistance, describing him to a third party in late November 1932 as his ‘correspondent in the North’.<sup>100</sup> When James noted the rising cost of footwear in Trinidad, Gillies duly sent ‘three pairs of shoes’ up to Nelson, noting ‘these shoes are worn on the Mediterranean, and similar shoes, with rope soles made from local grasses, are worn, I am told, in Buenos Aires and on the South Coast of South America. They were sold at about 1/- a pair in Spain this year.’ As Gillies asked, ‘why should such shoes not be made locally in the West Indies?’<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Malmsten, ‘The British Labour Party and the West Indies’, p. 189.

<sup>97</sup> See LHA: WG/BWI/12, letter from Gillies to Cipriani, 7 November 1932.

<sup>98</sup> See LHA: WG/TRI/32, letter from James to Gillies, 10 November 1932, and Malmsten, ‘The British Labour Party and the West Indies’, p. 189.

<sup>99</sup> In one letter, James told Gillies ‘I shall be glad if you could help me to get the exact documents describing the present constitutions of Malta, and Rhodesia; and the constitution outlined for Burma by the Prime Minister on I believe Jan 12<sup>th</sup> in the House of Commons. I would be glad to have the official documents and will pay for them if you will let me know the cost. His Majesty’s Stationery Office never seem to know the ones I want even when I go there, and when I send they send the wrong ones.’ LHA: WG/BWI/14, James to Gillies, 30 November 1932.

<sup>100</sup> LHA: WG/TRI 80, Gillies to Mrs. Postgate, 22 November 1932.

<sup>101</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/33, Gillies to James, 16 November 1932.

James sent the shoes back to his wife Juanita back in Trinidad ‘asking her to get in touch with Captain Cipriani about them’.<sup>102</sup>

While in London, James was also introduced to Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia, a Fabian former colonial civil servant and secretary of Labour’s ‘Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions’.<sup>103</sup> Woolf had drafted the 1928 declaration of the Labour Party with respect to West Indian self-government, and clearly felt a little embarrassed about the lack of progress since then.<sup>104</sup> As James reported to Gillies, ‘I have seen Mr Woolf and he has promised to do all he can’.<sup>105</sup>

Mr. Woolf has consented to consider a pamphlet of 10,000 words dealing with the West Indian question, and I am at work on it. I must thank you for your kind assistance in this matter and hope he will see his way to print it. I shall send you a carbon copy of the M.S.S. I send to him. It may be useful as containing the argument in a concentrated form.<sup>106</sup>

As it happened, Woolf was impressed enough by reading a copy of James’s *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, telling James “I would like to publish this, but not all

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<sup>102</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/40, James to Gillies, 12 January 1933. Cipriani was after all the self-declared ‘champion of the barefooted man’. The high cost of shoes in Trinidad at the time seems to have been caused by the new Ottawa duties. As Cipriani reported to Gillies, ‘the question of granting a preference to Canada on Rubber shoes and cheap hosier has given rise to a great deal of heated debate and high feeling as the Workingman is now called upon to pay at least 100% more for footwear than he paid formerly when these were imported from Japan’. See LHA: WG/TRI/81, Cipriani to Gillies, 30 November 1932.

<sup>103</sup> On 7 November, Captain Cipriani wrote a letter of introduction to ‘Mr. L.S. Woolf, 58 Tavistock Square’. ‘My dear Woolf, I have the pleasure to introduce to you Mr. C.L.R. James of Trinidad, who is now studying in England, and occasionally writes to the press on West Indian subjects. In the West Indies he works in coalition with our friends. Mr. James contemplates writing a book on the case for West Indian Self-Government. I would like you to give him a little time.’ See LHA: WG/TRI/31. On Woolf, see Margaret Cole, ‘Woolf, Leonard Sidney (1880-1969)’, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, V, (1979).

<sup>104</sup> In his memoirs, Woolf described how some were unhappy with Sidney Webb’s ‘conservatism and his masterly inactivity whenever an opportunity arose to do something different from what Conservative governments and the Colonial Office civil servants had endorsed as safe, sound, and “progressive” for the last half-century’. Malmsten, ‘The British Labour Party and the West Indies’, pp. 176, 187. In 1936, Lord Sydney Olivier wrote to Woolf attacking colonial officials as ‘mostly third-rate products of the educational system of our capitalistic society ... incapable of taking a socialist point of view, or of regarding black people as commensurable human beings’. Quoted in Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics; The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford, 1993), p. 101.

<sup>105</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/32, James to Gillies, 10 November 1932.

<sup>106</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/34, James to Gillies, 17 November 1932.

of it.” I said, “Go right ahead.”<sup>107</sup> On 12 January 1933, James could report to Gillies that ‘I am sure you will be glad to hear that Mr Woolf is likely to publish an abridged edition of the *Life of Captain Cipriani* in the Day to Day series, and that the Editor of the N.S.A.N. [*New Statesman and Nation*] has asked me to submit an article on the W.I. political situation’.<sup>108</sup>

If James had been at all nervous when first speaking about the West Indies to people in Lancashire, by January 1933 it seems he was in his element and extremely confident. Indeed, he had begun tentatively to generalise about British imperialism as a whole rather than just on its hold over the West Indies. The *Nelson Leader* published a report of a ‘fine lecture at Nelson’ by James on ‘Coloured Peoples under British Rule’ that he gave on 22 January 1933.

A fairly good audience turned up at the I.L.P. rooms on Sunday evening to hear Mr. James, the West Indian, who is a good friend of Constantines, speak on the above subject. His audience were rewarded by the manner in which the speaker dealt with the subject, and also for the sympathy which he had for the exploited people under British rule, in their demands for independence.

We also get a sense of James’s disappointment with the Labour Party.

At the outset of his address, he stated that there was no hope of Labour’s ideals being realised in this country unless the colonial peoples under British rule were granted independence. Mr. James then went on to deal with three sorts of coloured people who were subject to British rule, i.e. the people in Kenya, Burma and the West Indies.

James’s reference to Kenya is noteworthy, as it is possibly the first time that this intellectual figurehead of the ‘black Atlantic’ discusses Africa in any sort of public forum, certainly in Britain.

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<sup>107</sup> Anna Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972; A Literary and Cultural History* (London, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> I.HA: WG/TRI/40, James to Gillies, 12 January 1933. The *New Statesman* editor was Kingsley Martin, who incidentally reviewed Volumes II and III of Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* around this time, a review James doubtless read with interest. See *New Statesman*, 21 January 1933.

Dealing with Kenya, he [James] said that thirty two years ago the natives were untouched by British rule and white civilisation. They could be classed like European rural districts today. Then the white settlers came, and in order to live, the natives had to pay a poll tax to the settlers. This meant that they had to have money, and in order to get money they had to work for the white settlers. Failing to pay the poll tax, they were punished and subject to criminal law. The natives of Kenya were keenly up against this imposition.

If the *Nelson Leader* reporter has quoted accurately, James's comments constitute a quite remarkable defence of African civilisation before the impact of colonialism. The idea that without the benefits of Western 'white civilisation' and British colonial officials, that black African people could have established a form of society comparable with 'European rural districts today' was a provocative challenge to prevailing racist assumptions. Nor was James unaware of the Kenyan people's struggle against the brutal white settlers who had stolen their land. 'There were many questions at the close, and there was no doubt that the audience very much appreciated the striking and interesting way in which the address was presented.'<sup>109</sup>

James's speech seems to have tapped into the rich vein of anti-imperialism in Nelson. His was an audience, after all, whose grandparents may well have taken part in the boycott of cotton from the Southern States during the American Civil War of the 1860s, and whose parents had objected to schools being closed to celebrate the relief of Mafeking in the Boer War on the grounds that for children to associate 'rejoicing and holiday-making with war and bloodshed was distinctly immoral'. It was an audience who themselves may have marched against British intervention in the Great War and in Soviet Russia afterwards, and who now supported Gandhi's boycott of imported British cotton.<sup>110</sup> Nelson overall must have enabled James to imagine what a 'Britain' without Empire might look like; this small weaving town,

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<sup>109</sup> 'Coloured Peoples under British Rule', *Nelson Leader*, 27 January 1933. See Appendix B.

<sup>110</sup> Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work*, pp. 5, 74. See also Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, pp. 255, 277, 358. Anti-militarism ran strong in Nelson after the Great War. One Labour mayor of Nelson, Richard Winterbottom, in the late 1920s had even banned nationalistic music including the National Anthem, *Rule Britannia*, *Land of Hope and Glory*, and *God Bless the Prince of Wales* from being played at the local ceremony on Empire Day (24 May). The band was forced to play jazz instead, and a few months later the Nelson Parks Committee had even imposed a ban on military bands in local parks. For how 'Empire Day' was marked in colonial Trinidad, see George Padmore, 'What is Empire Day?' *Negro Worker*. (June, 1932).

with its democratic traditions and socialist culture, was, if not quite fully 'postcolonial' then certainly the antithesis of anything he had read about before or seen in the sprawling metropolis of London.

This is not to say that James did not encounter any challenges in Nelson to his campaigning work against British colonial power. In an article James wrote in 1964 for *New Society*, he described the peculiar relationship between the residents of Constantine's house on Meredith Street and the people of Nelson at that time.

Except for a coloured man who used to push a cart about the street and collect garbage they knew nothing at all about coloured people, had never got into close contact with any. Mr. Constantine was a very distinguished cricketer and local hero; I was obviously a person with education and knowledge more than the average in Nelson. Mrs. Constantine conducted herself with great reserve and dignity. The three of us were very conscious that we were, so to speak, on exhibition. The people of Nelson began by believing that we had something to do with India. When they were made to understand that this was not so, that English was our native language and we had no native religion, they began to look upon us as an entirely unknown sort of people, unknown at least to them, and they began to look upon us as typical West Indians. So much so that a local acquaintance who was very critical of my pronouncedly pro-Labour attitudes, having visited the West Indies, returned and did a powerful propaganda along the following lines: "All of them are not like Constantine and James. The Constantines and James are exceptional people, but don't think all of them out there are like these."<sup>111</sup>

More importantly, in the week in which the *Nelson Leader* carried the report of James's meeting, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. As a result, when James sent his article on the political situation in the West Indies off to the *New Statesman*, it was rejected. The Royal Commission on the West Indies had yet to report, but more crucially the spotlight was now on German politics. The appointment of Hitler may have passed without comment in James's letters to Gillies, but in terms of European politics it was as if an earthquake had hit. As James reported with some sadness to Gillies in February 1933,

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<sup>111</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Colour: another view', *New Society*, 10 December 1964.

I have just received a letter from Mr. Kingsley Martin who has an article of mine on the West Indian situation. It says that unfortunately people are not interested and I must keep my eye open for anything in the news which may make an article topical.<sup>112</sup>

Gillies replied, explaining the thinking of the *New Statesman*'s editor and clearly wanting to offer some consolation but also finding it a little hard to elicit much sympathy for James's predicament in the aftermath of the Reichstag Fire. 'I have been away on the continent, and since my return have been preoccupied with the German situation ... it is quite true that political articles in the 'New Statesman' must be topical and alive.' Of course, 'literary articles may be as dead as mutton'.<sup>113</sup> James's enthusiasm for and commitment to the struggle for democracy in the West Indies however does not at this stage seem to have been diverted by European politics. He continued his speaking tour about the West Indies, and on Sunday 19 February, 'Mr. C.L.R. James of Nelson' addressed two 'large gatherings' at Charlesworth Independent Chapel (near Glossop), with Constantine presiding.<sup>114</sup> Two weeks later, on another Sunday morning in early March, James was invited to introduce the weekly discussion class of Nelson Labour Party.<sup>115</sup> By the time he left Nelson in late March 1933 the *Nelson Leader*'s 'Table Talk' columnist noted that 'Mr. James has become a familiar figure in the town, and has also lectured and spoken on various topics from several local platforms'.<sup>116</sup> It is perhaps also worth

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<sup>112</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/94, James to Gillies, 23 February 1933.

<sup>113</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/95, Gillies to James, 4 March 1933.

<sup>114</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 24 February 1933.

<sup>115</sup> As the Party's paper, the *Nelson Gazette* put it, advertising the meeting, 'next Sunday Mr. C.L.R. James will deal with the present policy of the Labour Movement, and the speaker will have something of importance to say, and it will no doubt be delivered from an unusual angle'. *Nelson Gazette*, 28 February 1933. Sadly the *Nelson Gazette* did not report James's speech.

<sup>116</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 7 April 1933. See also the *Nelson Leader*, 21 April 1933, which reported his actual departure. One leaflet survives from 'The Comradeship of the C[hristian] E[ndeavour] Holiday Homes, Nelson and Colne Group' dated 19 March (no year), which advertises an 8p.m. 'Special Study Circle' at 108, Walton Lane, with 'Mr. C.L.R. James of West Indies' as 'Speaker'. Christian Endeavour seem to have been very supportive of colonial students in Britain, as can be seen from numerous references to them in *The Keys*, the official organ of the League of Coloured Peoples (L.C.P.). Thanks to Eric E. Robinson for showing me this leaflet. In 1935, Dr. Harold Moody, L.C.P. President was elected President of the British Christian Endeavour Union, 'the first time in the history of Great Britain that a coloured man has been made President of an important national organisation'. See *The Keys*, 3/1, (July-September, 1935), p. 3.

quoting from a letter that James wrote to Gillies on 12 March 1933, just before he returned to London to begin working for the *Manchester Guardian*:

My pamphlet [*The Case for West Indian Self-Government*] will be out on the 21<sup>st</sup> of the present month. I have an idea in mind for circulating it among various branches of the Labour Party, as many as I can manage. By the time I have written to them and pay for the transport of the book, profit will have vanished, but it does not matter. I would like to have copies scattered in the right place among all supporters of the movement. Can you recommend me to any publication where I can get a list of the secretaries of the various Labour groups? And if it is not too much to ask, and would not be out of place in your official position, could you give me a line or two recommending the book. Lord Olivier has written a formal letter to me praising it. Some day I hope to go from Labour Party Group to Labour Party Group trying to interest them in the West Indies but I cannot afford that as yet and want to try this means ... I have been speaking to the Nelson Labour Party and the Colne and hope to do some more before I leave the North.<sup>117</sup>

The correspondence with Gillies not only reveals James to be a committed activist with respect to colonialism but also an intellectual who was thinking seriously about his relationship to the international Communist movement. In the context of the Great Depression, the growing menace of fascism, and a Labour government that had so manifestly failed to represent the labour movement, a political radicalisation took place among many in British society. As James later remembered, ‘it was this period of disillusionment with British capitalism which preceded a wave of sympathy for Stalinist Russia and the skilfully propagated “success” of the Five Year Plan’ as an alternative to the crisis-racked West.<sup>118</sup> Accordingly, the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.) emerged from its isolation when it had just over 2,500

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<sup>117</sup> See LHA: WG/TRI/96, James to Gillies, 12 March 1933. When ‘The Case for West Indian Self Government’ did finally come out, the *New Statesman* mentioned it after discussing the Commission’s visit under the heading ‘Self-Government for the West Indies’, describing it as ‘an admirably written pamphlet’, which must have further lifted James’s confidence. See *New Statesman*, 1 April 1933, *Nelson Leader*, 7 April 1933 and *Port of Spain Gazette*, 19 April 1933. On 7 April 1933, the Commission for West Indies Closer Union reported, upholding the Governor’s traditional powers of certification of legislative councils and veto. See Malmsten, ‘The British Labour Party and the West Indies’, p. 189, and Madden and Darwin (eds.), *Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth, Volume VII*, p. 75. James’s thoughts on the Commission after it reported can be seen in his brief article, ‘West Indies Self-Government’, in *The Keys*, 1/4. (April-June, 1934).

<sup>118</sup> James, ‘The British Vote for Socialism’, p. 114.

members in November 1930, mostly in core bases of Scotland and South Wales, to grow to 9,000 members nationwide in 1932 as a result of its work among the millions of unemployed; a figure that was to grow further.<sup>119</sup> Nelson C.P.G.B. was small, but they threw themselves into the struggles of the cotton weavers with an energy that put most members of the Labour Party to shame. Even back home in Trinidad, while James's *The Life of Captain Cipriani* was 'a grand success', it was also facing some criticism for its moderate tone, and one old friend even asked why James did not call for 'a classless society, a communist society'.<sup>120</sup> James himself must have puzzling over the very same question, not least because at this time the international Communist movement took questions of imperialism and racism rather more seriously than the British Labour Party. Since March 1931 the Scottsboro case, which saw nine black boys charged with the alleged rape of two white girls on a train in Alabama, had made headline news internationally.<sup>121</sup> At a time when all but one of the boys were facing the death penalty, the Communist Party in America were at the forefront of organising their legal defence, through an organisation they had founded in 1922, International Labour Defence (I.L.D.).

Indeed, the I.L.D. was even one of the topics James and Gillies had discussed when they met in November 1932. James himself does not seem to have previously heard of the organisation, but questions had been asked about it back in Trinidad in the *Port of Spain Gazette* after Vivian E. Henry, Secretary of the T.W.A., showed support for it on a visit to Europe. In June 1932, Ada Wright, mother of one of the accused 'Scottsboro Boys' spoke in London as part as a European speaking tour of the I.L.D., a meeting attended by 'a large number of white and coloured workers'.<sup>122</sup> It seems possible that Henry was among those inspired, and in early July 1932, he had attended a conference in Berlin organised by 'German Red Aid', a group affiliated to

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<sup>119</sup> A. Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1992), p. 42, and Stevenson and Cook, *Britain in the Depression*, p. 153. There were later hunger marches organized from Nelson, on the initiative of the local Communist Party. See Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, p. 381.

<sup>120</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 122. For more on the books reception in Trinidad see chapter six. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 23.

<sup>121</sup> See Haywood Patterson, *Scottsboro Boy* (London, 1951), and James A. Millar, Susan D. Pennybacker, and Eve Rosenhalt, 'Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-1934', *American Historical Review*, 106/2, (2001).

<sup>122</sup> Millar, Pennybacker and Rosenhalt, 'Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys', p. 403. See also Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 33-37.

the I.L.D.<sup>123</sup> While leading members of the Labour Party had stressed their support for the campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys, its members were forbidden from involvement in Communist-led groups such as the I.L.D. Gillies took care to warn James - and clearly he hoped through James, Henry also - about the hidden agenda of the I.L.D.

With regard to the International Labour Defence, I have very little doubt as to the identity of this organisation. In this country, the International Labour Defence (British Section) is one of the ancillary organisations of the British Communist Party. It was formerly known as the International Class War Prisoners' Aid (British Section), or, on the Continent, the Red Aid. But there appears to have been a change of name, and with regard to that point, enquiries are being made. The change of name may not be unconnected with the fact that membership of the International Class War Prisoners' Aid is incompatible with membership of the Labour Party.<sup>124</sup>

At this time, relations between Labour and the C.P.G.B., having steadily deteriorated during the 1920s, were particularly sour, largely as a result of the current Communist policy of 'class against class', which argued that the leaders of Labour were 'social-fascist labour bureaucrats'.<sup>125</sup> James seems to have been persuaded by Gillies's anti-Communism to some extent and in a letter sent on 10 November informed him that he had 'written to Captain Cipriani about Henry's visit to Europe and the dangers of his getting entangled with the Communist Party. This, however, I

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<sup>123</sup> See LHA: WG/TRI/36, Gillies to James, 28 November 1932. In July 1932, it was announced that Vivian Henry had accepted an invitation from the I.L.D. to send two delegates to attend their annual convention in Berlin in November. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 2 July 1932. For George Padmore's failed attempt to entice Kobina Sekyi, a barrister from the Gold Coast representing the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (A.R.P.S.) in London during the summer of 1932, to the I.L.D. conference in Berlin, see Samuel Rohdie, 'The Gold Coast Aborigines Abroad', *Journal of African History*, 6/3, (1965), p. 396.

<sup>124</sup> See LHA: WG/TRI/35, Gillies to James, 21 November 1932. See also Miller, Pennybacker and Rosenhaft, 'Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys', p. 416. On Gillies's anti-Communism during this period, see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, p. 49.

<sup>125</sup> On the Communist International and 'class against class', see Hugo Dewar, *Communist Politics in Britain: The C'PGB from its origins to the Second World War* (London, 1976) and Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern* (London, 1996). See also George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (London, 1931), pp. 6, 60, 107. The Communist Padmore denounced the likes of Lord Olivier as one of many 'social fascist politicians' who were aiding 'native local labour misleaders and national reformists to keep the masses in submission by making them promises'. In Nelson, local Communists in this period regularly described Labour as the 'third capitalist party' in Britain. See Liddington, *The Life and Struggles of a Respectable Rebel*, p. 372.

did quite unofficially.’<sup>126</sup> It seems that it might have been too late, as by then Henry had apparently departed for Moscow. As Gillies wrote to James on 21 November.

... the lady who called here told me that Mr. Henry had gone to Moscow. As an international Congress of the “Mopr” organisations is being held in Moscow from November 10 to 25, it is probable that the lady was right. Is it not so? The “Mopr”, made up of the initials of the Russian title, is another name by which this organisation is known on the Continent.

As Gillies added, ‘therefore, do not be surprised if your organisation [the T.W.A.] is now being attacked as Bolshevik, or as one having Bolshevik affiliations’.<sup>127</sup>

James seems to have found the information Gillies sent to him about the I.L.D. and its links to the Communist International quite fascinating, for although he was reading Trotsky while he was in Nelson, James still knew very little about contemporary left-wing party politics.<sup>128</sup> In a letter James wrote to Gillies in February 1933, for example, he innocently confused the Labour Party’s *Labour Magazine* with the C.P.G.B.’s *Labour Monthly*.<sup>129</sup> However, while James certainly did not see himself as a ‘Bolshevik’ at this time, he did regard British colonialism as a far greater ‘danger’ than Communism. It is perhaps worth citing a letter Captain

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<sup>126</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/32, James to Gillies, 10 November 1932.

<sup>127</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/35, Gillies to James, 21 November 1932. In fact, the T.W.A. had regularly (without foundation) been accused of being ‘Bolshevik’ since the end of the Great War, something which may have prompted Henry to take the opportunity to go to Moscow to see ‘Bolshevism’ for himself. M.O.P.R. stood for Russian Red Aid, and on this world conference in Moscow which was attended by Ada Wright see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>128</sup> As James replied to Gillies on 30 November 1932, ‘Thanks very much for the information about the International Labour Defence. I shall find out for certain which conference Henry attended. As soon as I do so I shall let you know.’ LHA: WG/BWI/14. Henry’s speech at the I.L.D. conference was published in the *Negro Worker*, under the title ‘Class War in the West Indies’. ‘Comrade Henry’ was described as being a ‘delegate from the West Indian Labour Movement’. *Negro Worker*, (February-March, 1933). Henry was however much less radical a figure when the ‘class war in the West Indies’ reached a much higher level during the mass strike in Trinidad of 1937, which Henry, as General Secretary of the Trinidad Labour Party, described as a ‘regrettable’ action taken by ‘irresponsibles’ and instead urged the workers to ‘constitutionally advocate for their equitable and legitimate due’. Richard W. Jacobs, ‘The Politics of Protest in Trinidad: The Strikes and Disturbances of 1937’, *Caribbean Studies*, 17/1-2, (1974), p. 43.

<sup>129</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/42, James to Gillies, 1 February 1932. Gillies, of course, was quick to correct this mistake.

Cipriani wrote to Gillies in November 1932 to remind ourselves of why anti-colonialists were bitterly opposed to the British Government:

It would be well to remind the Home Government that the time has long since past when we in the Colonies are going to sit still and swallow everything that is pushed down our throats ... we are sick and fed up to the back teeth of all this mawkishness and if you do not help us to run and administer our own affairs then we will be bound to make every effort on our side to free ourselves from this rotten form of industrial and economic slavery in the way that seems most satisfactory and profitable to ourselves. I had at one time a great deal of confidence in the Labour Party, I still have a great deal of confidence in many of its members, but you will pardon me when I say that frequent and repeated disappointments have shaken that confidence to its very foundations and so say all of us. The Englishman's word is no longer his bond, we the small peoples of the Empire realise that we are there for only one thing, the exploitation and oppression of the English imperialist and foreign capitalist.<sup>130</sup>

Overall, it had not taken long for the young writer 'Ishmael', having debarked from the ship in Plymouth and boarded the far bigger 'ship' of Britain, to sense that not all was well on board. If the '*H.M.S. Britannia*' was not quite the *Pequod* Ishmael boarded under the madman Captain Ahab, during the Great Slump of the 1930s it might as well have been. As Eric Hobsbawm has written of British capitalism at this time, 'never did a ship founder with a captain and crew more ignorant of the reasons for its misfortune or more impotent to do anything about it'.<sup>131</sup> How ironic that James should find one of the few sections of the 'crew' that did not feel either ignorant or impotent amid the crisis in a northern industrial town named after Britain's greatest Admiral, Lord Nelson.<sup>132</sup> In *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, James wrote that Ishmaels 'are dangerous, especially when they actually

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<sup>130</sup> LHA: WG/TRI/81, Cipriani to Gillies, 30 November 1932. That said, Cipriani himself was very far from embracing revolutionary politics himself, telling Trinidadian workers on 19 May 1933 to put their faith in 'peaceful evolution' as 'violence was the way of the Communists and not of socialists'. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, p. 40.

<sup>131</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 212.

<sup>132</sup> The name was originally taken from an early nineteenth century coaching stop, the Nelson Inn, commemorating the famous naval hero, making it 'probably the only English town of any size to be named after a pub'. Hill, *Nelson*, pp. 9-10.

leave their own environment and work among workers or live among them'.<sup>133</sup> The ordinary working people of 'Red Nelson' certainly helped James become 'dangerous'. On James's eightieth birthday, in 1981, E.P. Thompson suggested that his friend was like Tom Mann in that he intended to 'grow more dangerous' as he grew older.<sup>134</sup> Thompson was right. In his 'Eightieth Birthday lectures', when someone suggested to James that the British working class was somehow too 'backward' and not 'educated' enough for socialism, the great socialist would point out that on the contrary it was his working-class friends in Nelson that had 'helped to educate me'.<sup>135</sup>

Perhaps even more strikingly, James gravitated towards revolutionary politics while avoiding what Isaac Deutscher called the 'vulgar Marxism' of orthodox Communism. Even some who later worked politically with James assumed that he must have come under Moscow's spell at some point.<sup>136</sup> After all, a fellow member of the T.W.A., Vivian Henry, seems like he might well have briefly done so when he visited Britain around the same time. Unlike Henry, James did not go to Moscow, but settled in the 'Little Moscow' of Nelson, where he had become acquainted not with Josef Stalin but with Leon Trotsky.<sup>137</sup> In any case, while James left Nelson to begin professional work as a cricket reporter still harbouring dreams of making it as a novelist, he did not now try to ingratiate himself with the literary elite in Bloomsbury on his return to London. Instead, as he vividly once recalled, 'Hitler came to power in 1933 and ... the contemporary world had been swept into politics, political life ... I got swept into politics'.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, p. 40.

<sup>134</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'C.L.R. James at 80', in Paul Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James; His Life and Work* (London, 1986), p. 249.

<sup>135</sup> James, *Eightieth Birthday Lectures*, p. 55.

<sup>136</sup> So Cornelius Castoriadis suggested that James found Trotskyism as 'the first avenue' that opened after he broke with Stalinism. See Cornelius Castoriadis, 'C.L.R. James and the Fate of Marxism', in Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain (eds.), *C.L.R. James; His Intellectual Legacies* (Amherst, 1995), p. 277.

<sup>137</sup> James's orientation towards Trotskyism might have been accelerated dramatically if he had attended a meeting organised in Nelson by an early British Trotskyist, Henry Sara, on 12 March 1933 about the 'Turmoil' in Germany. See *Nelson Leader*, 10 March 1933. On Sara, see John McIlroy, 'Sara, Henry (1886-1953)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, XI, (2003).

<sup>138</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972*, p. 3.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### ‘Trotsky’s Lieutenant’: The Early Marxism of C.L.R. James

When C.L.R. James was described as a ‘lieutenant’ of Leon Trotsky by a British Communist in 1938, few at the time would have disputed the appropriateness of the label.<sup>1</sup> Whatever one thinks of the tradition of Marxists using military terms and metaphors - probably dating back to Engels who was nicknamed ‘The General’ by Marx’s family because of his interest in military history, but certainly adopted by Communist Third International, born during the Russian Civil War - the term fits him well. From James’s discussions on revolutionary politics with George Padmore in London in the summer of 1933 up to his meeting with the former Soviet Commissar for War himself in Coyoacán, Mexico in April 1939, he demonstrated a loyal commitment to the ideas of Trotsky. After becoming a ‘Bolshevik-Leninist’ (as the Trotskyist movement then called itself) in 1934, James quickly rose to become one of the outstanding leaders of the tiny British Trotskyist movement. As Chair of the Marxist Group and editor of its paper *Fight*, James ably and eloquently defended the organiser of the October Revolution and founder of the Red Army from the tirade of Stalinist slander during the Moscow Trials at numerous meetings in Britain. In late July 1936, James had been delegated to the ‘First International Conference for the Fourth International’ in France and in September 1938 was elected to the fifteen-strong International Executive Committee of Trotsky’s Fourth International at its founding conference. While there is a certain incongruity in describing someone with no military experience and a professional position as a cricket reporter as a ‘lieutenant’ of anybody, it might be noted that James did plan to go and fight in Ethiopia against Mussolini and then also seriously considered volunteering for the Spanish Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter is not going to attempt to fully detail James’s relationship to the early British Trotskyist movement, but rather will attempt to elucidate some of the quality and originality of his early Marxism. In particular, we will examine James’s pioneering 1937 anti-Stalinist history of ‘the rise and fall of the Communist

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Six Questions to Trotskyists - And their Answers’, *Controversy*, 18, (March, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, James’s acceptance of the collective discipline of the Trotskyist movement as well as his own understanding that he was more valuable making revolutionary propaganda in Britain than risking his life abroad may have been factors in explaining why he did not go to fight in Ethiopia or Spain.

International', *World Revolution*, an overlooked classic of Marxist literature, unappreciated even by many Trotskyists and Jamesians. *World Revolution* reveals much about James's evolving relationship to Trotsky and Trotskyism, and can in part be seen as an attempt to think theoretically through some of the organisational difficulties and disagreements over strategy and tactics that the Marxist Group experienced with Trotsky's International Secretariat. James was never an 'orthodox Trotskyist', to use the term coined by American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon, but like several other figures in or around the early Trotskyist movement including Daniel Guérin, was always an original thinker, ever open to new ideas and rarely happy to simply repeat Trotsky's formulations unquestioningly.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in part this creativity in James's Marxism was also the result of the circumstances he found himself in during the 1930s, for then as subsequently, Trotskyism was far from the only option available for those inspired by the revolutionary communist tradition of October 1917, of workers' power and international socialism but seeking a radical alternative to both Social Democracy and Stalinism. In this period, James met and discussed politics with a fantastic range of Marxists and revolutionaries who were outside the Trotskyist movement, most notably Karl Korsch and Boris Souvarine, a new edition of whose powerful and damning 1935 biography *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* James translated into English for publication in 1939. Closer to home, aside from the wide range of people whom James met through the I.L.P., including Jennie Lee and George Orwell, he also met Nora Connolly O'Brien, the daughter of James Connolly and Nan Milton, the daughter of John Maclean. Indeed, James's life and work in this period offers a fascinating glimpse into an almost subterranean world of 1930s British far-left politics, a story of heretics, renegades and dissidents, from surrealist poets to Jewish printers and anarchist booksellers, and the seeds of his later 1951 break from the official Trotskyist movement were arguably first sown here. It is therefore not really surprising that by 1940, while Trotsky was arguing every member of the American Socialist Workers Party (S.W.P.) 'should and must consider himself an officer in the proletarian army', James himself was hardly the first person who would have come to

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<sup>3</sup> James seems to have met with Guérin during the 1930s, presumably on one of his many visits to France. See Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. xv. On Guérin, see Ian Birchall, 'Daniel Guérin's Dialogue with Leninism', *Revolutionary History*, 9 2, (2006).

Trotsky's mind as a particularly loyal lieutenant. Indeed, in April 1940 Trotsky would refer to James in a private letter as a 'Bohemian freelancer'.<sup>4</sup>

### **Becoming a 'Bolshevik-Leninist'**

'I had not been in Europe two years before I came to the conclusion that European civilisation as it then existed was doomed', James later recalled.<sup>5</sup> In general terms, it should be noted that such a conclusion was of course far from unusual at the time. The 1929 Wall Street Crash had been a critical factor in the plunge of Europe, a continent irrevocably scarred by the destruction of the Great War, into a devastating economic crisis which had profound political and ideological consequences, most strikingly leading to the triumph of Hitler's Nazis in Germany in 1933 on the back of mass unemployment. James's political orientation towards Marxism was an entirely understandable reaction to the worst crisis in the history of capitalism. In March 1933, E. H. Carr would declare Marx has 'a claim to be regarded as the most far-seeing genius of the nineteenth century and one of the most successful prophets in history'.<sup>6</sup> As Stuart Macintyre has noted of this period, even 'erstwhile critics such as [G.D.H.] Cole, [Harold] Laski and even the Webbs revised their anti-Marxist attitudes, and Cole wrote that "To look around on the world today with seeing eyes is to be a Marxist, for Marxism alone explains what is going on"'.<sup>7</sup> The hopes raised by the Russian Revolution, and the apparent success of the First Five Year Plan in enabling the Soviet Union to avoid the nightmare of unemployment, meant that Communism offered a serious alternative way out of the crisis, and one that, unlike fascism, stood, theoretically at least, for more not less democracy in the process. As Carr once noted, he had been born in 1892 and so 'grew up, not in the high noon but in the afterglow of the great Victorian age of faith and optimism, and it is difficult for me even today to think of a world in permanent

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<sup>4</sup> Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism* (New York, 1976). pp. 103, 164.

<sup>5</sup> James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Basingstoke, 2001). p. lxxviii.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science; Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933* (Cambridge, 1980). p. 94.

and irretrievable decline'.<sup>8</sup> In turning to Marxism, James, the 'Victorian with the rebel seed', was in similar fashion affirming his optimism, his faith in the potential for humanity to progress.

Yet if in general James's turn to revolutionary socialism was quite understandable, his precise political and intellectual evolution perhaps demands closer attention. At a time when the appeal and attraction of Soviet Communism was perhaps at its height among intellectuals, James returned to London from Nelson in March 1933, and having read and re-read volume one of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, joined the miniscule British Trotskyist movement a year later. Clearly, the importance of reading Trotsky's masterful three volumes of historical analysis cannot be underestimated, and it shaped him profoundly as it did many others.<sup>9</sup> 'I had plunged into a river from which I was never to emerge', James recalled.

In 1933 I began to work as a cricket reporter ... I bought Volume I of the *History of the Russian Revolution* which I had read and reread, but during the summer of 1933 when I was making some money Volumes II and III became available and I bought them intending to read them when the cricket season was over in September. By the end of 1933 I had re-read Volume I ... and had read Volumes II and III as I had never read any books before except *Vanity Fair* and Kipling's *Plain Tales From the Hills*.<sup>10</sup>

Yet James, still a Labour Party member, was not reading Trotsky in a vacuum. Back in London, he used to frequent Student Movement House, and at this 'official society for students mainly from abroad', James remembered many of the students 'were believers in Marxism but for the most part they were supporters of Stalin and the Communist Party'.<sup>11</sup> In the process of his reading of Trotsky's *History* and odd

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<sup>8</sup> Carr, *What is History?* p. liii.

<sup>9</sup> Another to come across the first volume in 1932 and go on to become a leading Trotskyist during the 1930s was James Burnham, who recalled that 'reading this book was an exciting experience; and it left me with the impression of understanding very clearly those events of which it claims to be an accurate record and a valid explanation'. Quoted in Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', pp. 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', p. 2. James remembered this as 'Student Union House', which did not exist, but in 1933 in an article for *The Listener*, James wrote that 'were it not for a few institutions like the Student Movement House, and the League of Coloured Peoples, the average West Indian student

discussions with left-wing students James began to pick up something of the intensity and importance of the controversy between the exiled former Soviet Commissar for War and those with loyalty to Stalin over the nature of the Russian Revolution and Marxism itself, and he remembered he realised he needed to undertake his own 'serious and concentrated study' of both.<sup>12</sup>

Near James's flat on 9 Heathcote Street in central London, in a left-wing bookshop called *Lahr* (on 68 Red Lion Street), he found and bought two volumes of *Leninism* by J.V. Stalin, which he carefully proceeded to read 'pencil in hand'.

Practically from the first page Stalin's factual history, his analysis and his style appalled me but I was trained in searching into [and] balancing antagonistic accounts of historical events. Both Trotsky and Stalin referred continuously to Lenin. Obviously I had to read Lenin ... whom I read in the popular series of *Selected Volumes*.

Moreover, Trotsky, Stalin and Lenin 'continuously referred to Marx'.

So in accordance with my ingrained habits which I had brought from the Caribbean I bought Marx seeking as usual what Othello called "the ocular truth". I gobbled up Volume I of *Capital*, for quite a while tackled volumes II and III and at that time did not get very far with them. But I read and re-read *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the *Communist Manifesto* and other early pamphlets of Marx as were available.<sup>13</sup>

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would have a dreadful time.' James, 'A Century of Freedom'. James had first visited Student Movement House soon after arriving in Britain in 1932, to hear a lecture by the novelist Edith Sitwell. Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', p. 2. According to a 1975 interview with Alan J. MacKenzie, James 'recalled that, when in London in 1932 and 1933, he would meet coloured seamen who were involved in the transportation of [the Communist] *Negro Worker* to the islands of the West Indies'. MacKenzie, 'British Marxists and the Empire', p. 154.

<sup>13</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', p. 2. Othello actually refers to 'the ocular proof'. James gives his exact address in a letter to the *New Statesman* on 28 March 1936. James later declared Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* was 'an indispensable book for the student of any period of history'. See C. L. R. James, *World Revolution 1917-1936; The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (New Jersey, 1994), p. 32.

With all this intensive independent reading in the summer of 1933, James soon made the acquaintance of the German anarchist bookshop owner, Charlie Lahr (1885-1971), according to David Goodway ‘very probably the last’ in the line, ‘stretching back to the late eighteenth-century’, of ‘great London radical booksellers-cum-publishers’.<sup>14</sup> In 1933, with business quiet in the midst of the depression, James remembers Lahr soon ‘got interested in what I was doing and would put aside a book or pamphlet for me he knew or thought would interest me ... through Charlie I was made acquainted with pamphlets and publications of the American Trotskyist movement, also with similar publications in French’.<sup>15</sup> By now, James remembers he ‘was reading hard and was already a long way towards becoming a Trotskyist’.<sup>16</sup>

Yet within a few months of moving to London, his developing beliefs were soon given their first serious test. One day in August 1933, James heard that George Padmore, the legendary leading black figure of international Communism, would be speaking nearby on Gray’s Inn Road.<sup>17</sup> Padmore was the head of the Communist International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (I.T.U.C.- N.W.), located within the Profintern, the Red International of Labour Unions (R.I.L.U.), and he edited their paper, *Negro Worker*.<sup>18</sup> He had just escaped from Nazi Germany, where he had been imprisoned following Hitler’s seizure of power, the passport Padmore had courtesy of being a British colonial subject enabling him to get deported.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> David Goodway, ‘Charles Lahr’, *London Magazine*, (June-July, 1977). Born Karl Lahr in the Rhineland, he had chosen internment at London’s Alexandra Palace to fighting for the Kaiser in the Great War, and though briefly a member of the C.P.G.B. on its formation in 1920 had left over Kronstadt and founded his bookshop. Jonathan Rose describes Lahr’s bookshop in the 1930s as ‘a mecca for down-and-out Nietzscheans and scruffy poets’. See Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London, 2001), p. 303.

<sup>15</sup> James, ‘Charlie Lahr’, pp. 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘Writings from *The Nation*’, in Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford, 1992), p. 291. As James recalled, after his study of Marxism and the Russian Revolution, ‘I realised the Stalinists were the greatest liars and corrupters of history there ever were. No one convinced me of this. I convinced myself.’ David Widgery, ‘C.L.R. James’, in David Widgery, *Preserving Disorder; Selected Essays 1968-88* (London, 1989), p. 123. This article was first published as ‘A meeting with Comrade James’, *New Society*, 26 June 1980.

<sup>17</sup> James, ‘The Old World and the New’, p. 208.

<sup>18</sup> Padmore was also the author of six pamphlets including *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, which, like most things Padmore wrote, had been banned by colonial governments immediately. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 23. See also Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 334.

<sup>19</sup> Padmore was met on arrival in Britain by Special Branch. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 30. There is a brief portrayal of Padmore and the I.T.U.C.-N.W. in the memoirs of Richard Klebs, who

Hitler's victory gradually led to an abandonment of the Communist International's extremely sectarian 'Class-against-class' line, and the tiny C.P.G.B. was now trying to initiate a United Front against fascism with the two other main British working-class organisations, the Labour Party and the I.L.P. While the I.L.P. agreed to talks, the Labour leadership felt unity with Communists would undermine what was left of their electoral credibility and in any case that the real enemy was less fascism per se but 'dictatorship' and 'extremism', including Communism. Labour's 'anti-Communist anti-fascism' led them to attack the C.P.G.B.'s new front organisations, refusing to be drawn into what William Gillies called 'the Communist Solar System'. By mid 1933, Gray's Inn Road had become, in the words of Reginald Reynolds, home to the headquarters of 'a whole network of satellite organisations in the "Communist Solar System"' and if James was loyal to Labour, he might well have resisted going to see Padmore.<sup>20</sup> However, James remembers that 'I was going to every meeting in those days and the race-aspect of the matter was an added attraction,' not least because Labour never seemed to hold any meetings on the colonial question.<sup>21</sup>

James would not regret his decision. As he remembered, he turned up at the meeting hall to find 'about seventy or eighty people, about half of them white, and about five minutes before the time in walked my boyhood friend Malcolm Nurse'. The two had not seen each other for about eight years, since Nurse went to America, and they had lost contact long ago. 'We knew each other at once. He came and said, "Hello, how are you?"'<sup>22</sup> It quickly became apparent that the legendary 'George Padmore' was in fact none other than Nurse himself. A little stunned, but also

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while a Communist used the pseudonym Jan Valtin, and who also travelled to England from Germany in 1933. Jan Valtin, *Out of the Night* (London, 1988), pp. 275-76, 287-89.

<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*, p. 99. *The Communist Solar System: The Communist International* was a Labour Party pamphlet published in 1933. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 49, 293, and Michael Newman, 'Democracy versus Dictatorship: Labour's Role in the Struggle against British Fascism, 1933-1936', *History Workshop Journal*, 5, (1978), pp. 70-71, 86.

<sup>21</sup> James, 'Writings from *The Nation*', p. 291. M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 269. The question of colonialism was discussed at Labour's annual conference in 1933, but as one delegate asserted in that debate, though it was a 'very big' question, it was not apparently one that would 'fire the enthusiasm of the electors at a general election' or 'win for us a majority'. Bernard Porter. *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 271-72.

<sup>22</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Towards the Seventh: The Pan-African Congress - Past, Present and Future' [1976], in C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory: Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 1984), p. 240.

‘amazed and delighted,’ James assured his old friend that ‘we will talk afterwards,’ and now found a seat as ‘George Padmore’ took the stage.<sup>23</sup>

He spoke to the audience about struggles all over the world. Although he was a very good speaker, he was not a great orator; but what he had was authority. I was struck by the admiration and awe with which the audience listened and looked at him.

Padmore briskly dealt with personal questions about his courage in the face of danger and the risks he took. ‘It was part of his profession, that was all.’<sup>24</sup> C.A. Smith, author of a 1926 pamphlet, *The Crime of Empire*, and Chair of the London division of the I.L.P., later remembered James and Padmore ‘laughing uproariously’ at the meeting’s end.<sup>25</sup>

After what must have been the most exhilarating public meeting James had ever attended, the two went for a meal and James vividly recalled how they ended up returning to his flat and talking ‘till about four o’clock in the morning’.

He told me: “You were here in 1932 March, April, May?”  
... “My God, man, I was here in 1932, looking for people to carry to Moscow to train them to organise blacks. If I had seen you I would have asked you.” I told him: “Well, boy, if you had seen me and asked me to go to Moscow the day after I had landed in London I would have gone.”

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<sup>23</sup> James, ‘Writings from *The Nation*’, p. 291. James, ‘Towards the Seventh’, p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> James, ‘Writings from *The Nation*’, p. 291.

<sup>25</sup> Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, pp. 26-27. As Hooker notes, ‘Padmore introduced himself as being in charge of all the world’s Negroes, which Smith thought quite a parish. A diocese rather, Padmore replied.’



Plate 5. George Padmore, 1937.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [Photograph]. From Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. ii.

As James remembered, ‘we just missed each other’.<sup>27</sup> In September 1932, Padmore had briefly visited London after trying to organise the first ‘World Congress of Seamen’ in difficult circumstances in May in Hamburg, but by then James of course was in Nelson.<sup>28</sup> After meeting and talking to the inspirational Padmore, (who returned to his Profintern post in France soon after this encounter in August 1933), it seems likely that James had finally decided that he was no longer merely a socialist, but a revolutionary socialist, a ‘communist’.<sup>29</sup> Yet, it must have also made James aware of how much he still needed to know, and his sympathies for ‘Trotskyism’ must have been challenged. How could the ‘Stalinist’ movement be so bad if such a good friend could rise so high in it, so soon after joining it in America in 1927?<sup>30</sup>

That summer, then, James remembered ‘I was a cricket reporter for the *Manchester Guardian* while I educated myself politically’, clearly enjoying a job which ensured him ample free time and money to read and buy books.<sup>31</sup> While trying to measure James’s political radicalisation through his writings on cricket would be problematic, to say the least, there does seem to be some evidence of it. On 14 August 1933, while reporting Lancashire play Hampshire at Old Trafford, James attempted to apply a class analysis (of sorts) to some of the Hampshire players.

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<sup>27</sup> James, ‘Towards the Seventh’, p. 241. C.L.R. James, ‘George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary - A Memoir’ [1976], in C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory; Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 1984), p. 254.

<sup>28</sup> Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 26. For one account of the international Seaman’s Congress in Hamburg, see Valtin, *Out of the Night*, pp. 279-84.

<sup>29</sup> A certain amount of confusion persists about the date of this reunion with Padmore. Cedric Robinson and Paul Buhle dated the meeting as happening not in 1933, but in 1932, though if so surely James would have then gone to Moscow with Padmore, as he says. See Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 364, and Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 38. Others such as Anthony Bogues describe ‘their fortuitous 1934 London meeting’, though quite why Padmore would then try and recruit James to go and be trained up in Moscow after he had himself broken with the Communist International is less clear. Anthony Bogues, ‘C.L.R. James and George Padmore’, in Fitzroy Baptiste and Rupert Lewis (eds.), *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary* (Kingston, 2009), p. 188. More incredibly, Farrukh Dhondy ‘succeeded’ in dating their re-union as late as 1936. Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*, p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> As Isaac Deutscher once noted, unlike those who joined the Communists in the 1930s and afterwards, those who joined in the 1920s ‘went into a movement in which there was plenty of scope for revolutionary idealism. The structure of the party was still fluid; it had not yet gone into the totalitarian mould. Intellectual integrity was still valued in a communist; it had not yet been surrendered for good to Moscow’s *raison d’état*.’ See Isaac Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades* (London, 1969), p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> James, ‘Writings from *The Nation*’, p. 291.

Boyes, long, slim, and graceful, fielded at short leg with aristocratic boldness and easy skill. Captain Philip Mead had little to do, but it was pleasant to watch his good-humoured proletarian amble from slip at one end to slip at the other. Kennedy supplied the solid, bourgeois virtues of length, flight and spin ... he remained a dangerous bowler, never degenerating into negative theories.<sup>32</sup>

By now, James himself had certainly cast aside his 'solid, bourgeois virtues' and was in the process of 'degenerating' nicely into Marxism, a 'negative theory,' albeit at the pace of a 'good-humoured proletarian amble'. Having independently orientated towards Trotskyism, James seems to have been further aided in his 'degeneration' in 1933 by an Englishman called Geoffrey Bagot, who James remembered was not an organised revolutionary but 'was interested in Trotskyism and spoke to me about it', particularly with respect to history.<sup>33</sup> James remembered that Charlie Lahr and himself had by now formed 'a curious partnership', with Lahr answering James's growing number of questions about politics and the labour movement in Britain, particularly individual leading figures within it, while 'Charlie would instruct me usually of some scandalous betrayal which all political persons of the left knew and talked about'. That James should have first really learnt about the reactionary nature of individual Labour leaders and British trade union bureaucrats from discussions with a German anarchist might surprise some. Yet 'Charlie did not so much argue a political issue. He disseminated information.' Particularly useful for James was Lahr's take on Hitler's rise to power, as 'of Germany I knew nothing concrete except the music of Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven and the philosophy of Kant and Hegel'.<sup>34</sup>

The summer of 1933 also saw James return to Nelson, and during one visit Harry Spencer, after listening to his good friend enthuse over the latest book he had received from France and how it fitted into his plans to write about the Haitian

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<sup>32</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 August 1933. James would later praise 'the grand and weather-beaten' Philip Mead, the Hampshire batsman, who was about to retire. 'How I loved to see the man: his stance, his pulling at the cap, his solid foundation, his pawkiness, his deep enjoyment of every minute. In the field he rolled from short-slip like a sailor on deck.' *Glasgow Herald*, 28 April 1936.

<sup>33</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', p.2. 'Bagot was not particularly interested in political theory' but 'he lent me some Trotskyist material in French and indicated others that were to come'.

<sup>34</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', pp. 3-4, 7.

Revolution, asked ‘why are you always talking about this book - why don’t you write it?’ When James explained he was saving up to visit the archives in France, Spencer gave James ninety pounds to enable him to get ‘on to France’ that winter.<sup>35</sup> Yet it was arguably James’s experiences in Paris outside of the libraries and archives that hold the final clue to his political development. In February 1934, Paris was experiencing massive civil unrest as the far right hoped to emulate Hitler’s success the year before, through exploiting the growing protests of the middle class and blaming ‘corrupt’ financiers and Jews. On 6 February 1934 the fascists called a huge demonstration against the recently formed left of centre government under the Liberal Radical Party’s Eduard Daladier. The vicious fighting that ensued with police led to Daladier’s resignation, his replacement by a right wing Liberal, and proof that through force the French fascists could deliver political change. The social democratic Socialist Party (S.F.I.O.), happy to line up behind the still governing Radical Party, did nothing. The French Communists were still following Stalin’s line of a ‘Third Period’, where socialist revolution, not counter-revolution, was imminent, and their paper *L’Humanité* carried the headline ‘No panic’ and declared that the choice between the fascists and the existing government was like the choice between ‘plague and cholera’.<sup>36</sup>

Yet just as James was wondering whether he might have to rely on his British passport to escape from a fascist prison cell like Padmore, workers in Paris instinctively felt the need for unity against the fascists, something only a minuscule group of Trotskyists were arguing for. On the night of 10 February 1934, James has described how he witnessed ‘fierce fighting’ and ‘men were killed’. ‘The proletariat, the stock of 1789 and the 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1792, of 1830, of 1848 and 1871, came out in their thousands, whether Socialist or Communist.’ On 12 February, the main union federation, the General Confederation of Labour (C.G.T.), called for a General Strike and at the last minute the Communist Party called for a demonstration, albeit separately to the main Socialist Party/C.G.T. one. However, instead of the two

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<sup>35</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xv. Anna Grimshaw has suggested that James also visited France the previous winter while in Nelson, but there is no supporting evidence for this. See Anna Grimshaw, ‘Notes on the Life and Work of C.L.R. James’, in Paul Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* (London, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Chris Harman, *A People’s History of the World* (London, 1999), p. 494. As James wrote two years later, ‘the utter imbecility of all Stalinism was never more completely shown than in the actions of the Communist Party of France in this grave crisis’. James, *World Revolution*, p. 379.

demonstrations showing their traditional animosity toward each other, on meeting workers spontaneously and gloriously came together to sing anti-fascist slogans. As James wrote, 'it was in the streets that French parliamentarism was saved. The coup had failed.'<sup>37</sup> Coupled with the inspirational but ultimately unsuccessful uprising by the Social Democratic Schutzbund in Vienna, by then under Dollfuss's dictatorship, James left France exhilarated at seeing fascism being resisted at last.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile back in Britain, encouraged by Mussolini's and Hitler's success, Sir Oswald Mosley had since 1932 put himself forward as national 'saviour' to the crisis, pouring almost one hundred thousand pounds into his new British Union of Fascists (B.U.F.).<sup>39</sup> By Spring 1934, Mosley's B.U.F. enjoyed an air of respectability among the British establishment, and was beginning to be seen as a legitimate part of the British political scene.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the 'Blackshirts' had the sympathy and even the admiration of sections of the elite, most famously media baron Lord Rothermere.<sup>41</sup> Having seen the sort of 'fight' that Social Democrats and Stalinists had put up against fascism in France, James on his return to Britain felt 'I wanted to meet some Trotskyists'.<sup>42</sup> When he finally ran into some of these elusive individuals 'distributing a pamphlet' at a Labour Party meeting in London in summer 1934, James joined the revolutionary movement at last. James remembers 'there were some people from Oxford and Cambridge who ... brought some criticism to the official Trotskyists and they couldn't answer. So on the same night I joined I had to speak on

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<sup>37</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 381.

<sup>38</sup> Harman, *A People's History of the World*, p. 493.

<sup>39</sup> Stevenson and Cook, *Britain in the Depression*, p. 225.

<sup>40</sup> In the official journal of the B.B.C., *The Listener*, for example, in the week James had arrived in London in March 1933, the transcript of a radio broadcast Mosley had made on 15 March had been published with a response from Miss Megan Lloyd George M.P. Both pieces were published as if it was a serious debate, 'Does England Need Fascism?' *The Listener*, 22 March 1933. A week later, 29 March 1933, as 'balance,' *The Listener* published a similar debate, 'Communism: For and Against', with Maurice Dobb, Economics lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge.

<sup>41</sup> As James remembered, 'for months the *Daily Mail* was a Fascist organ'. James, 'The British Vote for Socialism', p. 114. By July 1934, the B.U.F. would have a membership of up to 50,000. See Stevenson and Cook, *Britain in the Depression*, p. 234. However, after the violence of the notorious B.U.F. rally at Olympia in June 1934 respectable support began to fall away and membership of the Blackshirts also went into decline.

<sup>42</sup> Widgery, 'C.L.R. James', p. 123. See also Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 375.

behalf of Trotskyism.’<sup>43</sup> If James was pleased to see the ‘official Trotskyists’, we can only imagine how happy they were to see him.

### **Learning Marxism in the Trotskyist movement**

In 1933, the triumph of Hitler’s Nazis over the strongest labour movement in the world and the fact the German working class movement went down without a serious fight led Trotsky, the ‘prophet outcast’ from the land of the October Revolution, to proclaim that the Third International had suffered its ‘August 4<sup>th</sup>’, a reference to its predecessor the Second International’s support for the Great War in 1914.<sup>44</sup> That point was made in an article of Trotsky’s entitled, ‘It is Necessary to build Communist Parties and an International Anew’, and that was the lonely and arduous work he now undertook with his miniscule number of supporters internationally, work which he however considered among the most important tasks of his life. In setting the scene for James’s involvement in the Trotskyist movement, Stuart Hall has felt it vital to stress that ‘Trotskyists differentiated among themselves; there was never just one Trotskyist group, there were at least four or five’.<sup>45</sup> In fact, contrary to Hall’s stereotype, there was a time when there was ‘just one Trotskyist group’ in Britain, the Communist League, which had formed when the twelve strong ‘Balham Group’ of veteran C.P.G.B. members in South West London was expelled in 1932. This group, led by Reg Groves, Harry Wicks and Hugo Dewar, had published Trotsky’s article ‘Germany - The Key to the International Situation’, which stressed

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<sup>43</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 12. In March 1934, Trotskyists in Islington I.L.P. had issued a pamphlet entitled *The Bolshevik-Leninists to the World Proletariat! For the Fourth International* that contained an analysis that ‘France is now the key to the situation’. It seems likely that this was the ‘pamphlet’ in question. See Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 188.

<sup>44</sup> ‘An organisation which was not roused by the thunder of fascism and which submits docilely to such outrageous acts of bureaucracy demonstrates thereby that it is dead and cannot be revived ... In all our subsequent work it is necessary to take as our point of departure the historical collapse of the official Communist International.’ Leon Trotsky, ‘It is Necessary to Build Communist Parties and an International Anew [15 July 1933]’, in Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 431.

<sup>45</sup> Hall, ‘C.L.R. James: A Portrait’, p. 8.

the urgent importance of a United Front of working-class organisations if Hitler was to be stopped.<sup>46</sup>

In June 1933, with about thirty members, the Communist League formed to try and win the C.P.G.B. away from its sectarian line that reformist workers organisations were 'Social-Fascist'. Yet Trotsky himself now also saw possibilities for his followers opening up elsewhere, as 'Social Democracy is everywhere experiencing an acute crisis. In a number of countries more or less important left wings have already separated themselves from the Social Democratic parties.'<sup>47</sup> This was certainly the case in Britain, where in July 1932 the I.L.P., with 16,773 members five times the size of the C.P.G.B., had broken away, in what Gidon Cohen notes was 'the most important Left wing split in the history of the Labour Party'.<sup>48</sup> Trotsky now urged his British followers to join the I.L.P., though this change in direction led to a split in the Communist League, as the vast majority felt they could relate to the I.L.P. adequately from outside, while maintaining close contact with sympathetic networks in the Labour Party and the C.P.G.B. By the end of 1933, the Communist League had grown to over fifty members while still outside the I.L.P., and so when they put the question of joining the I.L.P. to a vote, all but eleven of the youngest members rejected it.<sup>49</sup> When the eleven followed Trotsky's tactical advice and 'entered' the I.L.P. in February 1934, the remaining 'majority' of the Communist League were not greatly worried. Wicks remembered the 'only people it appealed to were the intellectuals' like Denzil Dean Harber, an ex-student of the London School of Economics (L.S.E.), who 'had no roots in the Labour movement'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Reg Groves, *The Balham Group; How British Trotskyism began* (London, 1974), p. 9. John McIlroy, 'Groves, Reginald Percy (Reg) (1908-1988)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, XII, (2005).

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 134.

<sup>48</sup> Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*, pp. 15, 31.

<sup>49</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, pp. 121, 137, 150.

<sup>50</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 143. Wicks felt Harber's group 'didn't know of the antipathy between the proletarian and the middle-class I.L.P.er,' who predominated in London I.L.P. See also Duncan Hallas, 'Revolutionaries and the Labour Party', *International Socialism*, 16, (1982), pp. 15-16.



Plate 6. I.L.P. leaders C.A. Smith, James Maxton,  
and Fenner Brockway, 31 January 1933.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> [Photograph]. From Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, p. 83.

When James, an ‘intellectual’ without real ‘roots in the Labour movement’, left Labour and joined the Trotskyists on his return to Britain in early 1934, he happened to join Harber’s Communist League ‘Minority’, and he was content to go with the flow and join the I.L.P. James met up with his new found Trotskyist comrades at meetings held at the house of the distinguished scientist, Dr. Israel Heiger, and his partner Esther, in Hampstead. This group were all part of the local I.L.P. branch in Finchley (North-west London) and James remembers his local Trotskyist branch ‘had meetings almost every evening’ that summer in Heiger’s garden, although his own work as a cricket reporter and his friendship with Constantine up in Nelson precluded him making them all.<sup>52</sup> One new participant, John Archer, then a student at London University, remembered James giving a talk, ‘an original analysis of the social and economic inequalities in the Soviet Union’.<sup>53</sup> James seems to have learnt much from his new friends, not least as living with the Heigers at this time was a young Hungarian political exile, Hans Vajda, whom Esther had met in Austria and invited back to live with herself and Israel.<sup>54</sup> James would still have memories of Vajda thirty years later, describing in *Beyond a Boundary* ‘a Hungarian refugee in London between the two wars - he was not twenty years old’ as ‘one of the few who after a few hours of talk have left me as tired as if I had been put through a wringer’.<sup>55</sup> Yet they were not just a discussion group, but also campaigning activists. As James remembers, ‘in the summer we held meetings along the side of the road. We put up something to stand on and we sold books and spoke.’<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 1. For a description of one of these meetings in 1934, see Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 11-12, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Bogues, *Caliban’s Freedom*, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Esther and Israel Heiger were soon to separate, Esther declaring ‘I felt that there was no time for academics like Israel in a world that was going to blow up any minute,’ and moving in with Vajda. Elspeth Cameron, *Earle Birney; A Life* (Harmondsworth, 1994), pp. 142-43.

<sup>55</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 249. This for James put Hans Vajda into quite a select category alongside Frank Worrall, Leon Trotsky and Amy Ashwood Garvey. One ‘Hans V’ wrote a humorous review of *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* by the Stalinist Dmitry Mirsky. See Hans V, ‘England’s Intellectuals’, *New Internationalist*, 2/5, (August, 1935).

<sup>56</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 1. See also Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 168. One Special Branch report, dated 3 March 1937, notes James spent time at 29 Willow Road in Hampstead during 1933. TNA: KV/2/1824 7a.

James found his experience as a journalist could be of use to the Trotskyist movement. As he remembered ‘some of us were criticising the paper’ of the I.L.P., the *New Leader*, ‘not only because we differed from it politically’ but ‘as a piece of political journalism’. James collected together six issues of the *New Leader* to examine them, before his group in Hampstead, which sold the *New Leader* every week, sent off constructive criticisms to the paper’s editor, Fenner Brockway. As a result the paper, which had been in existence for forty years, was changed at a convention on the matter, where their criticisms were supported by half of those attending. James recalled this as ‘quite an achievement for the Trotskyists who were usually in permanent opposition on political issues’, and also ‘a certain step which pitchforked me virtually into the position of a party leader’ of the Trotskyists inside the I.L.P.<sup>57</sup>

Soon, branch meetings were being held at James’s flat on Heathcote Street, and one new recruit to the group, Louise Cripps, later recalled vividly one such meeting.<sup>58</sup> Cripps remembers that aside from herself, James and Esther Heiger, there were five other comrades at this meeting, all relatively young. There was Arthur Alexander Ballard, a young carpenter, Ajit [Kumar Mukherj] Roy, a young Indian law student and Earle Birney, a Canadian doctoral student of English - the latter both at the L.S.E. There were also two young Oxford students who were ‘old friends’, Jack Whittaker and Hilary Sumner-Boyd (an American ‘who had taken the pseudonym of Charles Sumner’).

Not sitting at the table but standing in a corner or moving, from time to time, from one place or another around the room, was an Indian named [Bal Krishna] Gupta ... a tall, somewhat plump ivory-faced man, very genial ... a close friend of James ... He never seemed to take part in any of the sessions ... but he was there often, almost daily. I was told by James that his father had a very large export business of jute in India and was a very wealthy man; that Gupta had a large allowance, but because of a restriction visa could not take part in any political groups or meetings.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Glaberman (ed.), *Marxism for Our Times; C.L.R. James on Revolutionary Organisation* (Jackson, 1999), p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 13-14. For James’s warm recollections of Arthur Ballard, see Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 2. James would in America use ‘A.A.B.’ as a

James's connection with Bal Krishna Gupta (1910-72), an economics student at London University, together with Ajit Roy was to be significant for the future history of Trotskyism in India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). As Charles Wesley Ervin notes, Gupta had met James and, 'like so many others, was dazzled'. Gupta then gave a copy of Trotsky's *History* to his Bengali friend Roy, then a member of the C.P.G.B. and League Against Imperialism (L.A.I.) and author of a pamphlet *In Defence of the Colonial Revolution*. Roy was impressed by reading Trotsky and inevitably introduced to James, soon becoming a leading Trotskyist in his own right. 'I had rarely come across a finer political polemicist than C.L.R. James', Roy recalled. 'His attacks on Stalinism were absolutely devastating.'<sup>60</sup> After helping win Gupta and Roy to Trotskyism, James would go on to help train up what Ervin describes as 'a cohort of Ceylonese students' from London and Oxford Universities in the Marxist Group during the 1930s including Anthony Theodoric Armand 'Doric' de Souza (1914-87), Sebastian Cyril Constantine Anthony 'Tony' Pillai (1914-2000), P.H. William Silva (1908-88) and Vallipuram Satchithanandam.<sup>61</sup>

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pseudonym, possibly as a tribute to Ballard. For more on Hilary Sumner-Boyd (1910-76), see Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, pp. 120, 231.

<sup>60</sup> Charles Wesley Ervin, *Tomorrow is Ours; The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48* (Colombo, 2006), pp. 89-90, 92, 152, 261. See also Charles Wesley Ervin, 'Trotskyism in India; Part One: Origins Through World War Two (1935-45)', *Revolutionary History*, 1/4, (1988-89). Gupta helped support James financially throughout the 1930s while he was in London, before returning to India at the start of the Second World War to become a stockbroker, an important Trotskyist in Calcutta and ultimately a M.P. For more on Gupta, see TNA: KV/2/1824/9a. From May 1938, Roy would share a flat with James on 59 Boundary Road, helping write, edit and sell *Fight* while trying to also helping build a Trotskyist group up in Calcutta. For more on Roy, see TNA: KV/2/1824/34a. For Roy's later warm memories of James, see Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, pp. 262-63.

<sup>61</sup> Ervin, *Tomorrow is Ours*, pp. 70, 251-52, 272, 276-78. James apparently also met with another significant figure in the history of Trotskyism in what was then Ceylon, Philip Gunawardena, who was in London as a student in the early 1930s before leaving in 1935. George Jan Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon: A Documentary History of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, 1935-1942* (Stanford, 1968), p. 11.



Ajit Roy in Bombay, 1947.  
Photo: *New Spark*, 25 October 1947.



S.C.C. Anthony Pillai, *circa* 1945.  
Photo: K. Appanraj, *Anja Nenjan: Thoyizh Sangha Medai S.C.C. Antoni Pillai Vazhkai Varalaru* (1995).

Plate 7. Ajit Roy and S.C.C. Anthony Pillai.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> [Photographs]. From Ervin, *Tomorrow is Ours*.

Aside from its international make up, what is noticeable about this little group at this stage is its relative youth and inexperience, typical of the Trotskyist movement at this time. However, there were exceptions. Ballard had been a former member of the Young Communist League and secretary of the Croydon branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement and Youth Anti-War Movement respectively, and James recalled him as a 'gifted intellectual with a proletarian base' of support.<sup>63</sup> Birney, who had arrived from Canada in late September 1934, while only thirty, was also a talented organiser. Ostensibly in London to work on his Ph.D. on 'Chaucer and English Irony', Birney had been won to Trotskyism in Canada and had experience of working 'underground' in the Communist Party of the U.S.A.<sup>64</sup>

On 3 November 1934, an important meeting of Trotskyists inside the I.L.P. in London took place, forming the Marxist Group, and vowing to attempt to transform the I.L.P. into a 'revolutionary party'. The original entrists around Denzil Dean Harber and Stuart Kirby now had a strength of some sixty members, having been very successful in the eight months since joining. From those already in the I.L.P., there were some experienced activists like Bert Matlow and Ernie Patterson, later general secretary of the Construction Workers' Union and who Wicks remembered as 'a marvellous debater, very earthy working class speaker'. However, the calibre of the new members had also been impressive. As well as James, Ballard, Birney and Archer, they included a German refugee, Frederick Marzillier, two South Africans, Ted Grant and Max Basch (Sid Frost), as well as veteran former Communists like Arthur Cooper.<sup>65</sup> The group soon formalised relations with the international

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<sup>63</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 2. On Ballard's activism, see TNA: KV/2/1824/31a.

<sup>64</sup> Soon after his arrival 'Earle Robertson' - Birney's pseudonym - was off to attend a Plenum of the International Communist League in Paris in October 1934 with Harber and Stuart Kirby. On his return to London, Birney had moved in with Kirby in his flat on Great Russell Street, and joined Holborn and Finsbury I.L.P. One gets insight into what this little group of Trotskyists was up to in the letters he wrote home during this period. For example, on 11 November 1934, Birney reported that 'last night I went with some comrades ... to see some working-class films, and hear songs and see a play in celebration of the anniversary of the Russian Revolution'. Cameron, *Earle Birney*, pp. 131-32, 136-37. See also McIlroy, 'John Archer (1909-2000)', p. 239. Birney, later to become Canada's poet laureate, returned to Canada in 1936. James planned a speaking tour of Canada and the U.S. in February 1937. TNA: KV/2/1824/1a.

<sup>65</sup> Other members of the Marxist Group at this stage included Wally Graham, the Australian Dr. Ryan Lyndal Worrall, Max Nicholls, Roma Dewar, Sid Kemp, Hilda Lane, Joe Pawsey, John Robinson, Tony Doncaster and George Weston (Morris). Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, pp. 167-68. See also Martin Upham, 'The Marxist Group in the ILP (1933-1936) [1980]',

Trotskyist movement and agreed to publish a monthly *Bulletin of the Marxist Group*, a 'duplicated pamphlet series, mostly of the writings of Trotsky and statements of the International Left Opposition'.<sup>66</sup>

However, while the Trotskyists in the I.L.P. themselves were steadily growing and had cause for optimism, by 1935, the I.L.P. itself, though retaining strong bases of support in many localities, had shrunk to only 4,392 members.<sup>67</sup> Stuart Hall has called the I.L.P. 'a Marxist party', and Farrukh Dhondy has gone as far as to argue that 'the dominant thinking within the I.L.P. was organised Leninism as defined by Leon Trotsky'.<sup>68</sup> In reality, as Brockway himself noted, 'the ILP experimented in many different directions, at one time approaching the Communist International, at another moving towards the Trotskyist position', while most of the rank and file members regretted ever abandoning the social democratic Labour Party. As both the fortunes of the C.P.G.B. and the Labour Party recovered, Trotsky now felt that the 'centrist' I.L.P., which vacillated between reform and revolution, had no real future and urged the Trotskyists to leave it in order to 'enter' the Labour Party. The old Communist League 'Majority' of Wicks and Groves, having failed to grow outside the I.L.P., had by now entered Labour and become the 'Marxist League'. In February 1935, Harber and Kirby with a handful of other Marxist Group members followed Trotsky's advice and left the I.L.P., soon forming the 'Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party'. The majority of the Marxist Group, increasingly under James's leadership, decided to stay and try and continue to build inside the I.L.P.<sup>69</sup>

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'<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/upham/04upham.html>' (11 August 2009), and Hallas, 'Revolutionaries and the Labour Party', p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985* (London, 1991), p. 443. As Archer remembered, an 'inner group' now met informally at Kirby's flat - the new leadership around Harber and Matlow consisting of a dozen comrades including himself and Kirby, James, Birney, May Matlow (Bert Matlow's partner), Margaret Johns, Esther Heiger, Ted Grant and Hans Vajda. Cameron, *Earle Birney*, p. 133. When the Marxist Group was forced to formally disband within the I.L.P, it was May Matlow who wrote the group's statement. See May Matlow, 'The Marxist Group Disbands' (May, 1936), Glasgow Caledonian University Archive of the Trotskyist Tradition (G.C.A.T.T.), Box 420, Item 15.

<sup>67</sup> Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*, p. 31. See also Gidon Cohen, "'Happy Hunting Ground of the Crank"? The Independent Labour Party and Local Labour Politics in Glasgow and Norwich, 1932-45', in Matthew Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grass Roots; Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45* (Aldershot, 2005).

<sup>68</sup> Hall, 'C.L.R. James: A Portrait', p. 6. Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*, p. 56.

<sup>69</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, pp. 128, 166, 196, 243. Stuart Kirby in 1935 moved to Japan to become Professor of Commerce at Imperial University in Tokyo and then ceased to be an

This is not the place to detail the subsequent course of James's involvement with British Trotskyism. The factional fights between James's Marxist Group and supporters of the C.P.G.B. inside the I.L.P. are well detailed, as is the famous clash between James and other anti-imperialists in the organisation and the 'Parliamentary Group' who led the I.L.P. over Mussolini's war with Ethiopia in 1935.<sup>70</sup> Harry Wicks, though not a member himself, would always praise the 'tightly organised' Marxist Group under James's leadership for its work in the I.L.P.<sup>71</sup> Yet from our examination of just the first year of James's involvement in the British Trotskyist movement we get some sense of the movement's small size and overwhelmingly (but not exclusively) petit-bourgeois class composition, with a high proportion of university students. To some extent this was inevitable at this early period, given 'Trotskyism' was in a sense something quite new. The Marxist Group's cosmopolitan character is also quite striking, including as it did political refugees from Germany and Hungary, white South Africans, Indian and Canadian students. James, the Trinidadian writer working as a cricket reporter for the *Manchester Guardian* would have not found it too hard to acclimatise to such a milieu. Yet despite a few former members of the C.P.G.B., veteran trade union militants with an experience of working-class struggles dating back to syndicalism before the Great War, the Marxist Group's combined total experience of the British working-class movement was not great. All of these factors meant that the political authority of the exiled Trotsky himself, at this time in hiding in France, over the tiny Trotskyist movement cannot be over-stated. Trotsky's initial judgement in suggesting 'entry' to the I.L.P. had been vindicated going by the success so far of the Marxist Group, and for James and others to now implicitly challenge Trotsky's new perspective about the necessity for his British supporters to now 'enter' the Labour Party would not have been easy.

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active Trotskyist. After working for military intelligence in the Far East, he returned to Britain in about 1965 to become a Professor, later Emeritus Professor, in Geography at Aston University. For an obituary of this Trotskyist-turned-spy, see Ted Crawford, 'Professor Stuart Kirby (1909-1998)', *Revolutionary History*, 8/1, (2001), pp. 272-74.

<sup>70</sup> See for example, Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream* and Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*. Duncan Hallas has seen the decision of the Marxist Group majority around James to stay in the I.L.P. and work for the 'unreal prospect' of winning it to revolutionary socialism after the debacle over Ethiopia as 'an early example of one of the perils of entrism, the process of adaptation and accommodation to the host organisation'. Hallas, 'Revolutionaries and the Labour Party', pp. 17-18.

<sup>71</sup> Harry Wicks, *Keeping My Head: The Memoirs of a British Bolshevik* (London, 1992), p. 179.

In James's case this would have been doubly so, for his intellectual debts to Trotsky in the formation of his own politics, were, as we have seen, quite considerable. Over this first year, James's knowledge and understanding had grown in leaps and bounds. As he remembered, 'I joined the Trotskyist movement and I learned Marxism in the Trotskyist movement'.<sup>72</sup> Clearly this is not the place to reiterate all the fundamental issues on which Trotsky's Marxism differed from that of the official orthodox Communist movement, including his defence of revolutionary internationalism as opposed to the construction of 'Socialism in One Country', his defence of classical Bolshevik strategy and tactics, as outlined at the first four congresses of the Communist International, such as the 'United Front' as opposed to the new-fangled 'Popular Front', and so on. Nor can we examine in detail how Trotsky continued to develop and enrich Marxist theory during this period, as for example with his outstanding analysis of the resistible rise of Adolf Hitler.<sup>73</sup> Yet it is important to stress the impact on James of two aspects of Trotsky's Marxism. Firstly was Trotsky's unrepentant commitment to the principle of anti-imperialism (in contrast to the Soviet decision to join the League of Nations in 1934). Secondly was his development of the Marxist theory of permanent revolution, and perhaps just as crucially, and linked to this, that of uneven and combined development under capitalism.

Some sense of how Trotsky's Marxism must have helped to shake James out of any residues of his earlier commitment to parliamentary socialism might be gleaned from a brief quote from the conclusion to Trotsky's *Where is Britain Going?* (1925).

The cold cruelty displayed by ruling England in its relations with the Hindus, Egyptians, and Irish, which has seemed to be an arrogance of race, will in the case of civil war reveal its true class character when directed against the proletariat ... In the decisive struggle against the proletariat, the English bourgeoisie will receive the most powerful support from the bourgeoisie of the United States, while the English proletariat will draw its strength in the first place from the working class of Europe and the subject nations in the

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<sup>72</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> James would later describe Trotsky's 'succession of articles' on fascism in particular as 'like a series of powerful searchlights in the prevailing darkness'. James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', p. 102.

British colonies. The character of the British empire will inevitably impart to this gigantic struggle the scale of a worldwide conflict. It will be one of the most impressive spectacles of world history. The destinies of the English proletariat will be bound up in this struggle with the destinies of all mankind. The entire world situation and the role of the English proletariat in production and in society assures it of the victory, provided its leadership be truly and resolutely revolutionary.<sup>74</sup>

One gets here a sense of how Trotsky's world-historical vision of the spectre of looming revolutionary upheaval across the British Empire might have inspired James, the campaigner for West Indian self-government. Its limitations as a guide to formulating a feasible strategic orientation with respect to how the 1930s actually unfolded aside, it is worth noting that Trotsky's anti-imperialism flowed from his Marxist understanding of the world system, in particular from the theory of permanent revolution which he himself had done so much to develop in opposition to the dominant evolutionist orthodoxy of the Second International, based initially on the experience of how the tiny working class in backward Tsarist Russia had created the world's first workers' council or 'Soviet' during the 1905 Revolution.<sup>75</sup>

In a work published first in 1930 as *Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky not only provided a summary of the theory as outlined in his previous 1906 work *Results and Prospects*, but also unrepentantly and unapologetically stated for the first time what he had only left implicit before, namely the universal applicability of the Marxist theory of permanent revolution.<sup>76</sup>

With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and

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<sup>74</sup> Leon Trotsky, *On Britain* (New York, 1973), p. 148.

<sup>75</sup> There is a sizeable existing literature detailing Trotsky's development of the Marxist theory of permanent revolution, dating from *Results and Prospects* (1906) through to *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), written in the light of the defeated Chinese Revolution of 1925-27. See firstly, Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects* (New York, 1972) but also the summaries in Duncan Hallas, *Trotsky's Marxism and Other Essays* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 21-36, John Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution* (Brighton, 1981), the first part of Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development; The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London, 1981) and Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice (eds.), *100 Years of Permanent Revolution; Results and Prospects* (London, 2006).

<sup>76</sup> Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution*, pp. 40-45.

genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses ... No matter what the first episodic stages of the revolution may be in the individual countries, the realization of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletarian vanguard.<sup>77</sup>

Trotsky condemned the Stalinist ‘stages’ model of revolution (first ‘democratic’ then ‘socialist’) as ‘lifeless’, and exposed the Second International orthodoxy of a division between ‘civilised’ and ‘other’ countries as irredeemably Eurocentric.<sup>78</sup>

The above-outlined sketch of the development of world revolution eliminates the question of countries that are “mature” or “immature” for socialism in the spirit of that pedantic, lifeless classification given by the present programme of the Comintern ... Backward countries may, under certain circumstances, arrive at the dictatorship of the proletariat sooner than advanced countries, but they will come later than the latter to socialism.<sup>79</sup>

If the Marxist theory of permanent revolution during the 1920s became the defining original sin of ‘Trotskyism’ for orthodox Communists as the rising Stalinist bureaucracy sought to isolate Trotsky’s Left Opposition, then for the Trinidadian James, who would have first read a brilliant concrete account of the theory in Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*, we can imagine things were somewhat different. Indeed, as Neil Davidson notes, Trotsky in his *History* transformed permanent revolution from a strategy ‘lacking a complete theoretical basis’ into a fully developed theoretical model applicable globally and based not only on ‘the

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<sup>77</sup> Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects*, pp. 276-77.

<sup>78</sup> For a useful discussion of Marx and Engels themselves, see August Nimtz, ‘The Eurocentric Marx and Engels and other related myths’, in Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (eds.), *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>79</sup> Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects*, p. 279. See also Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 85.

theory of uneven development' (which dated back to the Enlightenment) but also what he called 'the law of combined development'.<sup>80</sup>

The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of *combined development* - by which we mean a drawing together of the different steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms. Without this law, to be taken of course in its whole material content, it is impossible to understand the history of Russia, and indeed of any country of the second, third or tenth cultural class.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, were one wanting to better understand the history of a tiny Caribbean island like say Trinidad or Haiti, it was not enough to simply point to the obvious and talk about how their economic, political and cultural 'backwardness' in comparison to say Britain or France illustrated the 'unevenness' of development under capitalism. Colonialism had materially blocked the possibility of such countries enjoying what Trotsky had called 'the privilege of historical backwardness' which had seen countries like Germany and Japan 'skipping over intermediate steps' on the path to capitalist modernity. To understand 'backward' societies in the colonial world, one had to look in concrete detail at how, to quote Davidson, 'the archaic and the modern had melded or fused in all aspects of these social formations, from the organisation of arms production to the structure of religious observance, in entirely new and unstable ways'.<sup>82</sup>

For James, Trotsky's discussion of 'the law of uneven and combined development' could help explain like nothing else the 'amalgam of archaic with more

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<sup>80</sup> Neil Davidson, 'From Uneven to Combined Development', in Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice (eds.), *100 Years of Permanent Revolution; Results and Prospects* (London, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>82</sup> Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 27. As Davidson notes, paradoxically, then, 'Trotsky, who emphasised more than any of his contemporaries the reality of the world economy, was also the thinker who refocused attention from "the international" in general to its impact on individual nation states'. Davidson, 'From Uneven to Combined Development', pp. 22-23. See also the useful discussion in Neil Davidson, 'Putting the nation back into "the international"', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 22.1, (2009).

contemporary forms' that he noticed growing up in colonial Trinidad. When faced with implicitly racist accusations about how black people in the Caribbean were somehow 'primitive' and not yet 'ready' for self-government, James would always instinctively reply with examples from his experience of how 'Western' and 'modern' the people, politics and culture actually were. Now Trotsky's *History* had allowed James to more fully make sense of his life so far growing up in Trinidad, with its division between town and country, and between a more rural north and a more industrialised and developed south around the oil fields. Moreover, while James had grown up a 'country bumpkin', the Marxist theory of permanent revolution explained why a 'modern' labour movement around the nationalist T.W.A. had grown so rapidly in just over a decade after the Great War, and pulled behind it radicalising intellectuals like himself with its energy and resolve. Indeed, this is possibly part of the reason why James's descriptions of growing up in what he called the 'heterogenous jumble' of Trinidad in *Beyond a Boundary* seem to have echoes of Trotsky's descriptions of his own childhood growing up in *My Life*.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the early chapters of *Beyond a Boundary* might be read as a demonstration of how 'the law of uneven and combined development' shaped an individual life. As James would later declare, 'in analytical power and imaginative audacity' Trotsky's development of the Marxist theory of permanent revolution was 'one of the most astounding productions of the modern mind ... after Marx's discoveries political thinkers were limited to the use of his method. It has never been better used.'<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 31, 34.

<sup>84</sup> James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', p. 94. After studying Trotsky's *History*, it was going to have to take something quite special for a non-Marxist historian or philosopher to ever impress James again. In 1934 James bought the first volume of English liberal Arnold Toynbee's new book, *The Study of History*, and remembers 'I read half and I have never read anything by him since. I said whatever he has there is not for me.' James, 'Towards the Seventh', p. 236. Eric Williams once noted Toynbee's work not only 'fell back on simple faith in God' but its discussion of different 'civilisations' managed to ignore 'completely the civilisation of Africa before the European slave trade'. Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies*, p. 154.

## The Writing of *World Revolution*

On joining the British Trotskyist movement, James was almost immediately aware of the shortage of literature it had at its disposal and though he was personally fortunate in that he was able to read some of Trotsky's writings in French, he recalls that, aside from Trotsky's *History*, 'there were no books in English, only pamphlets'.<sup>85</sup> James later described how he 'came to the conclusion that what was needed was a published book summarising the whole Trotskyist position'.<sup>86</sup> The responsibility, he felt, should have been on a more experienced comrades shoulders, but 'no-one else wanted to write it'.<sup>87</sup> One reason why James felt confident enough to write such a book owed something to the amateurism of the C.P.G.B. In 1935, the turn of the Communist International towards the Popular Front meant that much of the C.P.G.B.'s previous literature dating from the 'Class-against-class' period of 1928-33 was now redundant. As James remembered,

Infected with the new virus [the Popular Front], the Communist Party bookshop dug down in its basement and raked up all these old books, pamphlets, and documents which had not been sold and could not relieve themselves of the old doctrine. The Communist booksellers could have destroyed them. But ... they placed these books out in front of their bookshop, selling them if need be by the dozen in order to get rid of them ... I got Number 1 of the *International Press Correspondence*, which contained articles by Lenin and Stalin to name two of the most important, denouncing what had become the new doctrine. I bought freely ... I was an unsuspecting buyer ... [and it] ended in my having a collection of material published by the Stalinists such as no one else whom I knew had.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Glaberman (ed.), *Marxism for Our Times*, p. 79.

<sup>87</sup> Selwyn R. Cudjoe, 'The Audacity of It All: C.L.R. James's Trinidadian Background', in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.), *C.L.R. James's Caribbean* (London, 1992), p. 46.

<sup>88</sup> James's friendly local anarchist bookseller Charlie Lahr was also on hand and keen to help James fill in any remaining gaps in his collection, 'or point out to me a special copy with a useful article for exposing these scoundrels'. James, 'Charlie Lahr', pp. 6-7.

In early 1936, Fenner Brockway had introduced James to Fredric Warburg, of the new publishing firm Secker & Warburg.<sup>89</sup> Warburg was sceptical about the need for a history of the Communist International, particularly one that few Communists in Britain would be rushing out to buy. To convince him, James sat down and using the material he had from his new extensive collection wrote a 20,000 word synopsis in a week, 'not only clear in analysis, but full of quotes'.<sup>90</sup> On 24 June 1936, James was able to write to Trotsky, then in Norway.

Dear Comrade Trotsky,

The obvious bankruptcy of the Comintern has had an effect in all quarters in England, although this effect has not penetrated to the masses as yet. After trying for nearly a year to get some publisher to take a book on the Rise and Fall of the Communist International, I have at last succeeded in getting a well-known firm of publishers, Secker and Warburg, to agree to publish a book on this subject. They have given me *carte blanche*, and at last all our material and our point of view will be put before the public in comprehensive form.

The publication of the book is extremely important for us ... The C.P. here are terribly frightened at the prospect, for they, more than anyone else, know all that is to be said about their criminal policy during the last few years.

Although I am dealing with the Comintern, yet I am devoting as much space to the development of the Soviet Union as to the strategy and tactics of the Comintern on the ground that it is impossible to understand either the one or the other without realising their basic unity.

I told the publishers that I thought you would contribute an introduction. I hope you will, and I would like to bring the MS. to you some time in August so that, if you have enough time, you can look at it for me and see that everything is in order. I am anxious about this because I have got the publishers' permission to print an appendix in which I shall castigate without mercy the Webbs, Maurice Dobb, Harold Laski, and all these Left-intellectuals who have been so constantly misleading the public about the Stalinist regime, especially in recent years.

At the same time I will be able to discuss with you important points of policy in regard to the English situation.

I hope that you and Madame Trotsky are well, and that I shall be able to see you both in some time in August as I suggest.

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<sup>89</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, pp. 206, 211. Among the other writers recruited through the I.L.P. by Warburg was George Orwell.

<sup>90</sup> Glaberman (ed.), *Marxism for Our Times*, p. 80.

With comradely greetings,  
Yours fraternally,  
C.L.R. James.<sup>91</sup>

The meeting with Trotsky in August 1936 did not in fact happen, probably due to the opening that month of the first Moscow Trial, 'The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre', which no doubt also explains why Trotsky was not able to find the time to read James's book *World Revolution* until 1939, let alone contribute an introduction. The Moscow Trials represented a tremendous new test for the tiny international Trotskyist movement. Though accusations by the Stalinist bureaucracy of their assisting 'counter-revolution' through acts of 'terrorism' inside the Soviet Union had become customary, in August 1936, however, surviving leaders of the 'Old Bolsheviks', including Zinoviev and Kamenev, apparently confessed to having conspired with Trotsky to assassinate the leader of the Leningrad Communist Party Sergei Kirov in December 1934, and of now plotting to assassinate Stalin and other Soviet leaders to 'restore capitalism'. The Executive Committee of the Communist International (E.C.C.I.) ordered the leaders of Western Communist Parties on 28 August 1936 'to use the trial ... for the political liquidation of Trotsky and Trotskyism as a fascist agency that, in capitalist countries masking itself with radical phrases disorganises the workers' movement'.<sup>92</sup>

It was not just hardened Communists who went along with the notion that Trotskyists were dangerous quasi-fascist 'wreckers' of socialism. Whole swathes of the British Left, and even the I.L.P. refused to hold meetings about the Moscow Trial. Harry Wicks remembered 'the feeling of frustration, the feeling of defeat, that the Trials gave one. I can remember vividly Reg Groves expressing it that the Moscow Trials "represents curtains for us" - that was his phrase.' The growing sense that the mounting atmosphere of hysteria and hatred created by Stalinist terror represented a life and death question for the British Trotskyist movement led to the three main groups feeling, as Wicks put it, 'we have got to get together, we have got to unify, to

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<sup>91</sup> Trotsky Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Bms Russ 13.1 (2068-69).

<sup>92</sup> Internal E.C.C.I. document quoted in William J. Chase, *Enemies Within the Gate? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934-1939* (London, 2001), p. 158.

erect some defence'.<sup>93</sup> On 31 August 1936, a mass meeting of British Trotskyists in Hyde Park called for an international investigation into the accusations made, demanding Trotsky win the right of political asylum in Norway, free from internment and fascist thugs.<sup>94</sup> On 9 September, James joined Henry Sara and Wicks from the Marxist League at a meeting of the newly formed British Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky at Essex Hall in the Strand, London, the first of many such central London meetings that the Trotskyists organised.<sup>95</sup> Wicks in particular was very eager for a firm position to be taken with respect to the slander and vilification of Trotsky, who he had met in Copenhagen in 1932 (as the sole 'delegate' from Britain), as he knew from his own experience the 'Show Trial' in Moscow was based on lies. 'I knew [Leon] Sedov [Trotsky's son] was not in Copenhagen ... the Bristol Hotel [allegedly a meeting place, but in fact a building that did not exist in 1932] was another lie ... so I stood on firm ground.'

The British Trotskyists, though small, were therefore able to make an impact out of all proportion to their size over this question, disrupting and intervening in public Communist meetings. Wicks remembers a packed meeting at this time in Conway Hall on Theobalds Road at which an Indian journalist, Raj Hansa, just as the meeting was about to start leapt to his feet at the front of the Hall. 'Mr Chairman, would it be in order, before the commencement of this meeting, if we were to ask everybody to rise in honour of the old companion of Lenin, Zinoviev, who has been shot!' In the resulting 'pandemonium', the Communists were forced to let Wicks, a former C.P.G.B. member, speak from the platform.<sup>96</sup> James remembers he 'made it a habit to wreck the Stalinist meetings'. 'I used to go to their meetings and take only two people with me and their meetings would break up, because I had the Stalinist statements in my pocket and I would have a lot of copies and give the chaps copies

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<sup>93</sup> Socialist Platform, *Harry Wicks; A Memorial* (London, 1989), p. 14. See also Brian Pearce's outstanding 1969 essay, 'The British Stalinists and the Moscow Trials' in Brian Pearce and Michael Woodhouse, *A History of Communism in Britain* (London, 1995).

<sup>94</sup> *Fight*, 1/1, (October, 1936).

<sup>95</sup> Bornstein, and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 231. For more on the British Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky, see the papers of Jock Haston at the University of Hull. DJH/18.

<sup>96</sup> Socialist Platform, *Harry Wicks*, pp. 15, 17. It seems this meeting was organised by the Friends of the Soviet Union on 29 September 1936. According to a Special Branch report on that date, James attended and spoke for five minutes in the discussion. 'He commented adversely on the trial and showed that his sympathies were with the prisoners'. TNA: KV/2/1824/1z.

and say “Now have a read ... ”” The official trial transcripts contradicted themselves, as was clear to anyone prepared to read them carefully. James, with his excellent memory and keen eye for detail, was able to remember and recall with ease relevant facts or quotes to expose any new Communist argument he came across.<sup>97</sup>

In this midst of this campaigning work and despite not securing Trotsky’s direct assistance when writing his ‘Rise and Fall of the Communist International’, James succeeded in writing it in the winter of 1936 with the help of his comrades in the Trotskyist movement. Of particular help here was the veteran Wicks, who not only had seen the likes of Kautsky, Bukharin, Radek and Trotsky in action himself but also had a rich collection of unpublished and original documents from his training at the Lenin School in Moscow in the late 1920s.<sup>98</sup> James remembers ‘writing the book with great speed, never once having to go to the British Museum or to any other collection of books’.<sup>99</sup> Wicks remembered how James ‘laboured through an enormous literature, working from a small room in Gray’s Inn Road, heated by the smallest of gas fires’.<sup>100</sup>

However, it is clear that James had been reading rather wider than simply as much Lenin and official pronouncements of the Communist International in their full original versions as was possible (rather than selected quotes from safely mangled later official versions). As Al Richardson has noted, ‘James was particularly open to theories of the sort dismissed at the time by Trotskyists as “ultra left”’, including ‘literature of the French and American non-Stalinist and non-Trotskyist left’.<sup>101</sup> In

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<sup>97</sup> ‘The famous one was when they [the British Communists] held a meeting and I came there at nine o’clock. They were speaking when I came in. They knew what was up and the chairman spoke for ten minutes and said that they had a full discussion of the question and must draw the meeting to a close.’ Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> ‘No less important,’ Wicks remembers, ‘I commented on each chapter as he drafted it’. Wicks, *Keeping My Head*, pp. ix, 123-24, 180. Socialist Platform, *Harry Wicks*, p. 14, and Al Richardson, ‘Introduction to the Paperback Edition’, in C.L.R. James, *World Revolution 1917-1936; The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (New Jersey, 1994), p. xiii.

<sup>99</sup> James, ‘Charlie Lahr’, pp. 7-8.

<sup>100</sup> Wicks, *Keeping My Head*, p. 180. James’s flat on Heathcote Street was off Gray’s Inn Road. James also spent part of the winter of 1936 down in Brighton working on *World Revolution*.

<sup>101</sup> James was in touch with some Canadian supporters of American ex-Trotskyists B[ert].J. Field, and he read material by Albert Weisbord and Hugo Oehler. Field, who had been expelled from the Communist League of America in 1934, and Oehler, had formed the ‘Revolutionary Workers League’ in America in late 1935, which was opposed to ‘entrism’ and had its own publication. Richardson, ‘Introduction to the Paperback Edition’, p. xv. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 256, Leon Trotsky, *Writings, 1937-8* (New York, 1976), p. 467, and Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, pp.

part this came from the same sense of 'fair play' that had once led to James to read Stalin after reading Trotsky, and now led him to read left wing critics of Trotsky. Perhaps it also owed something to the rather eclectic environment of the I.L.P., with its various traditions including council communism and diverse other forms of non-Leninist socialisms.<sup>102</sup> However, it was also due to the fact that James's Marxist Group were in official dispute with Trotsky's International Secretariat and indeed internally in something of a crisis by the winter of 1936 having been effectively forced out of the I.L.P. Moreover, they were planning to go it alone as an independent organisation, even though this ran against the expressed wishes of Trotsky's International Secretariat, who were even considering the option of refusing to recognise them if they did not now follow the great bulk of the rest of the British Trotskyist movement into the Labour Party.<sup>103</sup> When James finished writing *World Revolution* in January 1937, his decision to dedicate it to his tiny group of comrades in 'The Marxist Group' was political in more senses than one.

In late January 1937, a second Moscow Trial was announced, charging Trotsky, who had now taken refuge in Mexico, *in absentia*, for working for the military defeat of the Soviet Union, in formal agreement with Hitler and the Emperor of Japan. Radek, Pyatakov and sixteen others sat in the dock apparently confessing to the charge of forming an 'Anti-Soviet Bloc' with Trotsky.<sup>104</sup> The leaders of Western Communist parties dutifully followed new orders to intensify their 'campaign in the

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106-108. James also seems to have been in contact with the group around former American Communist leader Jay Lovestone. See TNA: KV/2/1824/1z.

<sup>102</sup> For council communism within the I.L.P. see Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*, p. 111. Though interestingly, several leading members of the I.L.P., who James would have known well, Jennie Lee, John Paton and C.A. Smith, had visited Trotsky in France in 1933. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast; Trotsky: 1929-1940* (Oxford, 1979), p. 263. Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*, p. 102. James never broke off contact with the I.L.P. completely, and as late as 1938 continued to contribute to *Controversy*, and speak at coffee-socials organised by circles of *Controversy* readers. See *Controversy*, 18, (March, 1938). Indeed, he was due to address a central London I.L.P. meeting on 'The Importance of Political Principle' on 14 December 1938. See *Controversy*, 25, (October, 1938).

<sup>103</sup> John Archer, 'Britain: Entrism and the Labour Party, 1931-1937', *Revolutionary History*, 8/1, (2001), p. 260. See also the Resolution from the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, 13 December 1936, available on the website of *Revolutionary History*.

<sup>104</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p. 360.

press and among the masses against Trotsky and Trotskyism as a terrorist agency, a gang of wreckers, subversives, spies, and accomplices of the German Gestapo'.<sup>105</sup>

The British Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky in the midst of this growing atmosphere of hysteria and hatred called a meeting under the banner of 'Justice for Leon Trotsky!' for 10 February 1937 in Memorial Hall in Farringdon pessimistically expecting it to be the 'usual suspects'. Yet this London meeting was to be a memorable one, as over six hundred people turned up, far above expectations and some, including Labour M.P. Ellen Wilkinson, even had to be turned away. James spoke alongside not only the veteran British Trotskyists Reg Groves, Henry Sara and Harry Wicks (and a former leading British Trotskyist Stewart Purkis), but also the socialist Labour M.P. for Nelson, Sydney Silverman. As James recalled, 'there was a tremendous contrast between that meeting and meetings we [the Marxist Group] held ... but on the Moscow Trials a lot of Communist Party members came and listened ... It was a crisis for them'.<sup>106</sup>

James was in his element at such meetings, deconstructing the slanderous Stalinist myths and smears with indignation and humour. On 14 February 1937, he would debate the pro-Communist Labour M.P. and King's Councillor D.N. Pritt at a meeting of the Friends of the Soviet Union chaired by Victor Gollancz at Friend's Meeting House on Euston Road.<sup>107</sup> Many veterans of the early British Trotskyist movement had warm memories of James's taking apart representatives of the C.P.G.B. in various debates. For Charlie Van Gelderen, 'James was probably the finest orator our movement has produced, at least in the English-speaking world, and the movement made full use of his talents'. He pays tribute to James's 'active role in combating the vicious Stalinist campaign against Trotsky and Trotskyism', noting 'he was the one person feared by the Stalinists as being more than a match for people

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<sup>105</sup> The secretariat of the E.C.C.I. sent out desperate memorandums in February 1937 calling for campaigns amongst 'the broadest popular masses' aimed at the 'entire smashing of Trotskyism'. Trotskyists were now not only apparently 'the most dastardly enemies of the USSR' but 'warmongers' and 'enemies of the people's liberty' and the 'independence of nations'. Chase, *Enemies Within the Gate?* pp. 192, 202-203.

<sup>106</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 8, Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, p. 451, and Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 231. According to Special Branch, about 900 people attended this meeting, and there was organised heckling of speakers by members of the Friends of the Soviet Union. TNA: KV/2/1824/5b.

<sup>107</sup> TNA: KV/2/1824/6a. On Pritt, see Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 217. For a report of a speech made by James at a meeting of the Marxist Group on 11 March 1937, see TNA: KV/2/1824/7b.

such as Communist party leaders Harry Pollitt and R. Palme Dutt'.<sup>108</sup> One can imagine it was very hard for Communist speakers to make out that James, who had made his name opposing Italian Fascism as the Chair of the I.A.F.A., was some sort of 'Trotsky-Fascist'. James was, after all, probably the most well known black intellectual in British politics, and like the Jewish Trotsky, seemed hardly the sort of person Hitler would want running the Soviet Union instead of Stalin.<sup>109</sup> After seeing James in action, the C.P.G.B. agreed to only debate with Trotskyists as long as he was not the speaker. However, often the Trotskyists would set up such a debate with Communists such as Andrew Rothstein and Pat Devine, only to send James along instead of the agreed speaker.<sup>110</sup>

### **C.L.R. James's *World Revolution***

On 12 April 1937, in the midst of the torrent of lies against 'Trotsky-Fascism', James's *World Revolution, 1917-1936*, was published. At 440 pages and selling for the not inconsiderable sum of 12s 6d, Secker & Warburg marketed it enthusiastically, declaring it 'the first comprehensive study of world history since 1917 from a Trotskyist viewpoint, with much new material on the development of Russia since Lenin's death'.<sup>111</sup> 'Here in fact is a well-documented textbook of the Trotskyist movement; convincing and exciting. It is of vital importance that it should be widely read in *all* circles of the left.'<sup>112</sup> The title seems to have been chosen as a direct repost

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<sup>108</sup> Van Gelderen, 'C.L.R. James - Thinker, Writer, Revolutionary', p. 42. See also Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 232. James's oratory also won recruits for the Marxist Group. See the obituary of Alec Acheson (1912-96), *Revolutionary History*, 6/4, (1997), p. 242.

<sup>109</sup> As the novelist Nigel Balchin noted in August 1937 of the 'logic' behind the allegations against Trotsky as a lifelong fascist agent, 'there he was subtly working for fascism years and years before anybody else, Mussolini and Hitler included, realised there was such a thing. The reasonable assumption is that Trotsky hated communism so much that he went abroad and plotted to bring communism about in Russia, so that when communism *had* been brought about in Russia, he would have something nice and big to overthrow. Few of us, I suspect, would have thought as far ahead as that.' Quoted in Paul Flowers, *The New Civilisation? Understanding Stalin's Soviet Union 1929-1941* (London, 2008), p. 147.

<sup>110</sup> Accordingly, 'after these brushes the Stalinists refused to debate with the Trotskyist leaders, just as they did with the I.L.P.' Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 232.

<sup>111</sup> *The Plebs*, (May, 1937).

<sup>112</sup> *Fight*, 1/5, (April, 1937).

to leading C.P.G.B. theorist Rajani Palme Dutt's recent work *World Politics, 1918-1936*, (Left Book Club choice in July 1936), an examination of the world of 'official politics' which focused on the Great Power relations between States as they had evolved, discussing, for example, 'The New Power-Relations After the War' and with the ubiquitous homage to Russian state power, 'The Victory of Socialism in the Soviet Union'.<sup>113</sup> Contra Dutt, James kept his eye focused on the political activity and development of the 'international revolutionary movement against Capitalism'.<sup>114</sup>

As a historian who was simultaneously researching the interplay between the Great French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution, James was well suited to explore the ramifications of the international for the national with respect to the Russian Revolution. If the Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture ultimately failed, James would write in 1938 in *The Black Jacobins*, 'it is for the same reason that the Russian socialist revolution failed, even after all its achievements - the defeat of the revolution in Europe'.<sup>115</sup> As James insisted in *World Revolution*,

The Russian Revolution of October, 1917, began as the first stage in the international Socialist revolution, and despite the strangeness and variety of the historical developments of the past years, the two remain indivisibly linked. We shall show in detail not only how the revolutionary working-class movement, through the Third International, has influenced the development of the Soviet Union, but how the development of the Soviet Union has in turn exercised a constant influence on the fortunes of the Third International and, through it, on the fate of the whole world.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Rajani Palme Dutt, *World Politics, 1918-1936* (London, 1936).

<sup>114</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. xxv.

<sup>115</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 230.

<sup>116</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 20

For Workers' Power and Socialism



THE NEW LEADER

EDITED BY FENNER BROCKWAY... Printing and Publishing Dept... 26, St. Mark Street, Glasgow, C.I.

April 16, 1937

SCARED!

THE Labour Party Executive is evidently frightened by the support which the Unity Campaign is receiving. Its leadership supposed—indeed, the Daily Herald wrote this—that the campaign would peter out before Easter.

Bogey of "Moscow Gold"

The insinuations are that the Unity Campaign is a Communist manoeuvre undertaken at the command of Stalin and financed with Moscow gold.

The manifesto speaks of "large sums of money, the sources of which are not disclosed," being spent on the campaign, of Harry Pollitt getting his orders from Stalin and his money from Moscow.

The Daily Herald sneers at "the unadmitted disloyalty of the campaign, its secret funds, its gospel of hate, its subservience to Moscow."

Mr. Hugh Dalton talks of the Socialist League as "little more than a rich man's toy," and says that the Unity Campaign is being financed by one or two rich men.

These assertions in relation to the Unity Campaign are miles from the truth. The Unity Campaign is not a Communist manoeuvre.

It was not initiated by the Communist Party, but by the Socialist League, and at the beginning of the negotiations the Communist Party appeared doubtful.

It asked for time to consider the matter before committing itself. This was not the attitude of initiators.

The Cost of the Campaign

There is no secret about the financing of the Campaign. It was begun by a donation of £10 each from the Socialist League, the I.L.P., and the C.P.

We can understand the Labour Party officials not believing this. Such a Campaign would have cost them £3,000. The thousands who have come to the Unity Campaign meetings, and the spontaneous enthusiasm which has led them to donate collections amounting to over £2,000, must seem like a fairy tale to Transport House.

Little men like to behave like dictators, but the Labour Party Executive should understand what it is doing.

If it proposes to proceed with the expulsion of the members of the Socialist League and some of the sincerest men and women in the Labour Party and the Trade Union Movement because they have taken part in the Unity Campaign, it will strike a deadly blow at the British Working-class Movement.

Stafford Cripps, Aneurin Bevan, George Strauss and their like stand for something, but it is much more than individuals who are at stake. The Unity Campaign offers to the Labour Party an enthusiasm and conviction which would revolutionise the whole Movement.

THE RISE AND FALL of the Communist International

MANY readers of the New Leader have heard C. L. R. James speak. They have listened with amazement to his facility of utterance, the rapid clothing of clear thinking in correct words, the mass of facts, the combination of a broad survey with a command of detail.



C. L. R. James

The same faults mark his book "World Revolution, 1917-1936," published by Seeker and Warburg at 12s. 6d. this week. Such faults are not so serious in a book, because one is able to read paragraphs a second time and absorb facts at leisure; but James's writing swoops one on as in a torrent and page after page one has to pause to gasp for breath.

The book is over 150,000 words in length, but it must be read three times to realise its significance. It is a book which will influence substantially the thought of the time. Communists may attempt to ignore it, but they cannot. It will be discussed inevitably and arouse fierce controversy.

The sub-title of the book is "The Rise and Fall of the Communist International." It is a critical history, written with an intense conviction which often leads to a biased view. It tells of the conditions which preceded the formation of the Third International, the struggle between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks in Russia on the eve of its birth; the successes and inspiration of the Leninist period, and then it traces the departure from the line of world revolution to the present position of sacrificing the class struggle for the policy of alliance with "democratic" Capitalist Governments and "democratic" Capitalist parties.

Like other Trotskyists, James ascribes this deterioration to the adoption by Soviet Russia of the principle of "Socialism in a single country." This is a negative, incomplete and misleading diagnosis. Its effect is to discourage the effort to achieve as much Socialism as possible in any given country.

If workers win power over any part of the earth's surface where the raw materials are available to satisfy the needs of life, it is their duty to take advantage of such circumstances to establish the Socialist order of society. Such conditions exist in the United States of America. Except for rubber and tea every article necessary for human enjoyment is to be found within

its frontiers, and given a Socialist Movement capable of the task, and a defence force competent to resist Capitalist attacks, a fully developed Socialist State could be organised. The same is broadly true of the vast territories

against war was a clumsy and inadequate expression of this, but at least it was a beginning; it placed the emphasis upon independent class action by the workers.

In 1932 the working-class of Europe was moving towards this. The Labour Party Conference that year endorsed the principle and referred to its Executive and the T.U.C. General Council its application. But by the following year this healthy development had been stopped. The Communist International had added its influence to that of the

reactionaries of the Second International, who urged the workers to look to the League of Nations and collective pacts between Capitalist Governments rather than to their own action as a means of resisting war.

There is not space here to emphasise how this change in policy threw over the whole Marxist conception of the State. Marx taught that in the class struggle leading to Socialism the Capitalist machinery of the State must be destroyed and replaced by working-class organs of power. Parliaments must be used as platforms to expose Capitalism and to win certain concessions from it, but never must the working-class identify itself with a Capitalist State or modify the development of its own organisation and action against it.

It was not in that way that Soviet Russia and the Communist International used the League of Nations and pacts with Capitalist Governments.

Reviewed by FENNER BROCKWAY

the view that to maintain Soviet Russia it was necessary to throw over the policy of world revolution and to seek in its place alliances with Capitalist Governments against its most open enemies, Germany and Japan.

The immediate effect of this policy, as James's review of the working-class history of the last ten years clearly shows, was to destroy the whole class struggle basis of resistance to war. The Third International had its birth in the Marxist and Leninist conviction that the correct Socialist line for workers in time of war is to refuse collaboration with Capitalist Governments and to prepare to end the war by social revolution. The general strike tactic

became a substitute for the use of working-class organisation and action.

In the NEW LEADER these dangers of the changed line of the Communist International were pointed out at once, and the danger was also stressed that in the Imperialist countries which Soviet Russia sought as allies the revolt of the subject peoples would be discouraged. But I confess that I did not foresee the next danger. It was James Maxton who warned that it would follow.

The effect of the alliance of Soviet Russia with Capitalist Governments has been not only to weaken the class struggle against war and the struggle of subject peoples against Imperialism, but also to weaken the class struggle against Capitalism. The stage of alliances with democratic Capitalist Governments was followed by the stage of alliances with democratic Capitalist parties. Democracy became more important than Socialism. The test division was no longer between the possessing-class and the working-class, but between those who believed in democracy and those who did not. How far this process has gone is seen in this year's Communist inspired slogan for May Day—the historic demonstration of class solidarity for Socialism has now

When the national sections of the Second International deserted class solidarity in 1914 to line up with their Capitalist Governments in the war, Lenin declared the necessity for a new International, but he did not take steps to form it until the Soviet Revolution had given his principles a mass backing. The I.L.P. declares now for the necessity of a new International, but rejects the fantastic Trotskyist policy of forming an International to fight on the basis of the class struggle without a working class to back it.

It may be that a Spanish Revolution will form the background of the new International as the Russian Revolution did of the Communist International. It is too early to say. Our task in the present stage is to prepare the way by stimulating revolutionary thought and action on class lines and to make contacts with all the developing trends in this direction, both in the Second International, the dissident sections of the Third International, and the independent revolutionary parties. From these will come at the historical moment, if leadership, stimulation, and organisation be given, the forces which will clothe the principle of class action with mass class power.

THIS IS CAPITALISM

Capitalist Generosity

AN old-age pensioner was up before the court for having "picked up" a threepenny comb in the Caledonian Market, London. In addition to his old age pension, this man received 4s. a week pension after 35 years of service on the Midland Railway.

The generosity of some concerns to their faithful servants should really be recorded in gold letters!

The Duke Economises

EVERYBODY will be surprised to

learn, where prices are lower than in the village, and he eats very frugally on tea, bread and butter and fruit for lunch, and a simple evening dinner.

Altogether, Edward is trying to live within his income (which is not stated). A change for him, but not such a wearying job as faces the man on the Meuns Test.

Long-term Unemployment

WHILE there is less short-term

of a job, the longer they are likely to remain out, losing gradually their skill and training, while employers get young, untrained and cheap labour to meet the demands of mechanised production.

Catholics in Spain

HERE is an item of news which proves conclusively that Roman Catholics in Spain who do not participate on the side of the Fascists are permitted to continue their work un-

Plate 8. Fenner Brockway reviews C.L.R. James's World Revolution. 117

117 [Article]. From New Leader, 16 April, 1937.

James's book did not then claim to be a full history of the post-war world but rather a development of this thesis, one he hoped would demonstrate 'not only the strength of principles but the power of leadership'.<sup>118</sup> When they finally met in 1939, Trotsky himself told James he thought *World Revolution* 'a very good book', though marred by 'a lack of dialectical approach, Anglo-Saxon empiricism, and formalism which is only the reverse of empiricism'. In particular Trotsky thought James failed to adequately track the degeneration of the Communist International from 1917-36 carefully enough, in particular with respect to the failure of the German Revolution in 1923 and the Chinese Revolution in 1927. Whereas James had provocatively headed a chapter 'Stalin Kills the 1923 Revolution', Trotsky felt that 'the German revolution had more influence on Stalin than Stalin on the German revolution'.<sup>119</sup>

James had, perhaps, been a little too deeply influenced here by his German anarchist friend Charlie Lahr on matters relating to the German labour movement. James recalled Lahr's concrete knowledge had helped him

... penetrate more profoundly than usual not so much into the political arguments and conflicts but into the actual feeling of the different social organisations in Germany before Hitler. I do not hesitate [in chapter 12, 'After Hitler, Our Turn'] ... in showing that the Communist International deliberately manoeuvred Hitler into power ... there is a sense of journalism from day to day in the chapter which is the result of my constant seeking out Charlie as events happened from day to day.<sup>120</sup>

Trotsky was understandably less impressed with the specificities of this aspect of James's argument, noting that 'I cannot agree that the policy of the International was only a materialisation of the commands of Moscow', while the idea that Stalin had a 'plan' to 'allow fascism to come into power is absurd ... a deification of Stalin'.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 162.

<sup>119</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Discussions with Trotsky', in C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory; Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 1984), pp. 60-64.

<sup>120</sup> James, 'Charlie Lahr', pp. 8-12. See also the discussion in James, *Notes on Dialectics*, pp. 38, 149.

<sup>121</sup> James, 'Discussions with Trotsky', pp. 60-64.

Yet whatever specific errors of detail the work contains, James's pioneering demonstration of his underlying thesis has arguably stood up well, though no doubt the opening of the Comintern archives necessitates even further revision of many of his specific points. Of course James was essentially building on Trotsky's analysis, in particular his 1928 draft statement in response to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, *The Third International After Lenin*. James made time to read fresh from the French press Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, which though written by June 1936, was not published in Britain until May 1937, one month after *World Revolution* came out. Trotsky's pioneering materialist analysis of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state run by a ruling parasitic caste of Stalinist bureaucrats was endorsed and expanded on by James in *World Revolution*.<sup>122</sup> James himself notes that 'how much the book owes to the writings of Trotsky, the text can only partially show'. Buhle has therefore argued that *World Revolution* is 'James's least original major work' and, as we have seen, James was on the whole keen to make sure that 'everything was in order' from a Trotskyist point of view.<sup>123</sup>

Yet *World Revolution* was in two important ways strikingly original for a Trotskyist book of the period, implicitly challenging and questioning Trotsky himself and in a sense even beginning to see further than him. Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* had been written before the first of the Moscow Trials and before the eruption of the Spanish Civil War and so unsurprisingly, James was not hesitant about exposing the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism. Though one reviewer at the time claimed that the work was simply 'sheer naked Trotskyism', *World Revolution* actually showed James was already starting to react against what he felt were the limitations of Trotsky's analysis of Russia and the Trotskyist movement as he had experienced it, and it is worth looking how these feelings found expression in the work.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See also the review, '*The Revolution Betrayed*', in *Fight*, 1/9, (August, 1937), which noted 'the revolution is betrayed, not destroyed, because collective ownership is still maintained'. In 1940, James would note of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* that 'despite unceasing criticism of his methods and his conclusions from all quarters, the fact remains that over the years, there is simply no analysis of the Soviet Union worth bothering about except his own'. James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', p. 97.

<sup>123</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. xxvi. Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 51.

<sup>124</sup> Trotsky's analysis of the Stalinist bureaucracy by 1937 had hardened from that of 1936. In a letter to James P. Cannon on October 1937, he wrote 'some comrades continue to characterise Stalinism as "bureaucratic centralism". This characterisation is now totally out of date. On the international arena, Stalinism is no longer centrism, but the crudest form of opportunism and social patriotism. See Spain!'

The first issue was the question of the character of the Soviet Union itself, the ‘Russian Question’, about which James was as concerned with as anyone in the Trotskyist movement.<sup>125</sup> Trotsky’s idea that state ownership of the means of production meant that the Soviet Union was somehow ‘socialist’ was deeply problematic in terms of classical Marxist theory. As Padmore had noted in *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936) there were ‘state-built, state-owned and state-managed’ railways in colonial West Africa but this was very far from ‘socialism’. Indeed, it was imperialism or indeed ‘state capitalism’ as ‘the people, that is, the 25,000,000 Blacks don’t derive any more advantages from these railways than if they were privately owned’.<sup>126</sup> When in February 1937 the famous British administrator, researcher and head of the L.S.E. Sir William Beveridge in *The Times* noted the probable necessity for state ownership of British industry in any future war, James himself, in an editorial for *Fight*, commented that what Beveridge had in mind was ‘not socialism ... the ruling class in an emergency is willing to take over private property and administer it by the State in order to gain greater efficiency for war’.<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, the idea that the rise of a blood-soaked dictatorship of Stalinist bureaucrats constituted ‘the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union’ seemed disgustingly perverse to James. An article in the *Manchester Guardian* in February 1936 had suggested the Soviet Union ‘may not be the Socialism of the fathers or the prophets, but it works’. As their former cricket correspondent now countered in *World Revolution*, ‘it is not the Socialism of the prophets, it is not any kind of Socialism, and it does not work in any precise sense of that word’.<sup>128</sup> Contrary to Marx and Lenin’s predictions, ‘far from withering away, the State is more omnipresent than ever’. Stalin’s ‘terrorist regime’ for James was not only ‘a

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Quoted in Will Reisner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International (1933-40)* (New York, 1973), p. 399. H.L. Beales, ‘Critics of Stalinism’, *Fact*, 3, (1937), p. 98.

<sup>125</sup> Contra to the argument of Brett St Louis that James as a Pan-Africanist was ‘less fixated’ on this than other ‘orthodox Trotskyists’. St Louis, *Rethinking Race, Politics, and Poetics*, p. 96.

<sup>126</sup> George Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa* (London, 1936), p. 292.

<sup>127</sup> ‘Editorial: A Call to Revolutionaries’, *Fight*, 1/5, (April, 1937).

<sup>128</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 16-17. 301.

caricature of socialism' but a 'revolting tyranny', indeed a 'political tyranny without parallel in Europe'.<sup>129</sup>

Indeed, by the time he wrote *World Revolution* James was already showing an openness to those arguing the Soviet Union had become a state capitalist society.<sup>130</sup> According to Special Branch, when James spoke in defence of Trotsky after the first Moscow Trial on 9 September 1936, 'he compared the conditions of the British and Russian workers, adding that a form of capitalism was creeping into the Soviet State'.<sup>131</sup> One intriguing reference in *World Revolution* was to the classic work *The Secret of Hitler's Victory* by the now forgotten but once legendary veteran Russian Marxist Peter Petroff (1884-1947) and his German wife, Irma (1891-1968), which had been published in 1934 by Woolf's Hogarth Press.<sup>132</sup> The Petroff's Marxist analysis of the rise of the German Nazis made a passing reference in conclusion to 'established state capitalism - as we see it today in Russia'.<sup>133</sup> Another reference was to the German historian Arthur Rosenberg, who, with other leading members of the German Communist Party had broken with orthodox Communism as supporters of

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<sup>129</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 301, 409, 411-12.

<sup>130</sup> As Richardson notes, 'James was acquainted with the "State Capitalist" theories about the U.S.S.R. held by the French Communist group led by Henri Chazé'. Richardson, 'Introduction to the Paperback Edition', p. xv. Closer to home, James also referred to the writings of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (S.P.G.B.) in *World Revolution*, a tiny group which argued Russia had been state capitalist essentially since the Russian Revolution itself, and indeed James would debate with G. Clifford, a representative of the S.P.G.B. in London on 28 January 1938. James, *World Revolution*, pp. 132-33. Information from the S.P.G.B. website.

<sup>131</sup> TNA: KV/2/1824/1z. 'Stalin, he said, was striving for National Socialism, while Trotsky was upholding International Socialism'.

<sup>132</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 345-46. In 1907, Peter Petroff had arrived in Britain as a refugee from Russia and worked with John Maclean and other socialists up in Glasgow, learning English and relating to them in turn something of the history of the Russian revolutionary movement. Imprisoned during the Great War, Petroff maintained links with Trotsky and returned to Russia in 1918, joining the Soviet government. By the 1930s, after being sent to Germany as a special envoy and witnessing the disastrous role Stalinism played at the time of the rise of Hitler, he had broken with the Communist International. Harry McShane and Joan Smith, *Harry McShane; No Mean Fighter* (London, 1978), pp. 77-80, 89-90, 139, 151-52. Murdoch Rodgers and James J. Smyth, 'Petroff, Peter (1884-1947)', in William Knox (ed.), *Scottish Labour Leaders 1918-39; A Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1984), Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21*, Nan Milton, *John Maclean* (London, 1973), pp. 108-112.

<sup>133</sup> Peter Petroff and Irma Petroff, *The Secret of Hitler's Victory* (London, 1934), p. 123. See also Philip Wallace, 'G.C.A.T.T. and the Archeology of British Trotskyism', *Critique*, 37/2. (May, 2009), p. 276.

Zinoviev in the late 1920s.<sup>134</sup> In 1934, an English translation of Rosenberg's *A History of Bolshevism; From Marx to the First Five Plan* (1932) was published, the first serious academic treatment of the subject.<sup>135</sup> As well as noting the U.S.S.R.'s 'modernist civilization' which flowed from its 'system of State Capitalism by means of which the governing bureaucracy contrives to maintain its hold', Rosenberg here also paid tribute to the work of his former comrade, the 'left Communist' philosopher Karl Korsch.<sup>136</sup> Both had left Germany in 1933 when the Nazis came to power, and like Rosenberg, Korsch came to see Russia as 'state capitalist'.<sup>137</sup> James apparently met Korsch for discussions while the latter was in exile in London, probably in about 1936, and the relationship between the two remains intriguing.<sup>138</sup>

Yet perhaps the most significant influence on James's evolving thinking on the 'Russian question' was that of Boris Souvarine. Born Boris Liefschitz in 1885 in Kiev, Souvarine had been a founding member of the French Communist Party and, having known Trotsky since meeting him in Paris during the Great War, spoke bravely against Stalin in Moscow. Though Trotsky had high hopes of Souvarine forming a viable French Trotskyist movement, since 1929, Souvarine had broken off good relations with Trotsky, attacking Leninism and describing the Soviet Union as 'state capitalist'.<sup>139</sup> In his 1935 biography *Staline*, first published in Paris, he had

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<sup>134</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 168, 175, 178, 185. For more on Rosenberg, see Francis L. Carsten, 'Arthur Rosenberg: Ancient Historian into Leading Communist', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8/1, (1973). The impact of Rosenberg's Marxist historical work was registered among British Communist intellectuals in the 1930s. Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', in Maurice Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes; Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton* (London, 1978), p. 23.

<sup>135</sup> For discussion of how Rosenberg's thesis differs from that of James, see Joseph Carter, 'History of the CI', *New Internationalist*, (February, 1938). The only other comparable work was the exiled Russian historian Michael Florinsky's *World Revolution and the U.S.S.R.* (1933), which James noted 'though bourgeois in outlook, has grasped the essentials of Russian history since 1924'. James, *World Revolution*, p. 374.

<sup>136</sup> Arthur Rosenberg, *A History of Bolshevism; From Marx to the First Five Years' Plan* (London, 1934), pp. viii, 236-37. In 1938, in *Democracy and Socialism*, Rosenberg reiterated the fact that during the 1920s 'the Russian Revolution grew inert and Moscow became the capital of a bureaucratic system of state capitalism'. Arthur Rosenberg, *Democracy and Socialism; A Contribution to the Political History of the Past 150 Years* (London, 1939), pp. vii, 339, 348.

<sup>137</sup> Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory* (London, 1977), pp. 50-57, 163, 166.

<sup>138</sup> James's meeting with Korsch is recorded by Kent Worcester, from an interview in 1981 with American historian George Rawick. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 30.

<sup>139</sup> Archer, 'C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38', p. 73, and Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p. 46.

maintained that ‘the Federation of Socialist Soviet Republics, the very name a four fold contradiction of the reality, has long ago ceased to exist’, and ‘Soviet state capitalism’, ‘so-called Soviet society’ rests ‘on its own method of exploitation of man by man’.<sup>140</sup> James read *Staline* as part of his research for *World Revolution*, and was clearly impressed, describing it as ‘a book with an anarchist bias against the dictatorship of the proletariat but irreproachably documented, very fair, and full of insight’.<sup>141</sup>

While James’s *World Revolution* on the face of it rejected such heresy, there are sections which clearly do point towards his future as a leading Marxist theorist of the U.S.S.R. as a state capitalist society.<sup>142</sup> Early on in *World Revolution*, James noted that ‘for Marx and Engels, collective ownership did not mean Socialism. Everything depended on the development of the productive forces which this collective ownership would make possible.’<sup>143</sup> James quoted a telling passage from Engels’s *Socialism; Utopian and Scientific* detailing the circumstances in which a ‘deficient and restricted development of production’ necessitated a class division between the exploited and exploiters, between those who are ‘exclusively bond slaves to labour’ and ‘a class freed from directly productive labour, which looks after the general affairs of society; the direction of labour, State business, law, science, art, etc.’

It is therefore the law of the division of labour that lies at the basis of the division into classes. But this does not prevent this division into classes from being carried out by means of violence and robbery, trickery and fraud. It does not prevent the ruling class, once

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<sup>140</sup> Boris Souvarine, *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* (London, 1940), pp. 564, 570. Christopher Phelps, ‘C.L.R. James and the Theory of State Capitalism’, in Nelson Lichtenstein (ed.), *American Capitalism; Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2006), p. 165.

<sup>141</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 140. Trotsky was less impressed with Souvarine’s *Staline*. While he admitted that ‘the factual and documentary side of Souvarine’s work is the product of long and conscientious research’ he felt ‘the historical philosophy of the author is striking in its vulgarity’. Leon Trotsky, ‘Stalinism and Bolshevism’, 29 August 1936, quoted in Al Richardson, ‘Foreword’, *What Became of the Revolution: Selected Writings of Boris Souvarine* (London, 2001), p. v. Privately, Trotsky was less generous, writing to Philip Rahv in 1936 that Souvarine was ‘completely devoid of theoretical capacity’ and he felt ‘his biography of Stalin is the work of a journalist, the essential value of which is derived from his quotations’. Quoted in Archer, ‘C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38’, p. 73.

<sup>142</sup> Phelps, ‘C.L.R. James and the Theory of State Capitalism’, pp. 159-60.

<sup>143</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 28.

having the upper hand, from consolidating its power at the expense of the working class, from turning their social leadership into an intensified exploitation of the masses.

As James had noted, ‘an understanding of this elementary piece of Marxism would riddle the delusion that there is no exploitation of man by man’ in the Soviet Union.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, ‘the fiction of workers’ control, after twenty years of the revolution, is dead. But the bureaucracy fears the proletariat. It knows, none better, the temper of the people it so mercilessly cheats and exploits.’<sup>145</sup> One who might have demurred on this point was actually Trotsky himself, who saw the Stalinist bureaucracy as a brutal oppressor, but not actually an exploiter of the Russian working class.<sup>146</sup> Yet for James, the first Five Year Plan meant that ‘the remnants of workers control were wiped away’.<sup>147</sup> ‘The Russian proletariat, after its Herculean efforts, seems to have exchanged one set of masters for another, while the very basis of the proletarian state is being undermined beneath its feet.’ James declared the methods of Stalin’s industrialisation drive seemed to be just ‘discovering what the capitalists knew hundreds of years ago ... where will all this end?’<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 27-28. The seventeenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in January 1934, the ‘Congress of the Victors’, had declared ‘the victory of socialism in all branches of national economy had abolished the exploitation of man by man’. Quoted in Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern* (London, 1985), p. 139.

<sup>145</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 371.

<sup>146</sup> Trotsky felt the Stalinist bureaucracy was a ‘temporary’ phenomenon, and in 1939 declared ‘Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we fixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?’ See Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, p. 14, and Alex Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Minneapolis, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>147</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 296.

<sup>148</sup> See James, *World Revolution*, pp. 17, 415.

Such ideas were increasingly in the air on the far-left during the 1930s.<sup>149</sup> After writing *World Revolution*, James would in 1937 write an introduction for an eyewitness account of revolutionary Spain through the eyes of two surrealist poets who had gone to fight for the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification of Spain (P.O.U.M.), *Red Spanish Notebook* by Mary Low and the Cuban Trotskyist Juan Breá. In his conclusion to that work, Breá had speculated about the motives of the Soviet Union with respect to the Spanish Civil War, noting 'let us suppose that Russia is no longer a proletarian state but is making her first steps towards capitalism'.<sup>150</sup> One witness to Stalinist counter-revolution in Spain, George Orwell, in his 1938 classic *Homage to Catalonia* described the 'socialism in one country' being built in Russia by Stalin as little more than 'a planned state-capitalism with the grab-motive left intact'.<sup>151</sup>

Coming in the midst of Stalin's Great Terror, the Spanish Civil War was to be of critical importance for the political evolution of not only James, but also his key intellectual collaborator during the 1940s, Raya Dunayevskaya, with whom he would later form the 'State-Capitalist Tendency' (later the 'Johnson-Forest Tendency') within American Trotskyism. As Peter Hudis has noted, the role of Stalinism during the Spanish Civil War 'presented revolutionaries with what Dunayevskaya was later

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<sup>149</sup> In part this was because, at that time, as Trotsky himself had noted, the term 'state capitalism' had 'the advantage that nobody knows exactly what it means'. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York, 1989), p. 245. One former comrade of James's from the Marxist Group, the Australian doctor and philosopher of science Dr. Ryan Lyndal Worrall in late 1939 would be the first Trotskyist in Britain to put forward a substantial and sophisticated state capitalist analysis of Russia, in the I.L.P. journal *Left*. See R. L. Worrall, 'U.S.S.R.: Proletarian or Capitalist State?', *Left*, 39, (December, 1939). Intriguingly, Worrall had in 1933 published *The Outlook of Science*, a work defending the dialectic, which was read and praised by Trotsky. See 'A Tribute to Ryan Worrall (1903-1995)', *Revolutionary History*, 6/2-3, (1996). See also Phelps, 'C.L.R. James and the Theory of State Capitalism', pp. 165-66, 331-32, and Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union; A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates Since 1917* (Chicago, 2007), pp. 57-60.

<sup>150</sup> Mary Low and Juan Breá, *Red Spanish Notebook; The First Six Months of the Revolution and the Civil War* (London, 1937), pp. 254-55. See also Appendix G. One friend of Low and Breá's who travelled with them in Spain was the French surrealist poet Benjamin Péret who would in 1946 also describe the Soviet Union as state capitalist. See Van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, pp. 108-110. It is interesting to learn from Andy Durgan that 'in the early 1950s, the POUM adopted a State Capitalist analysis of the USSR and Eastern Bloc'. Andy Durgan, 'Marxism, War and Revolution: Trotsky and the P.O.U.M.', *Revolutionary History*, 9/2, (2006), p. 60.

<sup>151</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London, 1989), p. 83. As Orwell noted of the Soviet Union in 1939, 'Is it Socialism, or is it a peculiarly vicious form of state capitalism? All the political controversies ... for two years past really circle round this question.' Quoted in John Newsinger, 'Destroying the Myth: George Orwell and Soviet Communism', in Paul Flowers (ed.), *George Orwell: Enigmatic Socialist* (London, 2005), p. 138.

to call the “absolute contradiction” of our age - the emergence of counter-revolution from *within* revolution’. Trotsky’s Russian language secretary from 1937-38, Dunayevskaya later recalled how she first became critical of Trotsky’s analysis of the Soviet Union as a ‘degenerated workers’ state’ during this tumultuous period. ‘Out of the Spanish Civil War there emerged a new kind of revolutionary who posed questions, not only against Stalinism, but against Trotskyism, indeed against all *established* Marxisms.’<sup>152</sup>

On 3 September 1938, at the founding conference of the Fourth International held in the home of Alfred Rosmer in Périgny, a village near Paris, James intervened forcefully in the debate that took place about whether Trotskyists should call for the defence of the U.S.S.R. in case of war. As he remembered later, together with some from the American and Polish contingent, ‘we were against the Trotskyist position on the defence of the U.S.S.R.’.<sup>153</sup> By now James had sought out Souvarine himself in Paris and had begun work translating *Staline*, his greatest work, into English.<sup>154</sup> For the English edition, Souvarine wrote a new postscript, ‘The Counter-Revolution’, in which he pondered the recent experience of Stalinist terror, a process in which ‘stains of blood become letters of fire, and dark places are illuminated by a sinister glow’,

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<sup>152</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism* (Chicago, 1992), pp. x-xi.

<sup>153</sup> ‘We put forward our position and had it copied into the minutes, but we didn’t press the issue. The Polish comrades told us “We are not going to vote for you ... but we are sympathetic to you, James. You have the line, although we are not supporting it”. Nevertheless we had a powerful influence on that conference ...’ Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 10. See also Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, pp. 419-21. The surviving minutes do not actually record this discussion, though on the ‘Russian question’ James did not yet think the Stalinist bureaucracy did constitute a new ruling class, in control of the state power, but like the majority of the conference he did agree with Shachtman’s call for further discussion. Reisner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International*, pp. 291-94. James also recalled this conference in C.L.R. James, “‘Indomitable Rebel’”. Review; *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky 1929-40*; Isaac Deutscher’, *New Society*, 28 November 1963.

<sup>154</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 140, and Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 45. James’s translation of *Stalin* was not published in Britain until September 1939. However, Warburg remembers ‘the translation, by CLR James, had been in preparation for many months, and the delay was fortunate’. Coming out as it did a month after the August 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact, people were questioning Stalin’s policy. Warburg notes it sold over 1,700 copies in the first three months but ‘if had come out 2 months earlier’ it ‘would have been greeted with abuse’. See Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, pp. 270-71. One reviewer noted Souvarine’s translator ‘might usefully have supplied an occasional footnote for the benefit of the less expert reader, misspells a few Russian names’. Nonetheless, Souvarine’s *Stalin* ‘is probably the most destructive study of the existing regime in Russia that has appeared in print’. ‘Stalin: The Legend and The Enigma’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30 September 1939.

and the extent to which Stalinism was now akin to fascism in Germany, both 'totalitarian' regimes with Stalin as 'the Bolshevik Fuehrer'.<sup>155</sup>

James's increasingly critical reading of the evolution of the Soviet Union and its bureaucratic ruling elite raised the obvious question of why Trotsky and the Left Opposition had not been able to realise the danger and threat Stalin posed earlier - a danger and threat James stressed that Lenin in his *Testament* had himself realised - and so put up a more effective fight against the rising Stalinist bureaucracy after 1923. As James argued in *World Revolution*, after Lenin's final incapacitation,

[Stalin] bureaucratized the party more and more, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bucharin [sic] helping. What must not be forgotten is that this struggle went on in a narrow circle, so small had the governing group become, even after Lenin. The masses played little part, and Trotsky either could not or dared not bring the masses into it, as Lenin would infallibly have done sooner rather than later.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover, James clearly felt part of the problem was the nature of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and there was therefore an inherent danger within classical Bolshevism, and with the party Lenin had built which had become transformed into a machine of bureaucratic corruption, allowing a tyrant like Stalin to wield unparalleled power. Running throughout *World Revolution* is a serious and sophisticated discussion of democratic centralism, that again perhaps owes something to the impact of James's discussions with not only Korsch but also Souvarine.<sup>157</sup> It is

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<sup>155</sup> However, analytically, Souvarine now thought use of the term 'capitalism' to describe Russia was too kind to the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy, and in fact Russia had fallen back into what he called 'a sort of bureaucratic feudalism' with Stalin, 'the red Tsar', presiding over a 'kind of serfdom', a system of 'slavery'. Souvarine, *Stalin*, pp. 599, 644, 661, 673-74.

<sup>156</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 147. Trotsky accepted as historically inevitable a period of reaction after the revolutionary heights of 1917. As Trotsky insisted in discussion with James in 1939, the defeat of the Left Opposition in Russia must be explained 'by the dialectic of history, by the conflict of classes, that even a revolution produces a reaction'. James, 'Discussions with Trotsky', p. 55. In 1940, James would stress that 'nearly all' of the mistakes Trotsky made 'flowed from a constant incapacity to acknowledge, perhaps even to himself, the full depravity of Stalinism'. James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', p. 103.

<sup>157</sup> Korsch since the 1920s had urged 'an immediate and total break with Leninism' given Leninism was in reality now only a 'bourgeois and anti-proletarian state ideology' of the Stalinists. 'Our task' he added, 'consists in destroying that dead "communism" that lives on as a depressing and often idiotic spectre in today's proletarian workers' movement; sending it to its death and carrying on with double energy today's contemporary and real struggles of the working class that are already beginning with perceptible new power.' Kellner (ed.), *Karl Korsch*, pp. 62-63.

also interesting here to note that James was on reasonably good terms with some of the leading anarchists in Britain during the late 1930s. Aside from his relationship with Lahr, James had by accident crossed paths with Vernon Richards, a young Italian who edited *Spain and the World*, the main British anarchist paper of the day (previously and subsequently called *Freedom*), which he had launched in late 1936 when only 21 years old.<sup>158</sup> As the editor of the Trotskyist journal *Fight* (launched in October 1936), James met Richards on one of his regular visits to the printers at Narod Press in 129/131 Bedford Street, Whitechapel, which was run by a team of Jewish apprentices under ‘Papa Naroditsky’ and his three sons. As Richards remembers,

... to produce each issue of *Spain and the World* meant supervising the work of the apprentices in the composing department (where the type was made up into the pages) ... apart from the boys themselves ... one had the opportunity to meet other editors supervising their journals ... [including] the gentle-speaking West Indian Marxist CLR James who was producing his *Fight!* No punch-ups, political or otherwise.<sup>159</sup>

Indeed, James would on occasion rally to the side of the tiny British anarchist movement against the I.L.P. and C.P.G.B. in *Fight*.<sup>160</sup>

The necessity of a tightly organised and disciplined mass revolutionary party like Lenin’s Bolsheviks, Trotsky insisted, had been demonstrated beyond all doubt by the successful October revolution in Russia in 1917 (and then conversely in a

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<sup>158</sup> Richards, born Vero Recchioni, the son of an Italian anarchist, had been expelled from France in 1935 for anti-fascist activity. Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*, p. 126. It is interesting to note the title of the I.A.S.B. bulletin launched in mid-1937, *Africa and the World* in the light of James’s connection with the editor of *Spain and the World*.

<sup>159</sup> Vernon Richards, ‘Printers We Have Known: 1936-1986’, in *Freedom; Anarchist Magazine, Centenary Edition*, 47/9, (October, 1986). *Freedom*, the main British anarchist publication, then called *Spain and the World* used the Narod Press from October 1936-December 1936 and then from June 1937-September 1938. I am indebted to David Goodway for this material.

<sup>160</sup> In November 1937, James would take issue with Fenner Brockway in *Fight* for forbidding I.L.P. speakers to stand on the Anarchist platform during the May Day celebrations in Britain in 1937 in order to appease the C.P.G.B. ‘The Trotskyists and the Anarchists are small. The Stalinists have money, press, incredible brazenness. True they are kicking the I.L.P. in the front and rear, digging them in the eye and spitting on them. All that Brockway can do is to complain querulously and allow them to terrorise him from standing up for the Anarchists and the Trotskyists. The moral cowardice of these men!’ *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937).

negative fashion by the failure of ‘the German October’ of 1923).<sup>161</sup> However, for many Western observers, the Stalinist dictatorship, with its bloated privileged bureaucratic elite, was declared to have been the logical, organic and inevitable result of ‘Leninism’ in power.<sup>162</sup> Against this, Trotsky had pointed to the concrete backward material conditions prevailing in Tsarist Russia before 1917 and then during the Russian Civil War that historically explained the roots of the rising Stalinist bureaucracy, and insisted that Stalinism was the ‘direct negation’ of Leninism. James concurred, noting that the Great Terror showed that ‘the Stalinists seek to kill Leninism’.<sup>163</sup> Throughout *World Revolution* runs a vigorous defence of the necessity for a ‘Leninist’ party, yet rather more heretically James also found much of value in some of the warnings about where ‘Leninism’ could lead that had been made by the young Leon Trotsky and also Rosa Luxemburg.

James for example discussed the charge of ‘substitutionism’ made against ‘Leninism’ by the young Trotsky out of his early fear of ‘the replacement of the dictatorship of the proletariat by the dictatorship over the proletariat, of the political rule of the class by the organisational rule over the class’.<sup>164</sup> Trotsky himself had never returned to these earlier charges against Leninism after he joined Lenin’s Bolsheviks in 1917. However, for James, ‘the whole history of the Russian Communist Party and of the whole Communist International from the moment Lenin lay hopelessly ill’ up to the final triumph of Stalinist dictatorship proved Trotsky’s ‘specific criticisms which he levelled against Lenin’s principles as they worked out in practise cannot be dismissed, least of all today’. Indeed, they ‘must have had solid foundation’. In an apparent implicit criticism of his leader, James noted that Trotsky

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<sup>161</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Lessons of October* (London, 1987).

<sup>162</sup> This was also the argument of the likes of Boris Souvarine. See Richardson, ‘Foreword’, p. v.

<sup>163</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 420. On Stalin’s terror, see also C.L.R. James, ‘Trotskyism’, *Controversy*, 1, (October, 1937).

<sup>164</sup> Trotsky had argued that Lenin’s democratic centralism meant that ‘the organisation of the party substitutes itself for the party, the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation, and finally the dictator substitutes himself for the Central Committee’. James, *World Revolution*, p. 51. James even quoted Plekhanov’s ‘equally memorable and prophetic words: “The ultimate end of all this will be that everything will revolve around a single man who, ex providentia, will concentrate all the power in himself.”’

‘has since admitted that he was wrong; too generously, for the question is not so simple ... there is more in this than simple wrong and right’.<sup>165</sup>

It is important perhaps to note how much of James’s subtle questioning of ‘democratic centralism’ and his warning of the inherent danger of substitutionism was a reflection of the disheartening experience of his internal battles with Trotsky’s International Secretariat. While proud to be building the movement in Britain, James must have despaired at the control it exerted over his little group.<sup>166</sup> Trotsky, in an attempt to overcome the vast chasm that existed between the gigantic tasks ahead and the puny state of the actual resources at the Trotskyist movement’s disposal, had turned to some very centripetal organisational measures to try to build a stable revolutionary apparatus up around him.<sup>167</sup> Each national section of the Trotskyist movement was expected to participate in the discussion of the way forward for other sections, and be aware of the details of other section’s faction fights and splits. As Trotsky had written to a British supporter in 1936, members of the movement are ‘spread all over the world’ but ‘work closely together, mutually criticising and controlling each other’. The Trotskyist movement also adopted a very elaborate and tight organisational structure, and at their 1936 conference, set up a ‘General Council’, an International ‘Bureau’ and an ‘International Secretariat’. While this replicated the structures of the Communist International, unfortunately the Trotskyist movement was so weak it made any stability very difficult, even leaving aside the additional difficulties posed by Stalinist infiltration, sabotage and terror operating at the highest level. If the leadership of a revolutionary organisation is constantly changing, it is harder for it to build up any real trust and ‘moral capital’ with the rank

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<sup>165</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 49-51. For one explanation why Trotsky never returned to the warning of ‘substitutionism’ he made in 1904, see Tony Cliff, ‘Trotsky on substitutionism’, in Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman, and Leon Trotsky, *Party and Class* (London, 1996).

<sup>166</sup> For more discussion of this, with some interesting testimony from a member of the Oehlerite Leninist League in Britain, Ernie Rogers, who met up with James in October 1937, see Al Richardson, ‘Preface’, in *Fight; Facsimile Edition of British Trotskyist Journals of the 1930s* (Gothenburg, 1999).

<sup>167</sup> As Trotsky insisted in an article on the legacy of Luxemburg in June 1936, this approach resulted not from any personal desire to construct a new bureaucracy but from his understanding of the world situation during the 1930s. The ‘present epoch’ post 1917 had seen ‘immeasurable energies’ and opportunities for world revolution squandered, resulting in ‘the great depression in the proletariat and the successful Fascist advance’. Moreover, ‘the miserable collapse of the Third International’ meant that ‘without the slightest exaggeration it may be said: The whole world situation is determined by *the crisis of the proletarian leadership*’ and so what was now critically necessary was ‘the purposeful selection of the cadres of a new International’. Leon Trotsky, ‘Luxemburg and the Fourth International’, in Leon Trotsky, *Writings, 1935-6* (New York, 1970), p. 111.

and file members. As Tony Cliff, himself a Trotskyist at the time in Palestine, has described, ‘the structure of a political organisation cannot rise very far above its real base ... an overheavy structure under such conditions could only be an unnecessary burden’.<sup>168</sup>

It is only if we understand this context that we can see just why James was now so keen to use the young Trotsky’s critique of ‘democratic centralism’ to attack Stalin’s ‘abuse of democratic centralism which Trotsky had always feared in any system which, like Lenin’s, so openly glorified central control’. James noted that after Lenin’s last struggle to stop Stalin failed, ‘with the development of the bureaucracy the democracy dropped completely out of centralism. From the Russian party it spread to the whole International. Centralism which helped to create the International helped to ruin it.’<sup>169</sup> Instead of building up a truly international revolutionary leadership composed of those able to think critically for themselves, it created ‘a body of leaders who looked always to Moscow and were incapable of independent appraisal and action’. James seems determined to ensure that ‘centralism’ would not ruin the Fourth International in the same way, perhaps speculating on what might happen once Trotsky himself was not available to offer clear guidance, but was also conscious that ‘there is no specific [solution] for this problem’.

It will have to be fought out anew in each party as every emergency presents itself. But that can best be done only when there is a clear understanding of the issues involved. It is perhaps the greatest of the many bows that the revolutionary Ulysses will have to bend.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Tony Cliff, *Trotsky: The darker the night the brighter the star, 1927-1940* (London, 1993), pp. 301-303. See also Reisner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International*, pp. 151-52.

<sup>169</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 50-52. James had quoted the young Trotsky: ‘During the last three to four years of intense party frictions, the life of very many committees has consisted of a series of coups d’état in the spirit of our court revolutions of the eighteenth century. Somewhere way up on top somebody is incarcerating, replacing, choking somebody else, somebody proclaims himself something - and as a result, the top of the committee house is adorned by a flag with the inscription, “Orthodoxy, centralism, political struggle.”’

<sup>170</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 52-53, 189. In June 1937, it seems James developed this argument in *Fight*. ‘Not least of Lenin’s genius was his understanding of men. There never was a 100% Bolshevik, unless it was Lenin himself ... from 1903 to 1921 he dominated the party. But being selfless and devoted, he used the centralised power always for the good of the party. Democratic Centralism is the only possible system for the revolutionary party, yet it has its dangers. Plekhanov who first sided with Lenin in 1903, then left him over the question of organisation, wrote prophetic words: “The ultimate

For both New Leftists like Paul Buhle and orthodox Trotskyists like the late Al Richardson, this discussion of revolutionary leadership in *World Revolution* constitutes an organisational attack on Leninism and Trotskyism.<sup>171</sup> As Buhle asserts, ‘Trotsky himself was unlikely to accede to this formulation ... he took criticism of himself badly and outright disagreements still worse’.<sup>172</sup> In fact, Trotsky himself, in a private letter to James P. Cannon on 17 May 1938, regretted that he had not yet had time to read *World Revolution* but had been told James had criticised him ‘very sharply from an organisational point of view’.

I suppose that this criticism at that time was a theoretical justification of his own policy towards the Independent Labour Party, but that is not of importance. I suppose that he now considers his own criticism as a hindrance to friendly collaboration with us ... it is very important to convince James that his criticisms are not considered by any one of us as an item of hostility or as an obstacle to friendly collaboration in the future. It would be very bad if under the influence of this fact and some others he finished with a rupture from us ...<sup>173</sup>

Moreover, James’s discussion of Leninism in *World Revolution* surely stands as a thoughtful contribution to the question of revolutionary organisation, and one

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end of all this will be that everything will revolve around a single man who, ex providentia will concentrate all power in himself.” All was well so long as the single man was Lenin.’ ‘Politics and psychology’, *Fight*, 1/7, (June, 1937).

<sup>171</sup> James himself remembers that soon after moving to America to work with the S.W.P., ‘when I began to attack the [orthodox] Trotskyist position [over Russia], some people in the United States said, “When we read your book *World Revolution* we said that it won’t be long before James is attacking the Trotskyist movement” ... it was pointed out to me in a particular paragraph. I agreed with the interpretation.’ Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 9.

<sup>172</sup> Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 52. It might be worth recording here that for Trotsky, ‘revolutionary discipline has nothing to do with blind obedience’, and he declared any revolutionary worthy of the name ‘does not take anything on word. He judges everything by reason and experience’. Indeed, ‘a Bolshevik is not merely a disciplined person, he is a person who in each case and on each question forges a firm opinion of his own and defends it courageously and independently, not only against his enemies but inside his own party’. Quoted in Paul Le Blanc, ‘Trotsky, Leon (1879-1940)’, in Immanuel Ness (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>173</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Writings, 1937-8* (New York, 1976), p. 329. Trotsky also criticised Cannon for previously having ‘forgotten’ to invite James over to the ‘Pan-American Conference’ after having agreed to do this.

rooted within the tradition of classical Bolshevism.<sup>174</sup> Just as Napoleon Bonaparte liked having officers around him who were independent minded enough to question and disagree with him at times, so the old revolutionary general Trotsky was content for James to discuss the question of political organisation with him for an hour or so when they met in 1939. While there was not quite an exact meeting of minds over democratic centralism and the historical experience of classical Bolshevism, Trotsky acknowledged to James that ‘it is very important to bring up these questions periodically’.<sup>175</sup>

Today, *World Revolution* is a forgotten book, part of that submerged revolutionary democratic tradition that defended the political honour and internationalist principles of Marxism against the betrayals and bloodshed of Stalinism. Outside Britain, the British colonial authorities, with James now himself under surveillance as a threat to imperial ‘security’, naturally moved to censor it, forbidding the export of the work to India, though Richardson noted it did make some impact after being smuggled in.<sup>176</sup> Despite Communist denunciation of it as ‘objectively fascist’, Warburg remembers it ‘sold moderately well’ and ‘became a kind of Bible of Trotskyism’.<sup>177</sup> With its publication, as Martin Upham notes, James became ‘the first British Trotskyist to make a substantial theoretical contribution’, and Wicks’s review in *Fight* gives a sense of just how important the book was for the movement, describing it as ‘a book that every socialist should read and every

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<sup>174</sup> Indeed, in his (posthumously published and never fully finished) biography of Stalin written during the late 1930s Trotsky himself acknowledged that *Our Political Tasks*, his 1904 critique of Bolshevik centralism had correctly warned about the attitudes of the ‘committee-men’ who ran the Bolshevik apparatus. Trotsky also noted ‘the negative aspect of Bolshevism’s centripetal tendencies’ manifest at the Third Congress of the Russian Social Democrats in 1905, and again criticised the procrastinating role of the Bolsheviks during 1917, when ‘the masses ... were more revolutionary than the Party and the Party more revolutionary than the machine’. See Michael Löwy, *The Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx* (Chicago, 2005), p. 191.

<sup>175</sup> Trotsky also conceded to James during the discussion of the failure of the Left Opposition to Stalin during the 1920s that ‘all of us at various times wrote absurd things. I will grant you that.’ James, ‘Discussions with Trotsky’, pp. 62, 64.

<sup>176</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 264. For its impact in India, see Richardson, ‘Introduction to the Paperback Edition’, p. xiii.

<sup>177</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, pp. 214-15. See also Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade*, p. 5, and Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 219. Worcester reports that James himself felt it was ‘a piece of work which was recognised everywhere as worthwhile’. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 246. After he wrote it, a recurring nightmare of his since a schoolboy - ‘the report would come. It would say that I was not trying. My father would be very angry and I would be upset for days’ - went for good.

revolutionary possess'.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, *World Revolution* is perhaps best situated alongside Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and Victor Serge's *Russia Twenty Years After* (all first published in English in 1937), as part of a classic Marxist trilogy on the destiny and fate of the Russian Revolution.<sup>179</sup>

James himself remembered it was 'a piece of work which was recognised everywhere as worthwhile,' even achieving reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement* and in America.<sup>180</sup> It certainly filled an important vacuum in the literature of the non-Stalinist Left in Britain. The veteran British socialist Raymond Postgate in the *New Statesman* described James's *World Revolution* as 'unique of its kind' and 'very badly needed', while a reviewer in Postgate's new left wing monthly *F.A.C.T.* noted 'we welcome Mr. James's illuminating essay ... a careful, disciplined anti-Stalinist history of the course of the revolution since 1917'.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, even some British Communists of the 1930s were intrigued enough to risk a brief look. Tom Kemp, who was later to break with the C.P.G.B. after 1956 and join the Trotskyist movement, recalled that 'back in the 1930s, worried about the Moscow Trials, I had a surreptitious look at *The Revolution Betrayed* or C.L.R. James's *World Revolution* in

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<sup>178</sup> Upham, 'The Marxist Group in the ILP (1933-1936)'. Harry Wicks, 'World Revolution', *Fight*, 1/6, (May, 1937). See also Carter, 'History of the CI'. Wick's friendship with James was important for the attempted unification of the main British Trotskyist groups during this period, resulting in the formation of the Revolutionary Socialist League (R.S.L.) in 1938. As Wicks remembered, he was working with James 'and I thought that all of us should be in that situation'. Socialist Platform, *Harry Wicks*, p. 14. For a report of a meeting on 4 March 1938 at Essex Hall at which James and Wicks spoke on the Third Moscow Trial, see TNA: KV/2/1824/19a.

<sup>179</sup> Serge's work was first published under the title *Destiny of a Revolution*. Like James, Serge had the fortune to read Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* first and, writing to Leon Sedov, stated he found Trotsky's book 'wonderful and useful' and added that he was 'happy that in many places, my conclusions completely coincide with his, while overall both books shoot in exactly the same direction'. Victor Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After* (New Jersey, 1996), p. viii.

<sup>180</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 45, 246. See 'Communist Internationals: An Indictment of Stalin', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 June 1937. For its reception in America, see *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 196, (March, 1938) and the *New Republic*, 27, August 1937, quoted in James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, pp. 156-57. See also 'Books of the Day: A West Indian "Trotskyist"', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 June 1937, and Rowland Hill, 'The Retreat of Moscow', *The Plebs*, (August, 1937). Peter Fryer notes *World Revolution*, with its original analysis of 'The Great Retreat' to describe the social consequences of the First Five Year Plan for Soviet society, was subsequently 'shamelessly plundered by a succession of lesser experts'. See Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 337. Of course, few academic studies of the Communist International today even feel the need to acknowledge the existence of James's pioneering work.

<sup>181</sup> Raymond Postgate, 'Du Côté de Chez Trotsky', *New Statesman*, 8 May, 1937. Postgate did however find James's Trotskyism made his history a little 'peculiar': 'He puts Citrine, Morrison, Bevin, Noske, Lansbury, Blum, Stalin, Pollitt and every other living leader except Trotsky in the same category of crawling things'; Beales, 'Critics of Stalinism'.

the public library, only to hastily put it away if a friend approached'.<sup>182</sup> The last words might go to Fenner Brockway, who reviewed 'James's book' in the *New Leader*. While unsurprisingly finding faults with its Trotskyist 'bias', Brockway was decent enough to note that *World Revolution* 'is over 150,000 words in length, but must be read three times to realise its significance ... it is a great contribution to Socialist history and thought'.<sup>183</sup>

### **C.L.R. James's visits to South Wales, Scotland and Ireland**

One of the advantages of James's often close relationship with the I.L.P. during the 1930s was that because of its deep historic roots in the British working class movement, it provided a platform for him to engage with socialists and activists from not just England but also Scotland and South Wales. In autumn 1935, the I.L.P. organised a national lecture tour for James to put the case against Mussolini's war and European imperialism in Africa more generally, often sharing the platform with other leading I.L.P. members, including the M.P.s. This tour took James across England to Shoreditch, Barking, West London, Southampton, Norwich, Coventry, Nottingham and elsewhere, including Scotland.<sup>184</sup> On 26 October 1935, James visited South Wales, an area that had since late September witnessed serious and innovative industrial action, a 'stay-in' strike by miners to stop the employment of non-members of the Miners' Federation that was ultimately to be victorious with the help of local

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<sup>182</sup> Terry Brotherstone and Geoff Pilling (eds.), *History, Economic History and the Future of Marxism; Essays in Memory of Tom Kemp* (London, 1996), p. 305. I am indebted to David Goodway for this reference.

<sup>183</sup> *New Leader*, 16 April 1937, and for discussion of Brockway's review, see Bornstein, and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 225. *World Revolution* was declared *Controversy* 'Book of the Month' in May 1937, and reviewed in that issue by the Communist J.R. Campbell and Wicks. See 'Lunacy or Logic? Two Views of One Book', *Controversy*, 8, (May, 1937).

<sup>184</sup> The minutes of the Executive Committee of the Marxist Group contain what John Archer has called 'a stirring account' of James's meeting in Glasgow by John Robinson where he took on the arguments of the I.L.P. M.P.s in their heartlands. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 177, and Archer, 'C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38', p. 61. The minutes of the Marxist Group Executive Committee are in the Trotsky archive in the Houghton Library, Harvard. On Glasgow and Norwich I.L.P. during this period, see Cohen, "'Happy Hunting Ground of the Crank?'"

railwaymen who refused to run trains carrying blacklegs.<sup>185</sup> James interviewed two leading striking miners at the Nine Mile Point Colliery in Monmouthshire, William Mitchell and Bert Kear, for the *New Leader* about the potential of the ‘new weapon’ of the stay-in strike ‘with which they can break the resistance of the colliery owners through the length and breadth of the country’. After a remarkably detailed account of the strike itself, James drew the following conclusion:

But for Revolutionary Socialists what is most significant in this whole strike is the way the minds of the workers move towards revolutionary action. The sudden speeches of Mitchell and Kear at the bottom of the mine, the immediate acquiescence of the men, the response from thousands all over the coalfield, the awakening of the whole country - these are the steps (on a larger scale) by which a revolutionary period suddenly boils over into a revolutionary situation. And yet these workers were animated, first, by a desire to stop an overwhelming economic injustice; and, secondly, by a desire to prevent bloodshed; in other words a desire to keep the peace. There is no paradox here. That is also the way a revolution will develop best - on the defensive. Their resentment and determination must be translated into a vigorous offensive. That is the task of the revolutionary party.<sup>186</sup>

James’s revolutionary politics tapped into a growing mood among many ordinary I.L.P. members.<sup>187</sup> In November 1935 he returned to South Wales, speaking in Merthyr Vale, Troedyrhiw, Penydarren, Dowlais, and Merthyr miners hall.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> For more on this stay-in strike, which had been inspired in part by reading reports of the occupation of pits by a thousand miners in Hungary in 1934 and which in turn inspired Montagu Slater’s ‘Stay Down Miner’ (1936), see Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed; A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1980), pp. 276-91, and Brian Pearce, ‘Stay-Down and Stalinism’, *The Newsletter*, 4 July 1959.

<sup>186</sup> *New Leader*, 1 November 1935. As Francis and Smith note of the stay-in strike at Nine Mile Point Colliery, ‘the actual organisation underground was done by a militant miner, Billy Mitchell, who talked to others during a food-break’. Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p. 279.

<sup>187</sup> As a result James remembers the local I.L.P. in South Wales invited him to give a private meeting to them ‘purely on the question of the party’, the reformist politics of the Party leadership, the night before he was due to give the public I.L.P. meeting ‘on general questions’. James remembers that he proceeded to do this quite often ‘everywhere’ he went from then on. Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 3.

<sup>188</sup> *New Leader*, 11 November 1935.

In Wales I spoke about the colonial question and the need for West Indian self-government. The Welsh audience said, “We understand. We are in the same position in our relation to the British Government”. I hadn’t the faintest idea what they were talking about.<sup>189</sup>

In Ireland, Nora Connolly, daughter of the legendary socialist James Connolly, who had been murdered by the British in the Easter Rising of 1916, read a report of James’s meetings in Wales and invited him to address the Irish Citizen’s Army. In December 1935, James remembered he had ‘a tremendous meeting’ with the Irish Citizen’s Army on Ethiopia in Dublin, while also taking the opportunity to go horse-riding in Phoenix Park.<sup>190</sup> When Anna Grimshaw later asked James about the visit, he ‘said that he didn’t really understand what it meant to be revolutionary until he went to Ireland. The English “revolutionaries” - Marxists, Trotskyists, ILPers - were of a very different kind’ to the Irish revolutionaries who ‘really understood armed struggle and revolutionary conflict’.<sup>191</sup>

Robert Alexander notes that this meeting represented ‘the first exposition of Trotskyist ideas in Ireland’.<sup>192</sup> One member of the local branch of the Communist Party, Pat Devine, was only too aware of this, and attacked James in the meeting for making ‘the first attempt ... to try and disseminate such lying counter-revolutionary propaganda’ inside Ireland. To criticise the Soviet Union under Stalin and the Communist International, Devine continued, meant James was objectively on the side of ‘German and Italian Fascism, British imperialism and Japanese militarism’ and so

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<sup>189</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 3.

<sup>190</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 3. See also C.L.R. James, ‘The Olympia Statues, Picasso’s *Guernica* and the Frescoes of Michelangelo in the Capella Paolina’, in C.L.R. James, *The Future in the Present; Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (London, 1977), p. 226.

<sup>191</sup> Ciaran Crossey and James Monaghan, ‘The Origins of Trotskyism in Ireland’, *Revolutionary History*, 6/2-3, (1996), p. 54. James put Nora Connolly in touch with Trotsky (then in Norway), and invited her to London to address a meeting to the Marxist Group on Ireland. ‘I remember that woman, because in those days the British Trotskyite revolutionaries were no more than left wing Labour. So I went to meet her and invited her to come over here and speak, and she did. Coming from the railway station we crossed the river by Parliament, and she said, “You should have done away with that years ago, it is easy from the river.” So I said “Yes, we are revolutionaries, but bombing the Houses of Parliament is useless”. “You’re talking of something that you know nothing about!” She instinctively saw the revolutionary possibilities. From this side of the river you could bomb the Houses of Parliament and get away with it.’ Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 4.

<sup>192</sup> Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, p. 568.

guilty of 'Fascist activity' himself.<sup>193</sup> This historic meeting with the Irish Citizen's Army was one James would not forget easily.

They sent for me, and I had a tremendous meeting with them because I spoke against the British Government. When I had finished speaking a fellow got up to speak ... a young fellow, a good looking chap of about thirty, and he denounced me in one of the finest speeches I have ever heard or remembered. "Trotsky was this, Trotskyism was that, you come here disturbing everything". and so on. So I spoke to him after the meeting and said, "Let us go and have a drink somewhere. I have left politics now". "I am a member of the Communist Party and you are an enemy!" "So you say that I am a Fascist!" I said. "Oh that's all right", he said and we parted good friends.<sup>194</sup>

In February 1936, James returned to South Wales where, as well as addressing a Workers' Education Association (W.E.A.) conference of two to three hundred miners' delegates, he also went on a speaking tour with the I.L.P. The *New Leader* noted of his meeting in Rhondda in Trelaw, that 'this is the first time for some years that an ILP meeting has been held in the area and the good reception proved that given a militant lead on the war issue, the workers would respond'.<sup>195</sup> Gidon Cohen notes 'the tour, despite the vicious weather, took in Cardiff [where he was able to speak to black Communists], Neath, Merthyr, Treodyrhiw, Treharris, Abadare, Seven Sisters, Blackwood, Tre-Alan, Newport and Machen often reaching audiences of over 100 frequently against the hostility of the highly organised Communist Party'.<sup>196</sup> James returned to South Wales after this successful tour. One member of Newport I.L.P., Sidney Robinson, secretary of the Spanish Relief Newport

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<sup>193</sup> Crossey and Monaghan, 'The Origins of Trotskyism in Ireland', p. 53.

<sup>194</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, pp. 3-4. Accordingly, the local Communist Party's report of James's meeting in their paper, *Workers' Voice*, now condemned him in slightly less harsh terms, for merely 'devoting his main conclusions to a most irresponsible attack on the Communist Party and the Soviet Union'. Crossey and Monaghan, 'The Origins of Trotskyism in Ireland', p. 53. See also TNA: KV/2/1824/33a, which reports on 9 September 1938 that James had been invited to Belfast to speak at the Irish Socialist Party's weekend school, again something local Communists were not happy about.

<sup>195</sup> See *New Leader*, 21/2/1936. Also see Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 258.

<sup>196</sup> Report of Don James to the Marxist Group in London (July 1936), quoted in G. Cohen, 'The Independent Labour Party, 1932-1939', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 2000), pp. 185-86.

Committee, recorded in his diary for Sunday 21 June 1936 that ‘I attended a Day School organised by the National Council of Labour Colleges [N.C.L.C.] at Stow Hill Labour Hall, Newport, the Lecturer being C.L.R. James, subject “International and British Working Class Movements”’.<sup>197</sup> According to Al Richardson, in his introduction to *World Revolution*, ‘oral tradition in South Wales still pointed to a house where James allegedly worked on this book while campaigning for the ILP’.<sup>198</sup>

As a Trotskyist James would also visit Scotland increasingly regularly during the 1930s, speaking in the I.L.P. and C.P.G.B. heartlands of Edinburgh and Glasgow, and his activity there has been wonderfully detailed by James D. Young.<sup>199</sup> James supported the work of a small group of followers of the American socialist Daniel De Leon, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.), and also met the anarchist Guy Aldred in Glasgow. However, it is worth noting in particular James’s friendship with Nan Maclean Milton, daughter of the Scottish revolutionary socialist John Maclean. She remembers James was keen to discuss ‘the dialectic’, but also helped around her house, telling her family and friends about Trinidad and cooking them West Indian dishes. ‘He did most of the cooking ... delicious food with fish and rice. He also escaped into pubs; and everyone knew he liked intelligent and attractive-looking women.’ James apparently told Milton that he thought ‘Scottish socialists’ convictions were more serious and radical than those of their English counterparts’.<sup>200</sup> James would indeed later declare in 1941 that ‘Glasgow is the intellectual centre of British labour. The magazine [*New International*] and the old *Militant* were more widely read in Glasgow than anywhere else.’<sup>201</sup> However, perhaps the distinctive

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<sup>197</sup> Personal communication with Sidney Robinson, 4 June 2009. Thanks to Christopher Hall for putting me in touch with Robinson. This seems to be part of a tour that James did with the N.C.L.C. in Wales. See the intercepted letter dated 30 December 1936 from the Welsh Communist Dai Evans to fellow Communist Idris Cox about James’s activity in Wales, and plans for him to debate the C.P.G.B. in West Wales in February 1937. TNA: KV/2/1824/4a. In the event, the Communist leadership in Wales decided against staging a debate between James and Cox on the grounds ‘that there is more work to be done re Spanish Aid, etc., than giving a platform to Trotskyism’. See *Fight*, 1/4, (February, 1937).

<sup>198</sup> Richardson, ‘Introduction to the Paperback Edition’, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>199</sup> Young tells us James visited Scotland in 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1938, that year visiting Glasgow on six occasions. Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, pp. 82, 138.

<sup>200</sup> Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, pp. 66-67, 82-83, 129. Nan Milton was involved in researching her biography of her father during 1937-38. Milton, *John Maclean*, p. 7.

<sup>201</sup> Quoted in Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, p. 71.

‘national radicalism’ of the Scottish working class as compared to say their brothers and sisters in Lancashire, should not be romanticised too much. Young’s testimony also seems to reveal something about the comparative rarity of James as a black political activist in Scotland as opposed to say, London. At a N.C.L.C. social in 1938, James naturally objected to the singing of the song ‘The Darkies’ Sunday School’ and apparently pointed out that the generations of humanity who would grow up in a future socialist society would not recognise such categories as ‘black’ or ‘white’. Willie Tait, a member of the R.S.P. remembers James speaking on ‘The Empire in Revolt’ in Picardy Place hall, on 23 October 1938, just before James left for the United States. Hearing James speak was ‘the experience of a lifetime’, Tait remembers. ‘The workers who attended ... thought it was great that a black man could talk to them about socialism.’<sup>202</sup>

## Conclusion

As a delegate to the 1938 founding conference of the Fourth International, James received a letter from Trotsky.

To prevent the shipwreck and rotting-away of humanity the proletariat needs a perspicacious, honest and fearless leadership. No one can give this leadership except the Fourth International basing itself on the entire experience of past defeats and victories. Permit me, nevertheless, to cast a glance at the historic mission of the Fourth International not only with the eyes of a proletarian revolutionist but with the eyes of the artist which I am by profession. I have never separated these two spheres of my activity. My pen has never served me as a toy for my personal diversion or for that of the ruling classes. I have always forced myself to depict the sufferings, the hopes and struggles of the working classes because that is how I approach life, and therefore art, which is an inseparable part of it.<sup>203</sup>

Over a decade later, in 1949, James would develop Trotsky’s theme, declaring that ‘I have long believed that a very great revolutionary is a great artist, and that he

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<sup>202</sup> Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, pp. 56, 138.

<sup>203</sup> Quoted in James D. Young, *Socialism since 1889; A Biographical History* (London, 1988), p. 186.

develops ideas, programmes, etc., as Beethoven develops a movement'.<sup>204</sup> It is only if one understands that Marxism asks a fundamental question about human existence itself, that we can begin to see how James, 'the artist' became 'a revolutionary'. James later wrote that after reading Trotsky's *History*, 'the reader is not so much rhetorically exhorted to join up, but as he sees the difficulties and feels the unbounded confidence and unshakeable will which challenges and overcomes them, the knowledge and the power, he becomes part of this wonderful adventure'.<sup>205</sup>

Of course Marxism was about an objective, scientific, materialist method of analysis, but James was right to note that there was art and even 'adventure' there as well. Marxism not only enabled James to understand the old world in decline, it also gave him the inspiration to fight for the new, and encourage others to do the same. Just as important, however, was that the 'new' was out there to fight for. James had seen it in Trinidad in the growth of the T.W.A. after the General Strike of 1919, in the Great Lancashire Cotton Strike of 1932, and then in the French General Strike in February 1934. James felt that the oppressed and exploited had the same interests whether they were in the West Indies or Western Europe, and they were fighting against the same enemy. Marxism then, for James, was not, as Cedric Robinson insists, merely 'the prior commitment, the first encompassing and conscious experience of organised opposition to racism, exploitation and domination' and so something he left when he found it 'ultimately unsatisfactory'.<sup>206</sup> Rather, as James himself wrote to Constance Webb in 1944, 'ten years ago something came into my life and altered its whole course. Everything previous seemed only preparation.'<sup>207</sup> While moving from liberal humanism to revolutionary socialism in his attempt to understand the world James had thrown himself into the struggle to fundamentally change it. 'I had plunged into a river from which I was never to emerge.'

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<sup>204</sup> James, *Notes on Dialectics*, p. 153.

<sup>205</sup> James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', p. 123.

<sup>206</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 5.

<sup>207</sup> Grimshaw (ed.), *Special Delivery*, p. 136.

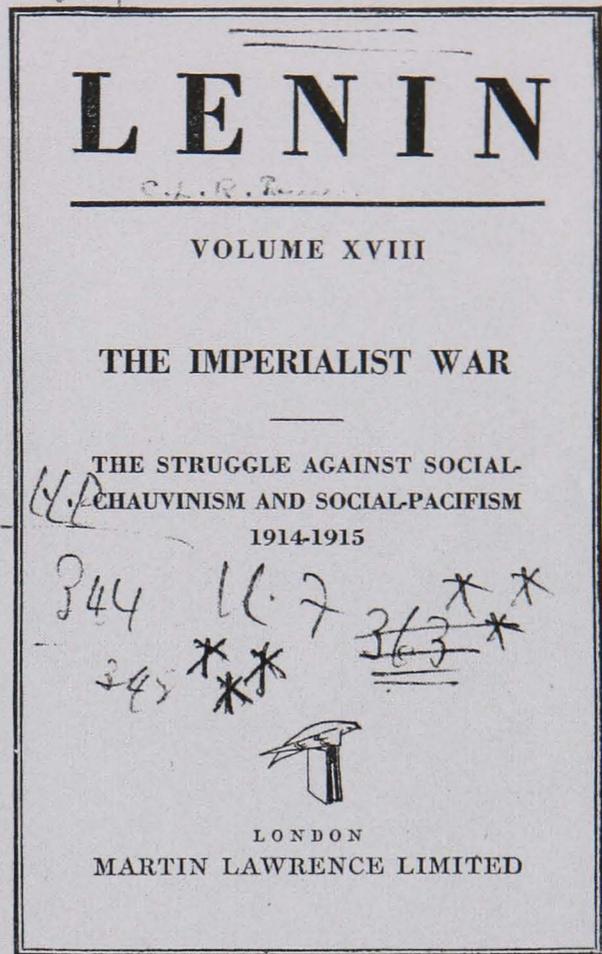
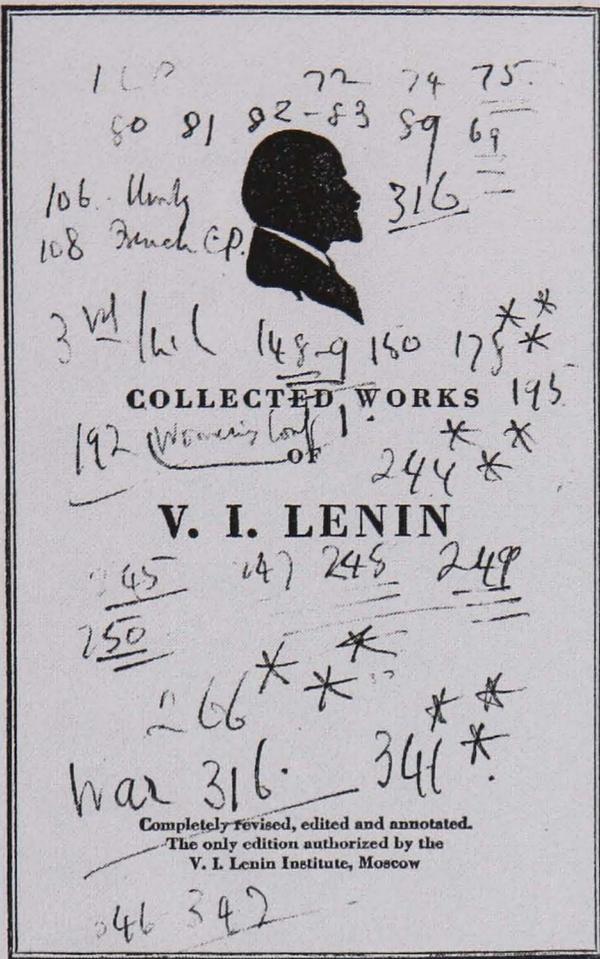


Plate 9. C.L.R. James's copy of the *Collected Works of V.I. Lenin*, Vol. XVIII.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>208</sup> [Frontispiece]. Copy kindly lent by Kevin Morgan, now deposited at the C.L.R. James Archive, Columbia University.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ‘Discovering Africa’: The Class Struggle Pan-Africanism of C.L.R. James

Few scholars today would doubt that C.L.R. James stands as one of the towering figures of twentieth-century Pan-Africanism, yet, as Paul Buhle once noted, his Marxism always made his Pan-Africanism somewhat ‘paradoxical’. However, if paradoxical it has also remained somewhat unknown, in part due to the notorious difficulties scholars have had in recovering the ‘hidden history’ of radical anti-colonial networks in the inter-war period. After noting that during the early 1930s, ‘James became an enthusiastic convert to Trotskyism’ Buhle admits that he is at something of a loss to explain James’s militant Pan-Africanism. ‘Did Pan-Africanism, then, become a function of James’s Trotskyism? The question cannot be answered decisively.’<sup>1</sup> Yet even if there are few ‘decisive answers’, the question surely still deserves to be put. In 1995, Eric Hobsbawm urged fellow historians to pay more attention to ‘the active and distinguished inter-war group of English-speaking Caribbean Marxists - Padmore, James, Williams, Arthur Lewis and others’ who were in Britain during the 1930s but were not to be attracted by the C.P.G.B. and the appeal of ‘Soviet Communism’.<sup>2</sup> Yet this gap in our knowledge is really only now beginning to be tentatively filled, as even some of those scholars who insisted on stressing how ‘the black radical tradition’ was ‘the source’ of James’s ‘radicalism’ seemed remarkably aloof from paying attention to the details of James’s early Pan-Africanism. Indeed, for Anthony Bogues, the very idea of James as a Pan-Africanist in the 1930s is fundamentally problematic as ‘while there is a recognition of the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Buhle, ‘C.L.R. James: Paradoxical Pan-Africanist’, in Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (eds.), *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London, 1994), p. 162. On the difficulties facing scholars of anti-colonialism see Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, pp. 25-26. For example, Reginald Bridgeman burnt the files of the League Against Imperialism with the outbreak of the Second World War ‘out of caution and concern for those who might be compromised’. Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement* (London, 1974), p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Afterword’, in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan (eds.), *Opening the Books; Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party* (London, 1995), pp. 252-53. See also David Howell, ‘Eric Hobsbawm’s Interesting Times’, *Socialist History*, 24, (2003), p. 4. Whether W. Arthur Lewis and Eric Williams were ever ‘Marxists’ is questionable. On Arthur Lewis, see Robert L. Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* (Oxford, 2006).

nature of colonialism and racial oppression, James continues to view these issues from the perspective of Western thought and tradition'.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will in no way pretend to offer a final analysis of James's early Pan-Africanism, but will simply attempt to demonstrate that the label itself is a meaningful one. We will first explore the emerging tensions between James's identification of himself as 'British' and his developing 'black internationalism', expressed through his loyalty to not just 'West Indian self-government' but also his growing commitment to more radical transnational identifications with black Africans and people of Africa descent, and their culture. Hopefully a closer examination of how James in Britain came to embrace what Kent Worcester has usefully called 'class struggle Pan-Africanism', and then a discussion of how that form of black internationalism manifested itself in practice, may illuminate why there was less of a paradox here than might at first appear.<sup>4</sup>

### **C.L.R. James and Garveyism in colonial Trinidad**

It seems few James scholars today would disagree with Worcester's assessment that the Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey was one of the three most important influences on James while growing up.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Bogues has gone as far as to argue Garveyism was the 'source' of James's radicalism as he 'grew to adulthood in a colony in which black nationalism was a strong political current'.<sup>6</sup> Garveyism became a central vehicle for black bitterness in colonial Trinidad after the Great War. Resentment on the home front had built up as the bloody conflict dragged on. In 1915, farmers demonstrated for a rise in the price of sugar, and in March 1917, oilfield, dock and asphalt workers took strike action against the United British

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<sup>3</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, pp. xii, 40. Bogues mistakenly dates the founding of the I.A.S.B., 'one of the bases of the modern black anti-colonial movement', to 1936 rather than 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 42. See also Kent Worcester, 'C.L.R. James and the Development of a Pan-African Problematic', *Journal of Caribbean History*, 27/1, (1993).

<sup>5</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, pp. xii, 6.

Oilfields company and the American owned Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company.<sup>7</sup> In December 1918, the black troops of the B.W.I.R. revolted in Italy against the war and the institutional racism of the army, and their anger as they returned to price rises, poverty and overcrowded housing was the spark that threw Trinidadian society into turmoil.<sup>8</sup> James remembered ‘a big strike’ on the sugar estate he worked at when eighteen, one of many precursors to the General Strike in late 1919 in support of a dock workers’ action along the Port of Spain waterfront.<sup>9</sup> He recalled dockers ‘patrolled the town, made business close down, and were at one time in charge of the city’.<sup>10</sup>

The chief political beneficiary of this revolt was the small social democratic T.W.A., whose members boldly wore red shirts in solidarity with the October Revolution in Russia.<sup>11</sup> However, while editorials in *The Weekly Guardian*, the *Argos* and *Port of Spain Gazette* sternly warned of the danger of ‘Bolshevism extending to Trinidad’, it was actually Garveyism, not revolutionary socialism, that captured the imagination of most leading strikers.<sup>12</sup> James himself knew a few of the strike-leaders through playing cricket and later recalled he felt ‘positive that they were Garveyites’.<sup>13</sup> There was mass widespread enthusiasm for Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.), founded in 1914 with an aim of uniting black people internationally under the slogan ‘One god! One aim! One destiny!’ Garvey’s militant rhetoric fitted with the new mood of resistance, and he declared in 1920 that the colours of the U.N.I.A. flag ‘showed their sympathy with the “Reds” of the world, and the Green their sympathy for the Irish in their fight for freedom’. However, Garvey himself was no revolutionary, once reminding an audience that

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Campbell, ‘Carnival, Calypso and Class Struggle in Nineteenth Century Trinidad’, *History Workshop*, 26, (1988), p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Small, ‘The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist’, in Paul Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James; His Life and Work* (London, 1986), p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, ‘A Conversation with C.L.R. James’, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> C.L.R. James, *A History of Negro Revolt* (London, 1938), p. 75. However, James recalled ‘all I did was to go and watch what was happening without taking any part’. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 363. See also Samaroo, ‘The Trinidad Workingmen’s Association and the Origins of Popular Protest in a Crown Colony’.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, ‘Carnival, Calypso and Class Struggle in Nineteenth Century Trinidad’, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 14.

though the Bolsheviks deserved the praise of black people, 'we are not very much concerned as partakers in these revolutions'.<sup>14</sup> The arrival of British cruisers and the mere presence of armed sailors in Port of Spain as a result signalled the restoration of the status quo.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, by the late 1920s there were thirty U.N.I.A. branches in Trinidad.<sup>16</sup>

In the aftermath of the General Strike of 1919, which would come to signal the birth of the modern nationalist movement for self-government in Trinidad, the eighteen-year old James was one of many who read Garvey's weekly paper, *The Negro World*, buying it 'every Saturday down St. Vincent Street in Port of Spain'.<sup>17</sup> Garveyism, the most powerful form of black nationalism until the 1960s 'Black Power' movement, certainly awakened James to the reality of racial oppression in America, and the horrors of imperialism in Africa. A few years later, in the mid-1920s, James began to study the 'imperialist intrigues resulting in the partition of Africa'.<sup>18</sup>

However, perhaps it is possible to overstate Garveyism's influence on James.<sup>19</sup> As James remembers, 'I read Garvey and I read Du Bois' but not 'with the insistence and concern' of others, in particular Malcolm Nurse who 'was always talking to me about them when we used to meet'.<sup>20</sup> James has written that 'politics seemed remote from me' in the 1920s and that if he did not get *The Negro World* he 'would not die'.<sup>21</sup> However, when, in 1929, Garvey, having been expelled from the U.S., came to Port of Spain, James, then working as a sports journalist, remembers 'I came to the conclusion that I should go and speak to him in person'.

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<sup>14</sup> Ahmed Shawki, *Black Liberation and Socialism* (Chicago, 2006), pp. 103, 105.

<sup>15</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, 'The World the Diaspora Made: C.L.R. James and the Politics of History', in Grant Farred (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James* (Oxford, 1996), p. 114.

<sup>18</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> James later told an interviewer that when he finally left Trinidad in 1932, 'I hadn't really the faintest idea about Black politics then, nor was there any talk about any African or Black revolt.' See M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 268.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James', p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive*, p. 49, and Small, 'The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist', p. 55.

So I called up where he was staying and I said, “Could I have an interview with Mr. Garvey? ... My name is James; I work with the newspaper.” He said, “By all means: come around in the morning at nine.” So I went in the morning and there was the great man. And it has been an experience I have never forgotten. Marcus Garvey began to tell me about the Black situation in the world and in the United States ... He told me nothing I had not heard before; he told me nothing I hadn’t read in what he had written; he told me nothing new; but Garvey mobilised himself to talk to me as if he had discovered all this the night before, and it was making me a convert, so that we that afternoon would go out and conquer the world for Africa. And then I realised what a political leader can be more than anyone else.<sup>22</sup>

That James could claim that in 1929 Garvey could tell him ‘nothing new’ about the situation of black people internationally, while perhaps slightly misleading, is testament to his ability to read widely, absorb information and think independently and critically about it. James as a young liberal humanist West Indian intellectual would come to the fore in vindicating the intelligence and achievements of black people, including Africans, in opposition to the white supremacy that underpinned European colonialism. In 1931 in a racist article in *The Beacon*, Dr. Sidney Harland, an English scientist resident in Trinidad at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, argued that ‘we seldom hear of a white traveler [in Africa] meeting with a black chief whom intellectually he feels to be the better man’. As James had immediately retorted,

This for a proof of the inferiority of the negro race! A European, with a European education, with a European background, meets a negro Chief in Africa, talks to him (about Genetics, and the Reform of the House of Lords I expect) and goes away without feeling any sense of inferiority. “Our conclusion is therefore...” Isn’t this pathetic? I wonder if I turned that argument round what Dr. Harland would say. But perhaps Dr. Harland believes that the average negro meets white men with a sense of innate intellectual

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<sup>22</sup> Dance, ‘Conversation with C.L.R. James’, p. 116. Small, ‘The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist’, p. 55.

inferiority. Let me assure the Doctor, let me earnestly and religiously assure him that it is not so.<sup>23</sup>

James later would suggest to Paul Buhle that ‘unlike most other West Indians, who came to England thinking Africans to be savages’ he arrived already considering them to be ‘as other oppressed but intelligent, capable peoples’.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in 1932, on first meeting West African students in London, James would declare ‘the average West Indian’ was not as ‘strong on the race question or on imperialism as the West Africans’.<sup>25</sup>

### **The League of Coloured Peoples**

In late March 1933, James returned to London from Nelson and immediately joined the L.C.P., a new pressure group that had been formed in 1931 by a Jamaican who had been resident in London since 1904, Dr. Harold Moody (1882-1947). Roderick Macdonald has noted the L.C.P. ‘may lay claim to embodying the first conscious and deliberate attempt to form a multi-racial organisation, led by Blacks, although with a membership that for its first ten years was predominantly white’. The fact that no white person was ever elected to the L.C.P. executive marked it out from both its larger American counter-part, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (N.A.A.C.P.), as well as the liberal Joint Council to Promote Understanding between White and Coloured People in Great Britain. ‘The League of Coloured Peoples has as its object the purpose of stating the cause of the Black Man’, declared the opening editorial of the first issue of its journal *The Keys* (July, 1933).<sup>26</sup> Yet as Anne Spry Rush has shown,

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<sup>23</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘The Intelligence of the Negro’, *The Beacon*, I/5, (August, 1931), a response to Sidney Harland’s ‘Race Admixture’, *The Beacon*, I/4, (July 1931).

<sup>24</sup> Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> Laughlin (ed.) *Letters from London*, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> Roderick J. Macdonald, ‘Dr. Harold Arundel Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples, 1931-1947: A Retrospective View’, *Race*, XIV/3, (1973), pp. 291-93. It seems James addressed the Joint Council to promote Understanding between White and Coloured People on 2 May 1933 on ‘Self-Government for the West Indies’. See TNA: KV/2/1824/1z. The overt masculinity of black politics internationally at this time, seen here in the L.C.P.’s championing of the ‘Black Man’, should also not

... by invoking an imperial British identity that drew on widely accepted elements of Britishness, namely respectability and imperial pride, the League gained support from black colonials and white English people in its fight for equality. This was true despite the fact that a major element of the League's conception of British identity, racial equality, challenged the dominant idea that "true" Britons were, by definition, white.<sup>27</sup>

Spry Rush has described how 'League members understood Britishness as being constructed from three main elements: a middle class notion of respectability, loyalty to an idealized British empire, and pride in varied racial and geographical heritages'.<sup>28</sup> That 'colonial subjects (particularly those of colour) may have shaped and claimed their own versions of Britishness', as an imperial identity, is of vital importance as a factor to remember when it comes to considering the political thought of James at this stage.

From 24-26 March 1933, James attended the L.C.P.'s first weekend conference at High Leigh, Hoddesden, Hertfordshire, along with over forty other members from countries including the Gold Coast, East Africa, Sierra Leone, the U.S.A. and from across the West Indies. Among the speakers on the Saturday was Stephen Thomas, a West African barrister, lecturer at the L.S.E., and secretary of the L.C.P., who spoke on 'the West African' and 'deplored the fact that there was but little contact between the Africans in various parts of Africa itself, and even less contact with their brothers and sisters in other parts of the world'. That afternoon, James, described as a 'brilliant young man' who had recently published *The Life of Captain Cipriani* and *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*, spoke eloquently on the 'West Indian', and it is perhaps worth reproducing some of *The Keys* report:

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go without comment and is explored further in Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (London, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Anne Spry Rush, 'Imperial Identity in Colonial Minds: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples, 1931-50', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13/4, (2002), p. 356.

<sup>28</sup> Spry Rush, 'Imperial Identity in Colonial Minds', pp. 360-62.

Mr. James began by showing how the black man in the West Indies had been shorn of all African civilization and had been engulfed by Western civilization. This meant that there was no spirit of nationalism, which gave force to democratic movements in other countries. To offset this, the similarity in language, religion and education, with schools open to all races on equal terms, meant that there was no clash between a Caste or Tribal system, and modern democratic ideas ... The greatest problem among the Negroes in the West Indies was an internal one - based on varying shades of complexion. Any united movement in the West Indies had to be based on the black masses, or it was doomed. The working people were splendid material and showed their true worth in the late war ... The officials were not very keen however in raising the standards and educational requirements. They felt that as long as the West Indies was agricultural, no education for the masses was needed ... Only absolute freedom would give the pent up energies of the West Indian the necessary outlet. Crown Colony Government was a cancer eating into the very vitals of the nation. There was a definite need of a West Indian consciousness, and a pride in the matters that pertain to our group.<sup>29</sup>

James's militant nationalist speech sparked a 'lively discussion' and he doubtless joined in other debates on 'The Indian Student', 'The East African' and 'Co-operatives in Africa'. The L.C.P. conference recognised that 'this was a very critical period in the history of our race', something which must have been brought home by not only discussions about racism in Britain but also in America with the Scottsboro case.<sup>30</sup> Though not overtly political, in 1933 the L.C.P. supported the Scottsboro Boys campaign and condemned the recent revival of lynching in the U.S.<sup>31</sup> Involvement in the L.C.P. must have further opened James's eyes to both racism internationally as well as constituting in itself a new multi-racial community

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<sup>29</sup> *The Keys*, 1/1, (July, 1933), pp. 3-8. James's apparent reference to 'African civilization' in his speech is notable given Bogues's charge that at this time '[James] was still operating within the framework of Western thought with its racial hierarchy which posited Africans as non-historic peoples'. Bogues also notes that James's *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* of March 1933 mentioned 'primitive peoples in Africa'. Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 24. However, even if James did not mean this ironically, that same pamphlet explicitly challenged the idea that 'the average Negro is a simple, that is to say, a rather childish fellow' by quoting Lord Olivier's opinion that 'the African races generally have a subtle dialectical faculty, and are in some ways far quicker in apprehension than the average Caucasian ... The African ... shows practical shrewdness and aptitude for the affairs of local government. His legal acumen is higher than that of the European'. See C.L.R. James, *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* (London, 1933), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *The Keys*, 1/1, (July, 1933), pp. 3-8.

<sup>31</sup> See Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, p. 346.

of resistance.<sup>32</sup> James would soon become a member of the L.C.P. executive, and later recalled that ‘there was some propaganda, there was agitation’.

Moody would be able to speak now and then to a member of Parliament, he would get a letter in the papers, and anything in those days mattered because there were too few black people around, and here was somebody who wasn’t an insignificant person, who was a well-established medical practitioner.<sup>33</sup>

The strategy of the L.C.P., as Spry Rush has noted, was indeed built around a concern with the ‘social uplift’ of those who were ‘insignificant’, and a culture of middle-class ‘respectability’ developed, as opposed to a commitment to challenging class or gender distinctions. ‘Before 1935 its “welfare” work was confined to assisting colonial students, who in this period could not have afforded to travel to Britain unless they came from middle-class or upper-class homes.’ Tennis matches, scholarly lectures and garden parties were common social activities. Moody’s concern with cultivating pride in ‘Britishness’ and the ‘Christian’ Empire among black colonial subjects can be seen, for example, in July 1933 when the L.C.P. presented a highly decorated copy of *The Keys* to the Prince of Wales. One wonders what the Prince of Wales made of James’s description of Crown Colony Government as a ‘cancer’.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As Maroula Joannou has noted, ‘inter-war London acted as a mecca for a varied assortment of radical subaltern networks ... Such politically conscious networks were at the forefront of the resistance to racial discrimination in public places’. Maroula Joannou, ‘Nancy Cunard’s English Journey’, *Feminist Review*, 78, (2004), p. 151.

<sup>33</sup> Roderick J. Macdonald, ‘Introduction to *The Keys*’, in *The Keys; The Official Organ of the League of Coloured Peoples* (New York, 1976), p. 9. James is listed as being on the 1933-34 L.C.P. Executive in *The Keys*, 1/3, (January, 1934). Learie Constantine also joined the L.C.P., commenting that ‘our people are badly misunderstood in this country’ but ‘I am trying to keep my end up in the North’. *The Keys*, 1/1, (July, 1933), p. 9. See also Fryer, *Staying Power*, pp. 326-29. In August 1933, the Communist *Negro Worker* (edited by George Padmore) attacked Moody as an ‘Uncle Tom’. See David Killingray, ‘“To do something for the race”’, Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples’, in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 64, 70.

<sup>34</sup> See *The Keys*, 1/2, (October 1933), p. 21 and Spry Rush, ‘Imperial Identity in Colonial Minds’, pp. 368, 372. The first issue of *The Keys* had a picture of the conference delegates, including James, on page 3.

## Defending African Art

In mid-May 1933, *The Listener*, official journal of the B.B.C., had advertised that ‘a representative exhibition of African sculptures and textiles is at present on view at the Lefèvre Galleries, 1a King Street, St James’s, SW1’, and carried an article on ‘Negro Art’ by Stanley Casson (1899-1944), a Fellow of New College, Oxford and expert on classical antiquities, author of *The Technique of Early Greek Sculpture* (1933). As Casson noted, ‘the present exhibition at the Lefèvre Galleries affords a unique opportunity to study African art at first hand’.<sup>35</sup> James took the opportunity and later noted that the exhibition ‘was the first real impact that Africa had on me ... I was completely unaware that Africa had artistic structures and traditions of its own’.<sup>36</sup>

I was about thirty-two years old and for the first time I began to realise that the African, the black man, had a face of his own. Up to that time I had believed that the proper face was the Graeco-Roman face. If a black man had that type of face he had a good face, and if he didn’t, well, poor fellow, that was his bad luck ... I went to this exhibition, I bought the catalogue, I bought some books.<sup>37</sup>

Those books were to prove necessary to counter Casson’s review of the exhibition, ‘Negro Art’. Casson damned African art firstly with faint praise, and then damned it in more time-honoured fashion, noting it ‘has remained always on the primitive level’ and that the work of the ‘Negro sculptor’ is ‘the work of what I might call a grown-up primitive’. ‘And by primitive art I mean art that is produced by men who have the minds of simple children and the hands of grown-up men.’<sup>38</sup>

The letters page of *The Listener* soon carried a response to Casson from one ‘C.L.R. James’ from ‘Hampstead’, defending African art.

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<sup>35</sup> *The Listener*, 17 May 1933.

<sup>36</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> James, ‘The Old World and the New’, p. 207.

<sup>38</sup> *The Listener*, 17 May 1933.

It is inconceivable to me how anyone looking at the Pahouin Venus in the present exhibition in the Lefèvre Galleries, some of the masks in the British Museum, and figures like those on p. 95 and p. 103 of Guillaume and Munro's book on *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, can continue to base his criticism on the theory, daily more and more discarded by anthropologists, that the mind of the African, in his so-called "primitive" condition, was the mind of a child.<sup>39</sup>

James's attack on the 'so-called "primitive" condition' of African people is noteworthy in itself, given that some black nationalist scholarship on James still perpetuates the idea of his 'continued insistence on and his usage and understanding of "primitive"' to describe African people throughout this period of his life.<sup>40</sup> The next issue of *The Listener*, 7 June 1933, saw Casson reply, noting 'Mr. James has heaved the heavy anthropological brick at my head'.

Will Mr. James come off his high horse and tell me exactly what modern anthropologists really think about Negro art, if they think much? In the meantime, if he will read *L'Art Primitif*, by G.H. Luquet, in [Paul] Rivet's *Bibliothèque d'Anthropologie*, he will learn much to his advantage, as this is a solid anthropological work. From it, it is quite clear that Negro adult minds and child minds are alike.<sup>41</sup>

Casson was clearly trying to call James's bluff here, trusting that his critic would bow in deference to his knowledge of anthropology, particularly the work of French anthropologists. But James was having none of it.

First, is Mr. Casson quite clear in his own mind about what he means by the term "primitive" Negro? There is a general belief that Negroes in Africa before the coming of the slave-traders were everywhere savage. Among books of the early voyagers which will

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<sup>39</sup> *The Listener*, 31 May 1933. While the anthropologist Professor Malinowski of the L.S.E. would join the L.C.P. in 1933, and give a speech on 'The Changing Relations of Races in Africa' in January 1935, it seems he was not yet a member at this point. See *The Keys*, 1/2, (October, 1933), p. 40, and *The Keys*, 2/3, (January-March, 1935).

<sup>40</sup> Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> *The Listener*, 7 June 1933. Paul Rivet was to become a leading anti-racist anthropologist, taking part in the 'Races and racism' group set up in Paris in 1936 which included the historian Georges Lefebvre. In 1937, Rivet set up the 'Committee for the initiative of international action against racist doctrines'. See Elazar Barkan, *The retreat of scientific racism: Changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States between the world wars* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 326, 328.

disprove this and testify to the standard of civilisation many had reached, is [Richard] Hakluyet's *Voyages to Guinea*. But there is an even greater complication. Two important groups of African people have remained untouched by European civilisation until comparatively recent times. The Routledges in *With a Prehistoric People*, described the Kikuyus of Kenya, who until western civilisation touched them, lived a life, in the opinion of Mr. McGregor Ross, superior to that of many modern European peasants. [Emile] Torday and [T.A.] Joyce, in their *Notes Ethnographiques...sur les Peuples...Bushongo*, have described the Bushongo who founded a vast empire, excelled in industry and art, and showed, in Emil[e] Torday's own words, "high social and political organisation and culture". Their great period goes back at least three hundred years, yet up to half a century ago or less, they were quite unknown. Were they "primitive" Negroes? I do not believe that the adult Bushongos, for instance, had the minds of children. And even if it is admitted that some of these Negro tribes who produced fine work were of the most primitive type, yet [Alexander] Goldenweiser's chapters on the mentality of early man in his book *Early Civilisations*, and Chapter 4 of Franz Boas' *The Mind of Primitive Man [1911]*, are a warning to those who make dogmatic statements about the workings of the primitive mind. Goldenweiser quotes Wundt: "This, however, does not imply that within the narrow sphere that constitutes his world the intelligence of primitive man is inferior to that of cultural man". It does not help at this stage for Mr. Casson to say that "artistically" the Negro has the mind of a child. That statement by itself means nothing. Lafcadio Hearn says that great artists are men who go through life retaining the freshness of outlook of children. That is a very different sort of remark from Mr. Casson's sweeping statement that Negro adult minds and child minds are alike.<sup>42</sup>

One gets some sense of the breadth and depth of James's reading in this letter, which quotes from the work of Hungarian anthropologist Emile Torday, the American anthropologist Alexander Goldenweiser and the legendary German anti-racist anthropologist Franz Boas.<sup>43</sup> Casson was to have the last word, but was

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<sup>42</sup> *The Listener*, 14 June 1933. T.A. Joyce was Keeper of Ethnography at the British Museum, and from 1905 produced commentaries on Emile Torday's trips to the Congo Free State and elsewhere. See Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa; Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination* (London, 1997), pp. 132-34. In 1938, James would describe Torday as 'one of the greatest African scholars of his time'. See James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 339. Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), a literary critic and novelist, had visited the West Indies in 1890 and written up his experiences.

<sup>43</sup> For more on Boas (1858-1942), who had worked in America since 1887, see Barkan, *The retreat of scientific racism*, p. 78. James may have also benefited from knowledge of the work of the Jamaican dentist and sculptor Ronald Moody, younger brother of L.C.P. founder Harold Moody. On Ronald Moody, see Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972*, pp. 1-2.

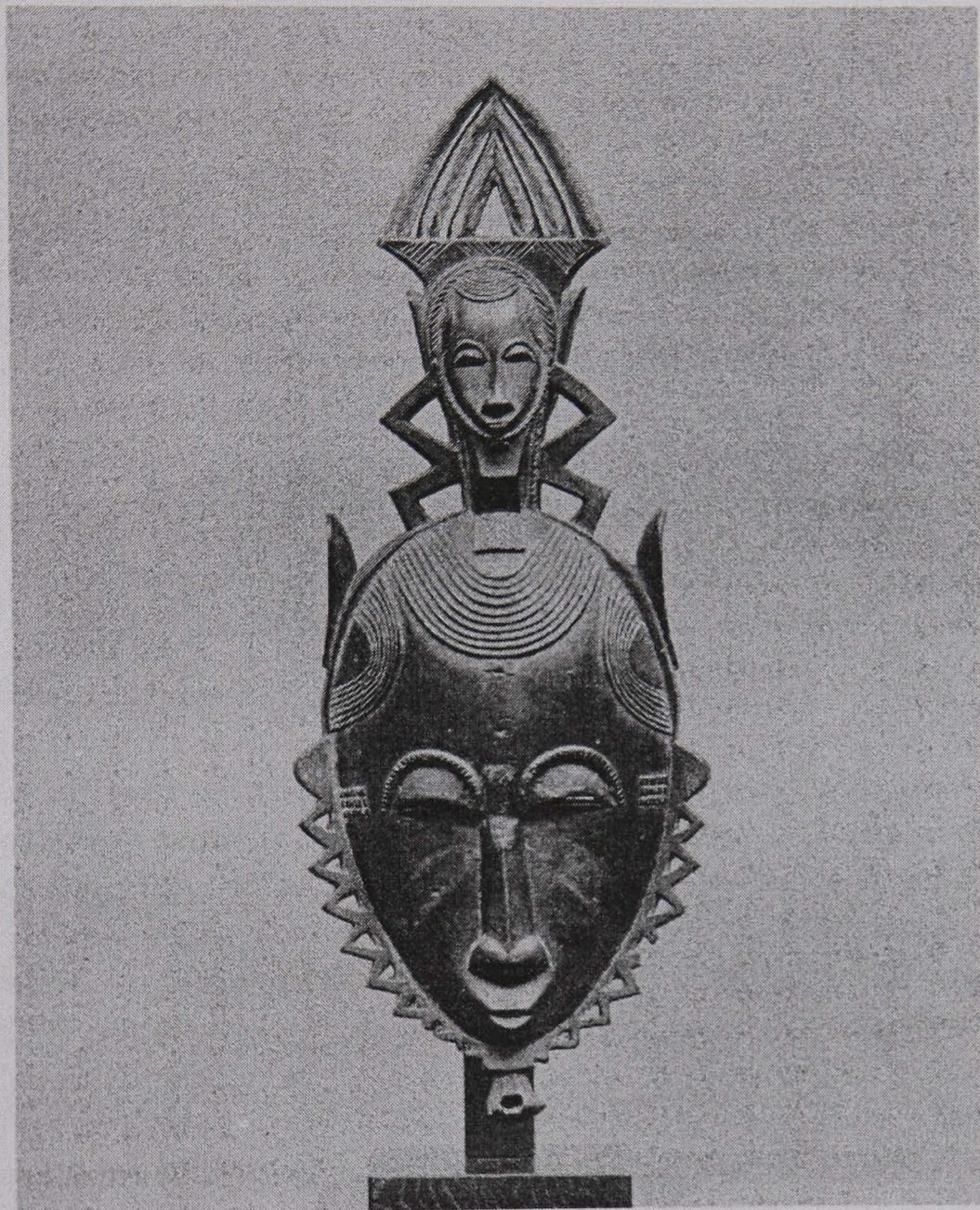
conciliatory, ending the debate on the grounds that 'I must leave Mr. James to his researches'.<sup>44</sup>



Plate 10. African sculpture from the Ivory Coast (I).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *The Listener*, 21 June 1933. Almost fifty years later, on 3 November 1982, James would once again write a letter to a British publication to defend African art. Taking issue with idea that Picasso incorporated 'primitive' elements into his art in an article in *The Guardian*, James noted that not only was African art the reverse of being 'primitive' but twentieth-century European artists were actually engaged in something else. 'What Picasso and his circle were looking for was a way out of the conceptions which had dominated Europe for 400 years.' Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive*, p. 104.

<sup>45</sup> [Exhibition Artefact]. From Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro, *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (London, 1926), p. 95.



28. IVORY COAST

Plate 11. African sculpture from the Ivory Coast (II).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> [Exhibition Artefact]. From Guillaume and Munro, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, p. 103.

## For the 'African Revolution'

James's researches certainly continued apace, and with them, his radicalisation away from any identification with imperial Britain and towards a militant vision of Pan-African liberation. James's polemic with Casson over African art took place in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, and as Hitler took to the world stage proclaiming the supremacy of the Aryan race, James found himself more and more openly declaring solidarity with the oppressed of the earth. In August 1933, James wrote a 'shocking exposure' of 'Slavery Today' for *Tit-Bits* magazine.

In 1833, the Act of Abolition involved no more than 700,000 slaves. *Today, a century after, there are more than 5,000,000 slaves, distributed throughout fifteen different areas of the world.* This, then, is what we have to face a century after the Emancipation. Five million fellow human beings still in bondage and sentenced to a lifetime of servitude and suffering.

James declared 'some direct *personal* interest' in the suffering of 'the shackled who have no future' as 'I am the great-grandson of a freed slave ... Although I am still a young man I knew personally a great-aunt of mine who had been a slave in her early days, and I have often heard her speak of what slavery meant in those days before the Abolition'. James went on to indict the continuing horrors of slavery for Africans, many of whom had been successfully stolen away from British colonies. Indeed, '*there are still thousands of slaves within the British Empire*'. Yet James at this stage was not yet quite an organised revolutionary, and he still envisaged the best hope for the liberation from the barbaric bondage of slavery to be in appealing to the better conscience of the British government, and to force the League of Nations to act.

Britain led the way one hundred years ago, and by an interesting coincidence it was British efforts a few months ago which have led to the setting-up of a Permanent Commission of the League of Nations to deal with slavery ... In that there is a weapon close at hand which can end the evil. But first we must set our own house in

order. We owe that at least to the memory of Wilberforce and the other pioneers whose work we are celebrating today. Then pressure must be brought to bear on the League to see that all nations who tolerate slavery are indicted, with no concealment and respect to none. Public opinion, ten times more powerful now than it was in 1833, will do the rest. It worked a miracle then, it can do so again.<sup>47</sup>

Two experiences were to be critical in finally breaking James from any identification with imperial Britain and transforming him into a militant Pan-Africanist. The first was hearing George Padmore speak on ‘the coming revolt in Africa’ sometime later that summer, probably very soon after writing that article for *Tit-Bits* in August 1933. The second was spending six months researching the Haitian Revolution in ‘Black Paris’ from 1933-34. While James had been in Paris, the Labour Party in 1933 had published a policy report outlining future colonial policy which explicitly ruled out self-government for ‘the primitive communities of Africa’ and even seemed to retreat somewhat from their previous pledge for West Indian self-government.<sup>48</sup> On his return to Britain in early 1934, James broke with the Labour Party, the moderate leadership of the L.C.P., and the politics of imperial ‘respectability’ in general and for good.

The decisive issue concerning James’s break with the L.C.P. seems to have been the controversial issue of Aggrey House. In 1932, Moody had quietly joined the Colonial Office’s hostel committee, which had just bought a ten year lease on a house on 47 Doughty Street, in central London, which they planned to open up as a ‘club’ for ‘all coloured people’, a meeting place between ‘black and white’ and ‘a door to the English home and English life’.<sup>49</sup> However, by the time ‘Aggrey House’ opened in March 1934, the truth had come out that it was not just Moody but also the British

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<sup>47</sup> James, ‘Slavery Today’. Italics as in original.

<sup>48</sup> As Paul B. Rich notes, ‘The 1933 policy document, *The Colonies*, reflected the experience of government and induced a fair measure of caution in the party’s assessment of the pace that could be made on initiating self-government. While the West Indies were “probably already capable of managing their own affairs”, the same could not be said of the African colonies, where conditions made it “impossible for them to take over the government of their country on modern lines.”’ Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, pp. 78-79. See also LHA: WG/BWI/77, [Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions], ‘West Indies Labour Party Policy’, (July, 1938). *The Labour Party: The Colonies* seems to have been written by Leonard Woolf. See Cole, ‘Woolf, Leonard Sidney’.

<sup>49</sup> It was to be named after the Gold Coast scholar Dr. J.E. Kwegyir Aggrey, and Moody hoped this would become the new headquarters of the L.C.P. Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London, 1998), p. 57.

state that was behind financing it. The West African Students Union (W.A.S.U.), who had themselves already successfully set up an independent hostel in Camden for African students, put out a leaflet, *The Truth about Aggrey House: Government Plan for Control of African Students*, which denounced 'this scheme of Imperialism'. In March 1934, W.A.S.U. held a protest meeting, with the support of a whole range of organizations, including several Communist backed groups such as the National Council for Civil Liberties (N.C.C.L.), the New India Political Group, the Negro Welfare Association (N.W.A.) led by the Barbadian Communist Arnold Ward and the League Against Imperialism (L.A.I.). The 'Africa House Defence Committee' (A.H.D.C.) formed to show solidarity with the existing student-run African hostel. James had no problem deciding which side he was on in this dispute, and while a L.C.P. member he successfully proposed a motion at an A.H.D.C. meeting calling for 'a complete boycott of Aggrey House by all students of African descent in London'.<sup>50</sup> His tenure on the L.C.P. executive had lasted barely one year.<sup>51</sup>

James's new militant Pan-Africanism also comes through in a lecture on 'The Negro', given in Nelson in March 1934. According to the correspondent of the *Nelson Leader*, James noted that the Africans themselves had never simply been passive victims in the face of the ravages of the slave trade, but had organised resistance, and in so doing revealed they possessed a higher code of morality to that of European 'civilisation'. Seemingly referring to the aforementioned Bushongo of the Kasai again, James noted

... these people established themselves right in the centre of Africa, and, having formed a kingdom, were able to resist all encroachments. The result was they had formed a civilisation which showed what Africa would have been able to achieve had it remained free from foreign interference. In fact their moral code might have served as an example to the rest of the world.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, pp. 59-60, 62, 64, 85, 193-7. The N.W.A. was affiliated to the L.A.I. James remembered Arnold Ward as 'a slow speaking working class type', 'utterly devoted to the cause'. C.L.R. James, 'Notes on the Life of George Padmore [c1960]', p. 36. On the L.A.I., see John Saville, 'The League Against Imperialism, 1927-1937', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, VII, (1984), and Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*. As Adi notes, the N.W.A. was in many ways a forerunner to the I.A.S.B.

<sup>51</sup> James would however attend and speak at the annual conference of the L.A.I. on 24-25 November 1934, and work with the N.W.A. See TNA: KV/2/1824/1z.

<sup>52</sup> 'Racial Prejudice in England', *Nelson Leader*, 16 March 1934. See Appendix C. On the Bushongo, see Basil Davidson, *Africa in History* (London, 1991), pp. 158-59.

James also discussed the devastating impact of European colonialism in Africa, beginning with the situation in South Africa, where Europeans had been ‘for about 300 years, and the natives had no prospects after 300 years’. Yet after discussing the barbarism of British rule in South Africa, and the repressive pass laws crushing the spirit of the people, James predicted that ‘there was going to be a tremendous revolt in Africa someday’. James then moved on to discuss the East African state of Kenya, where white settlers were not bringing ‘civilisation’ to the people, but destroying it. Apparently, James ‘was amazed at the atrocities committed by Englishmen who had the opportunities of education and upbringing, and who ought to know better’. Yet his Marxism meant that already in 1934 ‘the lecturer did not lay the blame on individuals, but on the system which permitted these things to happen. It was an economic question’.

“I have spoken seriously because it is a serious question,” said Mr. James in conclusion. “Although it is a racial question on the surface, it is a political and economic question below. I have spoken without hostility because some of the truest friends of the negro are white men. I don’t think you can do very much; the forces that control these things are far more powerful than you are, but the situation is not entirely hopeless. I think everyone here will realise that we are living on the eve of great changes. This is a transition period, and great things must come out of it, and it is possible that the negro may look forward to receiving better treatment than he has had in the past. It would be bad for both Negroes and Europeans if these changes had to be brought about by warfare.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Resisting Mussolini’s ‘Civilising Mission’**

In early 1935, the murderous intentions of the dictator of Fascist Italy, Mussolini, to conquer the East African state of Ethiopia (then called Abyssinia) were declared. Together with Liberia, Ethiopia was one of the last areas of Africa free from European control, its armies having heroically defeated Italy at the battle of Adowa in 1896. However, since 1932 Mussolini had been preparing Italian troops for their role

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Racial Prejudice in England’, Appendix C.

in the proposed glorious resurrection of the 'Roman Empire'. In order to justify such nineteenth-century style empire-building, the ideology of 'humanitarianism' was deployed by the Fascist regime alongside open old-fashioned racism, and promises were made to free the enslaved of Ethiopia, then about two million strong. In time-honoured fashion, the criminal invasion and occupation of a sovereign nation was declared to be, as Mussolini himself put it, 'a war of civilization and liberation'.<sup>54</sup>

This is not the place to examine the full reaction in Britain to Mussolini's war plans in all its complexity, nor Fascist Italy's barbaric war itself.<sup>55</sup> It might, however, be worth noting briefly that Winston Churchill, who had been 'charmed' by Mussolini's 'gentle and simple bearing' when he met him in 1927, was persuaded that British imperial interests were not endangered by Italy's plans and so continued to marvel at the man he had hailed in 1933 as a 'Roman genius'.<sup>56</sup> Such a stance was quite widely shared in British government circles (and Conservative opinion more generally), and some hoped that the acquisition of African territory by the likes of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany might act as a safety valve for European stability. This feeling among conservative and upper-class opinion extended to even the leading figure of the official Anti-Slavery movement in Britain, Lady Simon, who took Mussolini's rhetoric about 'civilization and liberation' at face value.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The quote from Mussolini was from a speech he gave at Pontinia, 18 December 1935, quoted in *The Times*, 20 December 1935. See George Padmore, *Africa and World Peace* (London, 1972), p. 153. Mussolini also defended his coming war with Ethiopia as a 'civilising mission' in an interview on 23 August 1935 with Ed Keen, the British United Press Special Correspondent. See *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1935. Padmore's *Africa and World Peace* has a useful chapter on Mussolini's Ethiopian 'adventure'.

<sup>55</sup> The collection of articles on 'The Abyssinia Crisis - Seventy Years On', published in *Socialist History*, 28, (2006), a volume edited by Allison Drew, provide one useful introduction to this question. I am indebted to the editors of *Socialist History* for including in that collection my article on 'C.L.R. James and Italy's conquest of Abyssinia,' which attempted to explore how Mussolini's war shaped James's writing of *The Black Jacobins*.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Vol. 5; 1922-1939* (London, 1976), pp. 226, 457. Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley; A Panorama of the 1930s* (London, 2000), p. 271. It was not until 1948 that Churchill finally grudgingly acknowledged 'Mussolini's designs on Abyssinia were unsuited to the ethics of the twentieth century. They belonged to those dark ages when white men felt themselves entitled to conquer yellow, brown, black or red men, and subjugate them by superior strength and weapons.'

<sup>57</sup> Lady Simon had heard James lecture on Africa in Colne to the Sunday Lecture Society in March 1935 before setting off to Italy to meet with Mussolini in April 1935. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 126-33, 145. I am also grateful to Amalia Ribí for sending me a copy of her paper, "'To finish the Work Wilberforce Began...'" Kathleen Lady Simon and British Anti-Slavery Activism in the Interwar Years,' paper given at the conference *Abolitions, 1807-2007; Ending the Slave Trade in the Transatlantic World*, 12-14 April 2007, University of York, United Kingdom. When challenged over her support for Italy's 'civilising mission' in Ethiopia, Lady Simon declared her critics were

Yet for Africans, and for people of African descent like James, the spectre of Mussolini's Blackshirts spearheading yet another European imperial 'civilising mission' in Africa filled them with both horror and rage.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, across the African diaspora an international explosion of protest now erupted, and Robert Weisbord has noted that 'perhaps no single event in the twentieth century more clearly illuminated the nexus between diaspora blacks and continental blacks than the Italian-Ethiopian war'. This was because of the collective memories Ethiopia evoked, with both 'an impressive cultural tradition traceable to ancient Axum and a uniquely successful resistance to the European intrusion in Africa in the latter part of the nineteenth century'.<sup>59</sup> James needed no lectures from Mussolini about the sufferings of the enslaved - indeed James had even written about 'the shackled who have no future' in Ethiopia back in 1933 in his article on 'Slavery Today'.<sup>60</sup>

Robert Hill has drawn attention to how Italy's invasion of Ethiopia 'marked the turning-point of nineteenth-century and post-war Black nationalism and paved the way for the emergence of an explicitly political Pan-Africanism', noting 'the contribution of C.L.R. James would prove to be one of the essential factors in clearly

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'quite mistaken in thinking that my work for the cause of the abolition of Slavery is anything but humanitarian - it is purely so, and politics do not enter into it in any form whatsoever'.

<sup>58</sup> Even the moderate L.C.P., at a crowded General Meeting on 4 September, 1935, passed an anti-imperialist resolution expressing its 'utmost cooperation with the Emperor of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian People in the deep shadow of War which now hangs over their beloved country' and called for 'the ultimate and complete freedom of Africa from any external domination whatsoever'. *The Keys*, 3/3, (January-March, 1936), p. 31, and the *Manchester Guardian*, 5 September 1935.

<sup>59</sup> Robert G. Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship; Africa, Africans and the Afro-American* (London, 1973), p. 89. See also Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey; Anti-Colonial Champion* (London, 1987), pp. 168-75; Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (London, 2005), pp. 138-39, 155-59, Cedric J. Robinson, 'The African Diaspora and the Italo-Ethiopian crisis,' *Race and Class*, 27/2, (1995), Robert G. Weisbord, 'British West Indian reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War: An episode in Pan-Africanism,' *Caribbean Studies*, 10/1, (1970), p. 35, and Kevin A. Yelvington, 'The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad, 1935-1936', in Bridget Brereton and Kevin A. Yelvington (eds.), *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition; Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History* (Trinidad & Tobago, 1999). The 1933 film *The Emperor Jones*, starring Paul Robeson, was banned in colonial Guyana in October 1935 fearing it would spread racial strife.

<sup>60</sup> James, 'Slavery Today'. In January 1936, Paul Robeson would give his thoughts on Mussolini's war in an interview, declaring his solidarity with the Ethiopians and noting 'it would seem that those people could get along without the kind of "civilizing" that European nations do with bombs and machine guns. There may be serious problems - slavery, for example - but Ethiopia could work out her own problems in time. There is no reason to believe that Italy can work them out for her.' See Philip S. Foner (ed.), *Paul Robeson Speaks; Writings, Speeches, Interviews, 1918-1974* (London, 1978), p. 104.

establishing the changed outlook'.<sup>61</sup> Through the L.C.P., James had met Amy Ashwood Garvey, the former wife of Marcus Garvey and a founding member of Garvey's U.N.I.A. As Italian war drums began to beat ever louder, James remembered that Amy Ashwood and he both 'felt that there ought to be an opposition' in Britain to Mussolini's looming war, and that she had 'a unique capacity to concentrate all the forces available and needed for the matter in hand'.<sup>62</sup> Together they revived an ad-hoc committee formed in 1934 to aid the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (A.R.P.S.) deputation to England.<sup>63</sup> James became Chair of the resulting International African Friends of Abyssinia (I.A.F.A.).<sup>64</sup> They soon gathered around them a quite remarkable group of militants from across Africa and the Caribbean, as Padmore later recalled.

Among the sponsors of this I.A.F.A. were the two representatives of the A.R.P.S. Messrs [George A.] Moore and [Samuel R.] Wood and Dr. J[oseph].B. Danquah who was secretary of the Ofori-Atta led delegation from the Gold Coast. The officers of the I.A.F.A. were Mr. C.L.R. James of Trinidad as chairman; Dr. Peter Milliard of British Guiana and the Hon. T. Albert Marryshaw of Grenada as vice-chairmen; Mr. Jomo Kenyatta as honorary secretary; Mrs. Amy Ashwood Garvey, former wife of the famous Negro leader, as honorary treasurer. They, together with Mr. Sam Manning of Trinidad, Mr. Mohammed Said of Somaliland, and the author [Padmore, after August 1935] formed the executive committee.<sup>65</sup>

Their first public meeting to protest against the looming war was held in London on 23 July 1935, and *West Africa* described how it was 'crowded' with 'men

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<sup>61</sup> Hill, 'In England,' p. 69.

<sup>62</sup> Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, pp. 5-6, James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 250.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the Gold Coast A.R.P.S. deputation, see Rohdie, 'The Gold Coast Aborigines Abroad'.

<sup>64</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, pp. 340, 345. A Communist front group, the Council for Promoting Equality and Civil Rights between White and Coloured People, would later wind itself up and join the I.A.F.A. Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, p. 240. The I.A.F.A. disbanded after 'major combat operations' had finished in Ethiopia and after others had formed the Abyssinian Association, active in April 1936. See Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian war*, p. 115.

<sup>65</sup> George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London, 1956), p. 145. Marryshaw was a trade unionist who had attended the 1921 Pan-African Congress.

and women of African descent'. The meeting sent 'resolutions of sympathy with Abyssinians in their resolve to maintain independence' and began a fund to either 'send an ambulance' or 'found a permanent hospital if there is no war'.<sup>66</sup>

Such an expression of solidarity with African people was sorely lacking among many leading British politicians and commentators, who openly declared for Fascist Italy's proposed 'civilising mission'. Lord Hardinge of Penhurst described the people of Ethiopia as 'a savage and barbarous enemy' and so, as Lord Stanhope, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, told a Foreign Office official, it would be wrong to sell them arms, as that 'would be going back on the White Man everywhere'. On 15 July 1935, the *Daily Mail* asserted that 'the British public take no interest whatever in the slave-owning Abyssinian Empire. And in this war which now seems inevitable their sympathy is wholly with the cause of the white races, which Italy is so finely upholding.' The *Mail's* Foreign Editor, Ward Price, went further, following Churchill in declaring Mussolini a 'genius' and warning that if the British opposed Italy's expansion 'to one of the last and most backward of independent nation states, we should be hindering the progress of civilisation'.<sup>67</sup> The possibility of an Ethiopian victory was too alarming to consider. The Earl of Manfield feared that 'should Italy lose, it would be at once a great encouragement to all that stands for mischief and sedition among the coloured races of the world'.<sup>68</sup> On the anti-imperialist British Left, such racism was often effectively ridiculed. As Reginald Reynolds put it:

... in short the ring is cleared for a straight fight between Italian aeroplanes and Ethiopian huts ... of every Ethiopian child who is killed, we shall be able to say "that is a blow struck against slavery"; and when Italian Fascism has reduced the whole land to the slavery of empire, our newspapers will no doubt applaud the

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<sup>66</sup> *West Africa*, 27 July 1935. See also Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, pp. 67-70, and Marika Sherwood, 'Ethiopia and Black organizations in the UK 1935-36', *Black and Asian Studies Association Newsletter*, 43, (September, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> Throughout 1935 the *Mail*, while stressing that 'the British public is not thinking of the matter at all' was also confident that 'British sympathy is entirely with Italy' in its 'African Mission'. Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian war*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>68</sup> Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian war*, p. 76.

destruction of thousands of human lives and the soul of an ancient nation as another victory of civilisation.<sup>69</sup>

On Sunday 28 July 1935, the I.A.F.A. held its second public meeting at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street. As *West Africa* reported, 'a crowded meeting of sympathisers with Abyssinia, was held, presided over by Mrs. A. A. Garvey, of the West Indies. The speakers represented several African territories.'

The first speaker was Mr. C.L.R. James, a West Indian writer and journalist, one of whose short stories was adjudged among the best of a recent year. He surveyed the history of Abyssinia's intercourse with foreign Powers. His plea may be summarised as follows:- Africans and persons of African descent all over the world have always looked with zealous pride at Abyssinia, which, alone of ancient African kingdoms, still maintains independence. They therefore viewed with alarm and indignation the desire expressed on behalf of Italy, of conquering Abyssinia and the concentration of Italian troops and armaments on the Abyssinian frontiers ... Mr. James expressed the belief that many Africans would be willing to offer themselves for the frontline, or for any auxiliary form of service in the event of war.<sup>70</sup>

From the reports of this meeting, one also gets some insight into how James reconciled his frantic political activity with his professional work reporting cricket. On Monday 29 July, readers of the *Manchester Guardian* would have read James describe an incident that took place during the match between Hampshire and Lancashire at Southampton, played on the Saturday. 'The dullness of the innings was enlivened by music from a loudspeaker, a brass band, singing, and periodical discharges from a gun, with all of which ... the local Conservative party made demonstration in the stadium next door.' While 'it sounded far more exciting than the cricket ... the gunfire next door continued with no regard for the batsman's concentration', nearly leading one Lancashire batsman, Paynter, to be dismissed by a 'political diversion'. 'Cricket,' James noted wryly, 'should be kept well away from politics'. However, a mere ten pages later, readers of that Monday's *Manchester Guardian* might have been somewhat startled to discover a report noting that at the

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<sup>69</sup> Reginald Reynolds, 'Italy Returns to Abyssinia', *The Keys*, 2/4, (April-June, 1935), p. 85.

<sup>70</sup> *West Africa*, 3 August 1935.

I.A.F.A. meeting the previous evening, their beloved cricket reporter 'gave a lucid history of the European treaties with Abyssinia' and declared that 'Abyssinia is a symbol of all that Africa was and may be again, and we look on it with a jealous pride'.<sup>71</sup>

In fact it seems that James had suffered from a 'cricket diversion' during the I.A.F.A. launch meeting, as, possibly still thinking about Paynter's batting, he remembers 'I got myself into a blunder'. 'Being a Marxist I was naturally opposed to the League of Nations, but in the excitement of forming the organisation we passed a resolution demanding ... that the League of Nations take steps against the Italian Government.'<sup>72</sup> It was not altogether that surprising that such a liberal proposal succeeded in getting passed. As James remembered, 'Lord Robert Cecil, a League of Nations maniac, instituted a private poll. It gathered over eleven million votes for collective security and over six million for an armed League of Nations.'<sup>73</sup> In late June 1935, a month earlier, the results of this 'Peace Ballot' were announced, and it showed that many people in Britain were deeply unhappy at Tory foreign policy and the prospect of another war. In part as a response, in July 1935, pragmatically thinking of British colonial possessions in East Africa, the new Tory Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin took the opportunity to dramatically steal the wind from Labour's sails, claiming that 'collective security' through the League was now 'the sheet-anchor of British policy'.<sup>74</sup> Given even the C.P.G.B. were now also urging action by the League of Nations, James remembered 'there were certain political elements who were extremely glad that our organisation, which was pretty widely known among the limited circles who were interested in these matters, could be included among those who were urging the intervention of the League of Nations'.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 July 1935, and 30 July 1935. Of course, by Monday, James himself was back in Southampton to see 'the match between Hampshire and Lancashire here continue in a minor key'.

<sup>72</sup> James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', p. 158. James's memory serves him correctly here. See *The Times*, 29 July 1935, and S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest; West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941* (London, 1977), p. 46.

<sup>73</sup> James, 'The British Vote for Socialism', p. 114.

<sup>74</sup> Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian war*, p. 20.

<sup>75</sup> James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', p. 158.

Yet had the National Government, the Labour and Liberal opposition, or the C.P.G.B. wanted to, they would not have been able to cite the I.A.F.A. as supporting their position for long. The I.A.F.A. soon reversed their position with respect to calling for sanctions by the League of Nations to stop Mussolini, and voted to reject 'any appeal to the League of Nations'. Indeed James remembers 'most of us who were in the organisation and who were supporting it, had a conception of politics very remote from debates and resolutions of the League'.<sup>76</sup> This comes through well in testimony from Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*, who described the meeting in his 'London Diary' column:

The meeting was not a big affair - a couple of hundred coloured people, and perhaps fifty white. But I have never seen an Albert Hall meeting which impressed me as so significant an omen as this little gathering in Farringdon Street, called to enlist support for the Emperor of Abyssinia. Mussolini has appealed to the war spirit and declared a white crusade against Black barbarism. Naturally, the response is Black defiance of white Barbarism.

The speakers came from the West Indies, the Gold Coast, Kenya, Somaliland and Abyssinia itself. When they expressed a hope that the League of Nations or the British Government would see justice done, the audience was silent or ironical. When they declared that coloured people everywhere would fight and die free men rather than submit to the subjugation of the last independent native kingdom, the meeting yelled with enthusiasm ... You only had to say the word "civilization" to get this meeting jeering. Soon it was persuading itself that Abyssinia was the centre of the civilization, and Europe of barbarism.<sup>77</sup>

As James put it in a letter to the *New Statesman* the next week,

There are some amongst our Society, including myself, who believe that the only final guarantee for Africa, as for the rest of the world, is the international socialist order. There are others who believe that Ethiopia must be supported because God said so in the Bible. But whatever our views, we are in this struggle as one, in that we stand by Ethiopia, and that we will do all that we can to help her. And most of us are fortified by the knowledge that in conflict with

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<sup>76</sup> James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', pp. 158-59. Of the I.A.F.A. James remembers he found 'English people were interested and we spoke in many places to somewhat small audiences'.

<sup>77</sup> 'A London Diary', *New Statesman and Nation*, 3 August 1935.

Italian Fascism we are with the stream of history and not against it.  
History will judge and the verdict will not be long delayed.<sup>78</sup>

On Sunday 25 August 1935, the I.A.F.A. held a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square, London, resolving to defend Ethiopia and demanding a lifting of the embargo on selling arms to that country. As well as James himself, described by the British journalist Hannen Swaffer as a 'West Indian orator' who 'is an expert on the history of Abyssinia's treaties' and 'speaks with eloquence and with an honest fervour', the I.A.F.A. could by now call upon a remarkable range of talent. Testament to the way in which James's organization had revived the dormant Pan-Africanist movement in Britain can be seen by the fact that for speakers they could also call upon Amy Ashwood, 'a fluent speaker', Padmore, recently returned to Britain, and Jomo Kenyatta, a Kenyan nationalist representing the Kikuyu Central Association who had been close to the C.P.G.B.<sup>79</sup> There was also another former Communist, the Barbadian Chris Braithewaite (alias 'Jones'), President of the Colonial Seaman's Association.<sup>80</sup> T. Ras Makonnen (c1900-83), born George Thomas Nathaniel Griffith in British Guiana but now claiming Ethiopian ancestry, happened to be passing through London for the first time in his life, and had heard about the rally.

I had noticed in an evening paper an announcement of a big meeting in Trafalgar Square the next day, so I went along. A number of people spoke ... I passed my card forward saying that I was an Ethiopian and I would welcome an opportunity to speak. At once I was invited to come forward, and from the plinth at Trafalgar Square I dramatized the whole scene. I linked up the struggle in

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in 'A London Diary', *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 August 1935.

<sup>79</sup> See Hannen Swaffer's article in *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1935. See also TNA: KV/2/1824/7a and Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian war*, p. 115. The I.A.F.A. had held a third meeting on 18 August 1935 at London's Conway Hall. James also addressed Manchester's Milton Hall on 29 August 1935, and Cambridge on 24 September 1935. TNA: KV/2/1824/1z. Kenyatta, who would later become President of Kenya, had even gone from London to Moscow with Padmore to be 'trained up' the winter Padmore wanted to have also taken James, that of 1932-33. See Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 340. For a photo of Kenyatta taken in the early 1930s, see Nancy Cunard (ed.), *Negro: Anthology made by Nancy Cunard, 1931-1933* (London, 1934), p. 803.

<sup>80</sup> Braithewaite, who had broken with the C.P.G.B. in 1933 when in his fifties, used the pseudonym 'Jones' to avoid discrimination at work as a result of his political activities. For more on Braithewaite, see Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, p. 222. For a photograph of him at a May Day demonstration in London in 1933, see Cunard (ed.), *Negro*, p. 567. There is also a portrayal of Braithewaite in Ethel Mannin's *Comrade O Comrade*. See Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade*, pp. 5, 117-18, 136-40, 147, 149.

Ethiopia with the larger struggle against imperialism in Africa. Across the square I pointed to South Africa House and linked its significance with the present conflict. And what else does one see from the centre of the square? Napier, Kitchener, outstanding British war-lords, and towering above them all was Nelson. But what of the English that the black and brown colonials knew about - the Shelleys, Byrons and Keats - all tucked away in some gallery or church? So one could see that Britain had really glorified those who had made its empire, and not its scholars ... After the meeting people came up and we introduced ourselves, and went off to Lyons Corner House for the usual tea.<sup>81</sup>

By August 1935 the I.A.F.A. had acquired an office at 62 New Oxford Street, where Amy Ashwood Garvey ran a restaurant.<sup>82</sup> Africans from across the diaspora felt Ethiopia was, in the words of Makonnen, 'the black man's last citadel,' and he remembered 'letters simply poured into our office from blacks on three continents asking where they could register'.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps most strikingly, the I.A.F.A. seems to have seriously considered organizing an 'International Brigade' from Britain to go and fight Fascism in this 'last citadel' of Pan-African pride. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, had argued on 1 August 1935 that if Italy invaded Ethiopia it would 'inevitably lead' to 'the formidable unsettlement of the great coloured races of the world'.<sup>84</sup> The I.A.F.A. were determined to do their bit to prove this Tory correct, and James remembered their desire to go and fight Mussolini created 'something of a political stir'.<sup>85</sup>

That an established cricket journalist like James, who had no military experience, should himself be willing to risk death fighting Mussolini's troops in Ethiopia requires additional explanation. As Robin D. G. Kelley suggests, 'as a Black man who probably felt a tinge of pride in Ethiopia's legacy, and whose

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<sup>81</sup> Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within* (London, 1973), pp. 113-14. For another vivid description of this rally see Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey*, pp. 142-43.

<sup>82</sup> Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, pp. 335-36.

<sup>83</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>84</sup> Konni Zilliacus, *Abyssinia* (London, 1935), p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> See James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', pp. 158-59. As James remembered, 'we wanted to form a military organisation which would go to fight with the Abyssinians against the Italians. I think I can say here with confidence that it would have been comparatively easy to organise a detachment of blacks in Britain to go to Ethiopia.'

admiration for Africa ran much deeper than anti-imperialism, he felt obligated to defend the place of his ancestors'.<sup>86</sup> James's Pan-Africanism comes through strongly in a letter he would later write to his comrades in the I.L.P., published on 3 June 1936 in the *New Leader*. He explained that he hoped to join the Ethiopian army to make contact with 'the masses of the Abyssinians and other Africans'. 'I did not intend to spend the rest of my life in Abyssinia, but, all things considered, I thought, and I still think, that two or three years there, given the fact that I am a Negro and am especially interested in the African revolution, was well worth the attempt.'<sup>87</sup>

Yet James's speeches in August 1935 also gives a sense of how his desire to fight in Ethiopia reflected the fact that he had just finished writing *Toussaint Louverture*, and his study of the Haitian Revolution clearly fired James's imagination about how the coming war against Italian imperialism might be won. Toussaint had defeated the European armies through a ruthless guerilla war waged from the mountains of Haiti, and the Ethiopians victory at Adowa in 1896 had also been achieved in a similar manner, through adopting a 'scorched earth' strategy and retreating into the mountains, before falling on the isolated and overstretched Italian army.<sup>88</sup> As James now put it to a public meeting of the I.A.F.A. on 16 August 1935, should the Ethiopians find themselves unable to get to grips with the Italians in conventional combat, 'we look to them to destroy their country rather than hand it over to the invader. Let them burn down Addis Ababa, let them poison their wells and water holes, let them destroy every blade of vegetation.'<sup>89</sup> Could James's research on Haiti have inspired him to seriously consider the possibility that history could repeat itself, that the Ethiopians - an army made up in part of slaves - could

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<sup>86</sup> Kelley, 'The World the Diaspora Made', p. 109.

<sup>87</sup> *New Leader*, 3 June 1936. The letter is reprinted in James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', pp. 158-59.

<sup>88</sup> As James described in *The Black Jacobins*, 'Toussaint, with half his 18,000 troops in the ranks of the enemy, could only delay and harass the advance, devastate the country and deprive Leclerc of supplies, while retiring slowly to the mountains ... he would raid Leclerc's outposts, make surprise attacks, lay ambushes, give the French no peace, while avoiding major engagements. With the coming of the rains, the French, worn out would fall victims in thousands to the fever, and the blacks would descend and drive them into the sea.' See James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 248. The Russians were to use a 'scorched earth' strategy successfully when Napoleon invaded in 1812, even letting Napoleon briefly take Moscow. Indeed, Russian military advisors worked closely with the Ethiopian army in 1896. See Edward T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa Before World War II* (London, 1974), pp. 57-58.

<sup>89</sup> Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, p. 46.

humiliate the vastly more militarily powerful European forces as had the rebel slaves on Saint Domingue?<sup>90</sup>

James's Marxism also comes through in the 1936 letter to the *New Leader*, and he noted that by joining the Ethiopian army, 'I would have had an invaluable opportunity of gaining actual military experience on the African field where one of the most savage battles between Capitalism and its opponents is going to be fought before very many years'. James however had doubts about whether the Ethiopian Emperor had the necessary strategic and tactical skills necessary to lead a guerilla army to victory over Mussolini's forces. 'As long as the Emperor was fighting Imperialism I would have done the best I could,' but should the Emperor have surrendered, 'I would have identified myself with those bands, hundreds of thousands of them, who are still fighting, and for years are going to carry on the fight against Imperialistic domination of any kind'. And just as Toussaint's forces had won the battle of ideas against the invading Napoleonic armies, confusing them utterly by reclaiming the songs of republican and revolutionary France, such as the *Ça Ira* and the *Marseillaise*, so now James suggested the same kind of ideological battle would have to be waged in Ethiopia. 'I believed also that I could have been useful in helping to organise the anti-Fascist propaganda among the Italian troops.'<sup>91</sup> In the event, James did not end up going to fight for the liberation of Ethiopia from 'Imperialist domination of any kind.' I.A.F.A. members were persuaded by the Ethiopian Minister in London that their efforts on behalf of Ethiopia would be better directed from Britain, and in any case, the British Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870 forbade British subjects to join forces of countries - in this case Italy and Ethiopia - which maintained friendly relations with Britain.<sup>92</sup>

October 1935 marked the start of Mussolini's barbaric war, and on the night of the attack, 1,200 people packed into an I.L.P. rally in London's Memorial Hall to hear James put the case for Ethiopia alongside the Party Chair James Maxton M.P.

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<sup>90</sup> I discuss this possibility further in Christian Høgsbjerg, 'C.L.R. James and Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia', *Socialist History*, 28, (2006).

<sup>91</sup> *New Leader*, 3 June 1936.

<sup>92</sup> See Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, p. 46. It is likely that the Emperor of Ethiopia, who had placed his faith in the League of Nations to stop Mussolini, did not want to risk offending the British Government by being seen to support such an 'International Brigade' from Britain. Equally, Trotsky would almost certainly not have been in favour of James going to fight in Ethiopia given the small number of supporters he had.

and Fenner Brockway.<sup>93</sup> Though many people in Britain reacted in disgust to Mussolini's invasion, few did more than James to rally solidarity with the Ethiopians while the war was going on.<sup>94</sup> Though this is not the place to relate his tremendous efforts in detail, as a member of the I.L.P., James wrote searing articles in the *New Leader*, and went on an extensive speaking tour on behalf of the Party which took him back up to Scotland and for the first time to Wales and Ireland.<sup>95</sup> James seems to have even shared a platform alongside Marcus Garvey himself at one London meeting.<sup>96</sup>

James's outstanding abilities as an orator stayed in the memory of all who had the fortune to hear him. Over seventy years later, one young member of the I.L.P. at this time, Len Edmondson, could still remember James as 'a very good, very able speaker,' addressing one such meeting at the I.L.P. owned Westfield Hall in Gateshead, in the North-East of England.<sup>97</sup> Brockway himself remembered that as a 'Socialist orator,' James was 'immensely popular in the I.L.P.'<sup>98</sup> James's solution to the crisis was very clear, based on his revolutionary politics of liberation-from-below.

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<sup>93</sup> *New Leader*, 4 October 1935.

<sup>94</sup> For evidence of sentiment in Britain in sympathy with Ethiopia, see Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War*, p. 33. On 10 October 1935, the London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* described how at cinemas, 'photographs of Mussolini and his two sons are now the signal for a storm of booing and hissing unknown hitherto in these places of entertainment' while 'for the Emperor of Abyssinia, who looks pathetically small in the contemporary newsreel, there is always a burst of cheering'.

<sup>95</sup> James's articles in the *New Leader* were published on 4 October 1935, then on 13, 20, 27 December 1935 and 3 January 1936. He also wrote longer polemics in the I.L.P. journal, *Controversy*. See for example James, 'I.L.P. Abyssinian Policy', Appendix D and the contributions, including James's, to 'Italy and Abyssinia: Should British Workers Take Sides?' *Controversy*, Special Supplement No. 1, (1936); Høgsbjerg, 'C.L.R. James and Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia'; Archer, 'C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38', p. 61. For James's speaking tour, see chapter three. For more on James's subsequent battle with the leadership of the I.L.P. on the question of Ethiopia, see the discussion on 'Abyssinia: a race or class question' in MacKenzie, 'British Marxists and the Empire', pp. 202-221 and Andrew Flinn and Gidon Cohen, 'The Abyssinia Crisis, British Labour and the Fracturing of the Anti-War Movement', *Socialist History*, 28, (2006). For the text of an anti-imperialist motion successfully passed at the I.L.P. national conference in Keighley in 1936 see Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, p. 71.

<sup>96</sup> Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, p. 330.

<sup>97</sup> Edmondson also heard James speak at 'an "open" meeting' in the North-East, and remembered George Padmore 'coming to speak several times in this area and staying with people named Winter ... Padmore always referred to James as "My very good friend", and James did likewise'. Personal information received from the late Len Edmondson via Helen Harrison, 7 February 2006. I am indebted to Raymond Challinor for putting me in touch with Edmondson.

<sup>98</sup> Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow: The Autobiography of Fenner Brockway* (London, 1977), p. 129.

The idea that the League of Nations, dominated by the Great Powers of Britain and France who had carved up most of Africa between them already, would decisively act to defend the people of Ethiopia from Mussolini was mistaken. James argued that to call for action by the League of Nations, 'to come within the orbit of Imperialist politics is to be debilitated by the stench, to be drowned in the morass of lies and hypocrisy'. Instead of appealing to the major European imperialist powers to impose League of Nations sanctions on Fascist Italy, James urged an alternative strategy - 'workers' sanctions' - international industrial action to stop Mussolini's war machine.

Workers of Britain, peasants and workers of Africa, get closer together for this and for other fights ... Now, as always, let us stand for independent organisation and independent action. We have to break our own chains. Who is the fool that expects our gaolers to break them?<sup>99</sup>

An indication of the kind of impact James's revolutionary oratory made can be seen from a report of a sizeable demonstration held up in Nelson on Sunday 4 August 1935 organised by 'the Nelson and District Anti-War Movement'. The *Nelson Leader* reported the demonstration as follows:

There was a parade of the main streets, followed by a meeting on the recreation ground. Many banners were carried with such slogans as "Are we to be the next victims", "We are sliding to chaos," "War is a crime against children of all nations," "Air raids will make all places distressed areas," "Dead men need no work," "War is a terribly profitable business, but not for the worker."

Represented in the procession were the Independent Methodist Church, the Salvation Army, the Socialist Sunday School, the Cooperative Society, the Communist Party, the Weavers' Association, the I.L.P., Church Lads Brigade, the Independent Methodists and Regent Street Boys Brigade.

Miss Stanworth, principle of Nelson Open Air School, who presided at the main platform, said the attendance showed that the people did not want war. Without the workers nations could not fight. Mr. C.L.R. James, compatriot of Constantine, the Nelson cricketer, said the procession and meeting revealed that there was strong anti-war feeling in Nelson. He was certain that a great war

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<sup>99</sup> *New Leader*, 4 October 1935. This article was reprinted. C.L.R. James, 'Is This Worth a War? The League's Scheme to Rob Abyssinia of its Independence', in C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory; Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 1984).

would flare up in Europe within a few years. The only way to find peace was to bring down the capitalist system. Mr. Leslie Hutchinson reminded the audience of the cost of the last war in lives and cripples. The only way to stop war was by the united action of the working classes.

A resolution was passed pledging “to resist all wars for profit and greed.” The resolution also demanded “that the Government withdraw support in any shape or form from Italy in her designs upon Abyssinia, realizing that the Abyssinian dispute could cause a world conflagration”. No Government could protect its civil population from the dangers of modern war, the resolution added.<sup>100</sup>

One *Nelson Leader* columnist noted that ‘the organizers of the Anti-War demonstration at Nelson on Sunday must have been gratified at the success of their efforts. The procession was much more representative of the life of the town than is usually the case these days’.<sup>101</sup> After the demonstration that Sunday itself, James had given ‘a masterly exposition of the position of Abyssinia in world affairs’ at a public meeting held that evening in Nelson Socialist Institute.<sup>102</sup> It is little wonder that with James in the leadership, the United States embassy in London could report in November 1935 that while the I.A.F.A. had begun as ‘slightly anti-imperialist’ it was now ‘showing a tendency to move further towards the left’.<sup>103</sup>

Testament enough, perhaps, to James’s inspiring work as Chair of the I.A.F.A. comes from his good friend, Learie Constantine. On 9 March 1936, Constantine, on a return visit to Trinidad, gave a lecture entitled ‘The West Indian Youth and his

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<sup>100</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 9 August, 1935. For a long, inspiring letter from ‘the Press Committee, Nelson Anti-War group’, advertising the demonstration, see *Nelson Leader*, 2 August 1935, while James’s coming return to Nelson as a speaker for the demonstration was noted in the *Nelson Leader* on 19 July 1935. Elizabeth Stanworth was a weaver and local C.P.G.B. activist. See Hill, *Nelson*, p. 97 and the letter from ‘Anti-Communist’, *Nelson Leader*, 16 August 1935.

<sup>101</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 9 August 1935. The liberal columnist was however troubled by the radical tone of the speeches, particularly it seems that of James: ‘There were many supporters of the National Government in the audience who would not accept the position that until we got rid of capitalism there would be war, and therein seems to be a weakness in many of the Anti War meetings. Instead of keeping to the subject of peace, many speeches cannot refrain from attacking the Government or the system under which we live ...’

<sup>102</sup> *Colne Times*, 9 August 1935. This report carried extensive coverage of James’s speech given at the Nelson demonstration, and noted the meeting at Nelson Socialist Institute voted unanimously for a resolution pledging ‘to support the people of Abyssinia in their struggle against Capitalistic Imperialism’.

<sup>103</sup> Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey*, p. 144.

Aspirations,' to the Trinidad and Tobago Literary Club Council, which included the following well received tribute to James:

We have great West Indians all over the world ... we have Mr. C.L.R. James who is doing political economy and literature. (Applause) A greater West Indian never left this country. (Applause) Mr. James has been chosen to represent a Party in England during the last elections and in that capacity he went all over England lecturing for his particular party. And it was a pleasure to him and to lots of people who are fond of him to find that his Party nearly returned every member that was put in. (Applause) We flatter ourselves that Mr. James has had a big hand in that success. But whether it is true or not, we must take it for granted and we must accept it if any of you hear Mr. James speak, you can come to no other conclusion than that he is an orator of the first class. (Applause) The English papers have written him up time and again as a wonderful speaker. They will continue to write him, so I am sure, and he will always be a credit to the West Indies. (Applause)<sup>104</sup>

### **Class Struggle Pan-Africanism after Ethiopia**

Africans and people of African descent, especially those who have been poisoned by British imperialist education, needed a lesson. They have got it. Every succeeding day shows exactly the real motives which move imperialism in its contact with Africa, shows the incredible savagery and duplicity of European imperialism in its quest for markets and raw materials. Let the lesson sink in deep.<sup>105</sup>

So wrote James in early 1936 in an article for the L.C.P. journal *The Keys*, 'Abyssinia and the Imperialists,' as the full depth of British and French complicity in the barbarism of Mussolini's war on the people of Ethiopia became known.<sup>106</sup> Given

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<sup>104</sup> *Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 March 1936. The I.L.P. returned four M.P.s, all in Glasgow. For a detailed analysis of the British general election results in November 1935, see David Howell, 'A Faraway Country: Abyssinia and the British general election of 1935', *Socialist History*, 28, (2006). Constantine left Trinidad in mid-March, possibly so he could be back in England in time to catch James's play *Toussaint Louverture*. He arrived back in Nelson after his trip on Sunday 22 March. See *Nelson Leader*, 27 March 1936.

<sup>105</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Abyssinia and the Imperialists', in Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford, 1992), p. 63. The original article appeared in *The Keys*, 3/3, (January-March, 1936).

<sup>106</sup> *The Keys*, 3/4, (April-June, 1936), p. 60. James's anti-imperialism inevitably drew criticism from some of the more conservative L.C.P. members, such as Major Brunskill, of Chingford in Surrey, who

a free run by the major European powers and with advanced military technology, particularly aircraft, Fascist Italy had effectively declared 'mission accomplished' by the time James's play *Toussaint Louverture* was performed in March 1936. However much heroic resistance the Ethiopians mounted to the Italian invasion, without international aid and modern arms, the odds facing them were insurmountable.<sup>107</sup> While rebels did retreat to the mountains to conduct a guerrilla war, the Italians used poison gas bombs extensively to terrorise the rest of the population, even targeting the Red Cross and hospitals.<sup>108</sup>

The mighty efforts of black radical activists internationally in solidarity with Ethiopia had been to no avail. As Weisbord has noted, 'regrettably, the black world had the will but not the power to stem the tide of fascist aggression. Perhaps the greater tragedy is that the white world which had the power lacked the will.'<sup>109</sup> Those Pan-Africanists with hopes that one country at least within the 'white world' - the Soviet Union - might have mustered the necessary willpower to rally international solidarity with Ethiopia were to see them dashed, as by the 1930s the Soviet Union was inexorably spiraling down into counter-revolution. Leaving the major imperialist powers aside, the betrayal of Ethiopia by the Soviet Union, since September 1934 a member of the League of Nations, was particularly striking. As war loomed in 1935, Trotsky observed that it was 'an irony of history' that 'in the international arena, the government of the Soviet Union has become a conservative power. It is for the status quo, against change. But it has not lifted a finger for the status quo in Ethiopia.'<sup>110</sup> In fact, come war the Soviet bureaucracy did lift a finger, but only to tell the Ethiopians

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felt 'the article does not ring true to me'. Brunskill doubted the Emperor of Abyssinia, who had now come to Britain, 'who seems to be an honourable, straight-forward man, [would] have anything to do with Great Britain if her governments had in times past behaved the way stated in the article'.

<sup>107</sup> One of Mussolini's sons, Vittorio, an Italian flying officer, boasted of the ruthlessness with which the Italians exploited their overwhelming military superiority. 'I dropped an aerial torpedo in the centre of the group [of Ethiopian horsemen] and the group spread out like a flowery rose ... about fifty brigands had a taste of our splinters. It was most entertaining work and had a tragic but beautiful effect.' Quoted in Viscount Cecil, *A Great Experiment* (London, 1941), p. 267.

<sup>108</sup> Alberto Sbacelli, *Legacy of Bitterness; Ethiopia and Fascist Italy 1935-41* (Eritrea, 1997), p. 55. See also Brendon, *The Dark Continent*, p. 279. The leader of a mobile Red Cross hospital commented: 'This isn't war - it isn't even slaughter. It's the torture of tens of thousands of defenceless men, women and children with bombs and poison gas.'

<sup>109</sup> Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship*, p. 110.

<sup>110</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Writings, 1935-6* (New York, 1970), p. 5.

where they could go. The economic interests of the Soviet oil industry came before any notion of rallying international working-class action through the Communist International. As Trotsky later remarked, while Litvinov ‘expressed his gratitude to the diplomats of France and England for their efforts “in behalf of peace”, efforts which so auspiciously resulted in the annihilation of Abyssinia, oil from the Caucasus continued to nourish the Italian fleet’.<sup>111</sup>

This betrayal of Ethiopia was merely one of the most visible demonstrations of the way in which the Soviet government had steadily abandoned world revolution in favour of building up ‘Socialism in One Country’.<sup>112</sup> After Hitler had come to power, Stalin had moved to try and make diplomatic approaches with Britain and France for reasons of national security, and the theorists of the Communist International accordingly now drew a distinction between the ‘Democratic Imperialist’ countries of Britain, America and France on the one hand and the ‘Fascist Imperialist’ powers of Germany, Italy and Japan on the other. In August 1933, Padmore had made a principled resignation from the Communist International over their sidelining of support for anti-colonialist struggle against the supposedly ‘democratic’ and ‘peace-loving’ British and French colonial dictatorships in Africa. After surviving a vicious Stalinist witch-hunt, Padmore had worked in Paris with Francophone Pan-Africanists in an attempt to organize a ‘Negro World Unity Congress’, but when this failed to get off the ground in July 1935, Padmore left for London, turning up at the door of James’s flat in August 1935, and quickly throwing himself into the I.A.F.A.<sup>113</sup> Padmore’s talents, experience and range of contacts

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<sup>111</sup> Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 195; Padmore, *Africa and World Peace*, pp. 153-54. It is interesting to compare how the Soviet Union reacted to Mussolini’s conquest of Ethiopia with how Tsarist Russia had reacted to Italy’s earlier attempt at colonisation forty years earlier. For imperial Russia in 1896, national interest came first as well, but in a strikingly different way. Hoping to establish a port on the Red Sea through trading links with Ethiopia, imperial Russia sold arms, provided medical care and advised the Ethiopians on military tactics, factors which helped Ethiopia inflict a crushing defeat on the Italians at Adowa. See Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II*, pp. 53-59.

<sup>112</sup> In James’s 1937 work *World Revolution*, he outlined the steady retreat of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union with respect to Ethiopia, and how initial support for ‘workers’ sanctions’ became replaced by support for the action by the League of Nations alone in Communist International propaganda. See James, *World Revolution*, pp. 387-89.

<sup>113</sup> James, ‘George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary’, p. 255. James, ‘Writings from *The Nation*’, p. 291. As James remembered, ‘he came unexpectedly to my flat, pale and drawn, to tell me that he had broken with the Kremlin and would henceforth be living in London. From that time on we worked closely together.’ For more on Padmore’s purge from the Communist International, see

(which now included W.E.B. Du Bois and Nancy Cunard) soon made him the natural national organizer of the I.A.F.A. While James toured the British Isles on his speaking tour, Padmore ensured the I.A.F.A. developed links in all directions, including with a similar new organization in France, Comité de Défense d'Ethiopie.<sup>114</sup> Nor did the I.A.F.A. leadership drop political education of its own members. The veteran British Marxist Harry Wicks remembers 'on one occasion in 1935, James and Padmore had taken me to meet a number of politically minded African students, one of whom I am certain was J[omo] Kenyatta'.<sup>115</sup>

As far back as October 1935, in an editorial 'Soviet Russia aids Italy' the black American journal of the N.A.A.C.P., *The Crisis*, had noted 'the Soviets are raking in good capitalist profits selling wheat and coal tar to Italy for use in the war against Ethiopia', accordingly branding the Soviet Union 'opportunist' and their protestation of 'defence of weaker nations' and 'love for exploited black people' so much 'flub-dub'.<sup>116</sup> When the news broke that the Soviet Union had sold oil to Mussolini, many black activists broke with orthodox Communism and organisations like the League Against Imperialism overnight. As Padmore recalled, 'the few Africans in London who were associated with the League [Against Imperialism] through affiliated membership of the Negro Improvement [Welfare] Association, headed by Arnold Ward, a West Indian, severed their association with the Communists and helped to form the International African Friends of Abyssinia.'<sup>117</sup>

There could then be no better audience for James's anti-imperialist play *Toussaint Louverture*, performed in London in March 1936, than these black revolutionary activists who had just had their faith in the Soviet Union shattered.

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Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II*, pp. 255-61; Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, pp. 31-34.

<sup>114</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (London, 2003), pp. 246-47, 276, 298. Paulette Nardal, secretary of the Comité de Défense d'Ethiopie was 'the primary relay' here on account of her excellent English.

<sup>115</sup> Wicks, *Keeping My Head*, p. 180.

<sup>116</sup> *The Crisis*, 42/10, (October, 1935). That issue of *The Crisis* also carried George Padmore's 'An Open Letter to Earl Browder', leader of the American Communist Party, defending himself from the Stalinist smear campaign and denouncing the Communist International's political bankruptcy. *The Crisis* editorial was quoted in *The Keys*, 3/2, (October-December, 1935), p. 27.

<sup>117</sup> Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* p. 330. For the rather sorry tale of one of the few Africans who stayed in the C.P.G.B. after the betrayal of Ethiopia, see Hakim Adi, 'Forgotten Comrade? Desmond Buckle: An African Communist in Britain', *Science and Society*, 70:1, (2006).

Many were so disgusted at the betrayal that they began to retreat from revolutionary politics altogether, and fell back into lobbying and placing demands on the British Government.<sup>118</sup> James's invocation of the Haitian Revolution in *Toussaint Louverture* must have helped to counter-act this tendency among supporters of the I.A.F.A., and in an important sense symbolised the staging of the Ethiopian resistance to Mussolini on the British stage.<sup>119</sup>

James's play was undoubtedly also much needed relief from what Padmore called the 'revolutionary comic-opera' that marked the official British Labour movement's response to Mussolini's war. Indeed, for many Pan-Africanists like Padmore, Makonnen and Kenyatta, it seems that the failure of the main parties of the European Left, particularly the Communist Parties, to seriously even attempt to mobilize solidarity with Ethiopia (especially in contrast to their subsequent mobilizations around Spain) was critical in their political and intellectual evolution. Though there were obvious limitations on what might have been possible, Makonnen and Kenyatta would doubtless have shared with Padmore the bitter feeling that, as he noted in 1937, 'the organised labour movement of Western Europe - England and France, which is supposed to be passionately anti-Fascist' did no more 'than express pious words of sympathy'.<sup>120</sup> For all three, as no doubt for many other Pan-Africanists in Britain, their positive identification with Africa, its people, its culture,

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<sup>118</sup> It is perhaps interesting to note that in July 1936, Marcus Garvey contended that if an Italo-German alliance was formed, then 'Negroes of Africa and the British colonies' should support the British Empire to stop Mussolini and Hitler gaining territory in Africa. See Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, p. 174.

<sup>119</sup> I am indebted to Robert Hill for this last suggestion.

<sup>120</sup> 'One cannot help feeling that had it been Abyssinians raining death from the air upon a white people ... that European Socialists would not merely have passed resolutions on behalf of the victim, but would have aroused the working classes into action.' Padmore, *Africa and World Peace*, pp. 154-55. See also George Padmore, 'Abyssinia betrayed by the League of Nations', *The Crisis*, 44/6, (June, 1937). See also Flinn and Cohen, 'The Abyssinia Crisis, British Labour and the Fracturing of the Anti-War Movement'.

its history, and so on would now be strengthened.<sup>121</sup> Kenyatta would go as far as to now adopt Kikuyu dress, despite the cold climate of Britain.<sup>122</sup>

It is often assumed that Italy's conquest of Ethiopia meant James in some fundamental way also now made such a shift towards a new stress on Pan-Africanism as a priority in his political practice.<sup>123</sup> As Bogues suggests, James's 'anti-colonial agitation would eventually lead him to a fundamental reconsideration of race'.<sup>124</sup> In fact, an examination of James's contribution to the heated discussions raging inside the I.L.P. with respect to Mussolini's war suggests matters are more complex. In October 1935, James had written one of his first pieces of sustained Marxist writing on 'I.L.P. Abyssinian Policy' for *Controversy*, then the party's 'Internal Discussion Organ' but soon to become the party's public journal.<sup>125</sup> In early 1936, James made two brief points about Ethiopian society before the war, which illuminate his thinking about this African country.

Abyssinia is not a capitalist nation; it is a feudal nation, and therefore has no need to seek markets, or sources of raw material, the ceaseless quest of every capitalist nation. The Emperor and other chieftains have fought among themselves in the same way as British barons fought in the Wars of the Roses, or as African tribesmen have fought. But to say on account of internal squabbles and the mere fact that Haile Selassie calls himself Emperor, a Socialist is entitled to take no side when faced with the aggression of Italian Capitalism for capitalist purposes is either profound ignorance or the most barefaced dishonesty.

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<sup>121</sup> As Makonnen remembered, by 1937, 'once I was back from Denmark, I was able to dig much more deeply into the relevant history of Ethiopia ... George [Padmore] and I spent a good deal of time in the British Museum digging out some of the ancient history of Ethiopia ... one would then discuss the social structure, the hierarchy and the church, and attempt to educate English public opinion, rather in the way that Sylvia Pankhurst was doing with her *New Times and Ethiopia News*.' Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, pp. 114-15.

<sup>122</sup> Simon Gikandi, 'Pan-Africanism and cosmopolitanism: The case of Jomo Kenyatta', *English Studies in Africa: a journal of the humanities*, 43/1, (2000).

<sup>123</sup> 'The Ethiopian crisis of 1936 was a turning point, as James was forced to confront the equivocation of the British labour movement in the face of imperialist aggression in Africa'. Anna Grimshaw, 'C.L.R. James: A Revolutionary Vision', in Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 47.

<sup>125</sup> James, 'I.L.P. Abyssinian Policy', Appendix D.

James's insistence on facing up to the harsh material reality of life in Ethiopia under Haile Selassie without any romanticism also comes out in this article, when he challenged the I.L.P. leadership's slogan of 'Workers' control in each nation'. James found this slogan not only abstract but 'an historical absurdity' in the context of Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular.

It is difficult to write with restraint of this slogan, which disgraces the Party in the eyes of every intelligent Socialist. Where are the workers in Abyssinia who are to take control? Hundreds of thousands of slaves and serfs, scattered over a huge country, thousands of small peasants and some chiefs, men living in a condition similar, except for a few modern developments, to England when William the Conqueror landed here. What is to be said of leaders who call upon the workers of an industrialized country like Italy with great cities, millions of workmen organised in factories and with the political experience of centuries behind them, to do the same as these backward Abyssinian peasants and slaves?<sup>126</sup>

It was perhaps James's awareness of the comparative backwardness of Africa as a whole that was still in his mind when first introduced by Brockway to Frederic Warburg in the summer of 1936. As James remembered, Warburg wanted 'to publish some books about the Left'.

Warburg ... sends to tell me that he wants to see me ... I am invited to go to the country with him and his wife ... they take me down to play cricket. He says, "James, I want you to write a book about African Socialism." I tell him, "No, that is not the book for me."<sup>127</sup>

James's refusal to take up Warburg's offer was perhaps not just because of his understanding that the material basis for socialism in Africa in general did not currently exist, nor his desire to write instead about the Soviet Union and the Communist International in what would become *World Revolution*. It was arguably also in part because of his close political and personal relationship with Padmore,

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<sup>126</sup> See James's contribution to 'Italy and Abyssinia: Should British Workers Take Sides?', *Controversy*, Special Supplement No. 1, (1936).

<sup>127</sup> See James, 'Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*', pp. 70-71.

who had just written such a book outlining the current state of political affairs in Africa. Since 1934, Padmore had been working with Nancy Cunard on what would become his authoritative *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936), and James had read this in proof before its publication.<sup>128</sup>

Padmore stated at the outset of *How Britain Rules Africa* that ‘very little is known about the effects of the capitalist economic system upon the native populations, a subject upon which we hope to throw some light’. Indeed, ‘our chief aim is to throw light into dark places’ and in colonial Africa ‘everywhere we shall see stark imperialist oppression and exploitation, allied with racial ignorance and arrogance, swaggering about without the least sign of shame’. Padmore deployed the term ‘colonial Fascism’ to describe the situation in such places as Kenya and South Africa in order to highlight the problematic nature of the Communist International’s turn away from the struggle for colonial liberation towards ‘anti-fascism’.<sup>129</sup> Padmore dedicated the work to ‘The Youth of My Race - The Vanguard of the New Africa’, and ended it with a proto-Fanonian rallying cry for Pan-African liberation:

As far as Africa is concerned the way is still dark, the goal is not yet in sight, but about one thing Africans have no doubts, and that is: The future belongs to the oppressed. The future of Africa belongs to the Blacks, for they are the most oppressed of the earth.<sup>130</sup>

‘Never was a book more timely’, James declared in his review of *How Britain Rules Africa*.

The book is not easy reading; it could have been better arranged; it badly needs an index. But as a picture of Africa today, economic and political, it is a masterpiece of reliable information,

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<sup>128</sup> Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa*, p. 17. ‘The author ... owes special thanks to ... his boyhood friend, Mr. C.L.R. James, for reading the proofs and offering many valuable suggestions.’ *How Britain Rules Africa* was reviewed in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 27 June 1936. Its title perhaps owes something to the inspiration of the British Communist R. Page Arnot’s *How Britain Rules India* (1929).

<sup>129</sup> As Padmore noted, ‘The Colonies are the breeding-ground for the type of fascist mentality which is being let loose in Europe today’, and the ‘brutality and barbarity’ apparent in places like South Africa and Kenya ‘remind us of conditions in [Nazi] Germany’. Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>130</sup> Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa*, p. 396.

knowledge and understanding, and easily the best book of its type that has yet appeared.<sup>131</sup>

However, James was not uncritical, because while Padmore had drawn heavily on Lenin's *Imperialism* for analysis, the comment that 'as far as Africa is concerned the way is still dark, the goal is not yet in sight' suggested he no longer seemed to have an answer to Lenin's crucial question 'What Is To Be Done?' or at least, if he did, it was not particularly Leninist. Indeed, Padmore's epilogue had noted that

... since the war, the more enlightened and far-sighted sections of the ruling classes of Europe with colonial interests in Africa have been appealing to the Blacks to co-operate with them. Africans welcome this gesture, for they want to co-operate and live in peace with all peoples, irrespective of race, colour and creed. But how can there be co-operation with those who seek to destroy them? ... Let those who preach co-operation demonstrate their sympathy with Africa in *deeds*, not words; for Africans have had too many empty promises made them in the past, and the present is far from being reassuring.<sup>132</sup>

James publicly rebuked the reformist logic implicit in his friend's perspective.

It is on the future of Africa that the author, himself a man of African descent, is grievously disappointing. He heads one section 'Will Britain Betray Her Trust?' as if he were some missionary or Labour politician. In the true tradition of Lenin, he insists on the rights of the African people to choose their own development. But, astonishingly, he welcomes the appeal of 'enlightened far-sighted sections of the ruling classes of Europe with colonial interests in Africa' to co-operate with Africans. That is madness. How does the lion co-operate with the lamb?

Africans must win their own freedom. Nobody will win it for them. They need co-operation, but that co-operation must be with the revolutionary movement in Europe and Asia. There is no other way out. Each movement will neglect the other at its peril, and

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<sup>131</sup> C.L.R. James, "'Civilising' the 'Blacks': Why Britain needs to maintain her African Possessions', *New Leader*, 29 May 1936.

<sup>132</sup> Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa*, pp. 391-92.

there is not much time left. The great cracks in the imperialist structure are widening day by day.<sup>133</sup>

James's own Leninist vision of Pan-African liberation was again restated in a lecture on 'Economic Organisation in the Tropics' given to the L.C.P. at their third annual weekend Conference, again at High Leigh in Hoddesden, on Saturday 4 April 1936. As *The Keys* reported,

[James] begun by pointing out how appropriate it was for the Conference to begin by considering the economic problems. For economics was at the root of the matter in Africa. Europeans might talk as much as they liked about going to Africa to civilise the African, but it was important for Africans to realise that what took white men to Africa in the first place was the desire for profits, and that the nations of Europe would remain in Africa only so long as profits could be obtained.

To secure profits they needed land and labour. Mr. James went on to illustrate the vileness into which white men in Africa had been led by their greed for land, and the measures, at times little short of slavery, which were practiced to compel a sufficient number of Africans to apply to white men for work. That situation, in his view, was destined to worsen, for as Japan drove British Imperialists out of the East, and as their hold on India weakened, they would be driven increasingly to invest their capital in Africa.

Africa's problem, said Mr. James, was the same as the problem of every other part of the world. What we saw in Africa was capitalism in its vilest form. In Africa, as elsewhere, it was producing its own destroyer, the native proletariat, who were destined sooner or later, in company with their revolutionary comrades elsewhere, to establish a free Africa.

Unsurprisingly, James's unrepentant Marxist perspective on the situation - 'what we saw in Africa was capitalism in its vilest form' - was followed by a 'long and lively' discussion among L.C.P. members, during which 'Mr. James was cross-examined on his view of the imminence of revolution in Africa, and on the theory that revolution could be an instrument of social progress'.

After lunch, the controversy continued when Dr. Norman Leys, the Christian socialist and British authority on Kenya (where he had served as a government medical officer for twenty years) together with James 'led a vigorous attack' on the

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<sup>133</sup> James, "'Civilising" the "Blacks"'.

philosophy underpinning talks by George Brown, a lecturer from America ‘who had just returned from sociological investigations in Liberia’ and the British journalist Leonard Barnes, a former member of the Colonial Service and author of *The Duty of Empire* (1935). Brown and Barnes ‘seemed to suggest that the essential features of tribal organization could be retained’ and progress in Africa still be made, but for Leys and James ‘the tribe, dominated by superstitious custom and narrow loyalties, belonged to the past, and could never stand up to the spread of education and transport facilities.’ *The Keys* notes that ‘round this central problem the conference ranged itself into two groups which, at teatime, were still unable to agree’.<sup>134</sup> L.C.P. members were equally fiercely divided by the question of the relationship of religious missionaries to imperialism.<sup>135</sup> James’s refusal to romanticise the old tribal networks around chiefs in colonial Africa and to counterpose instead struggles of the ‘native proletariat’ reinforces the extent to which his Pan-Africanism was quite different in character to that of say Kenyatta (or for that matter that of himself twenty years later).<sup>136</sup>

We can glean more about what James thought about the possibilities for revolution in colonial Africa from *Fight*, the Trotskyist journal, which came out on a more or less monthly basis from October 1936. James’s first editorial stated clearly

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<sup>134</sup> *The Keys*, 4/1, (July-September, 1936), pp. 4-6. See also *The Keys*, 3/4, (April-June, 1936), p. 48. In 1939, James would recall Norman Leys as ‘about as revolutionary as the late Ramsay MacDonald’, and describe the ‘conservative Englishman’ Leonard Barnes as ‘another milk and water socialist’. C.L.R. James, ‘Revolution and the Negro’, in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James, 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994), p. 85. On Leys, see Joyce Bellamy, John Saville and Diana Wylie ‘Leys, Norman, Maclean (1875-1944)’, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, VIII, (1987). For a more sympathetic view of Barnes, see Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, pp. 82-85. See also John Saville, ‘Barnes, Leonard John (1895-1977)’, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, VIII, (1987).

<sup>135</sup> *The Keys*, 4/1, (July-September, 1936), p. 12. James’s view of missionaries was not favourable. ‘The imperialists strive to keep him [the African] ignorant. They educate him through missionary schools which confuse him with talk about suffering and obedience and the life to come.’ See James, ‘“Civilising” the “Blacks”’.

<sup>136</sup> James saw some Kikuyu customs as indefensible, such as female circumcision and clitoridectomy, which Kenyatta supported in the face of missionary pressure. See Drake St. Clair, ‘Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan-African Movement’, in Robert A. Hill (ed.), *Pan-African Biography* (Los Angeles, 1987), p. 176, and Bodil Folke Frederiksen, ‘Jomo Kenyatta, Marie Bonaparte and Bronislaw Malinowski on Clitoridectomy and Female Sexuality’, *History Workshop Journal*, 65, (2008). On James’s fraternal but difficult relationship to Kenyatta, see James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, pp. 30-31, 36, and his critical appreciation of Kenyatta’s 1938 work *Facing Mount Kenya*. C.L.R. James, ‘The Voice of Africa’, *International African Opinion*, 1/2, (August, 1938), Appendix H. For James’s later positive assessment of tribal chiefs in the Gold Coast, see C.L.R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (London, 1977), pp. 52-53.

that since 'this journal stands for the old principles of international Socialism', including standing 'for the support of colonial toilers against capitalist oppression and tyranny, but through their own revolutionary struggles and not through the League of Nations', 'we shall devote space in every issue to the colonial question'.<sup>137</sup> The first issue therefore had an article, 'Egypt eases the grip', which showed that given 'Mussolini's black-shirts entrenched in Abyssinia' and 'the Palestinian Arabs carrying on a violent movement of strikes and revolt', British imperialism was being forced to relax its grip over the Mediterranean in order to try and avoid the risk of war there with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The new collaboration of Britain with the Egyptian landowners and middle-class intelligentsia meant 'Egyptian politics enters a new and advanced phase', beyond the era of 'the pro-consul masters of Egyptian destiny on the British side' and also beyond 'the leaders of national revolt on the Egyptian side'. But if the Wafd, Egypt's middle class nationalists, were very weak, the country was also lacking anything approaching a 'native proletariat'.

Egypt, practically without any large-scale industry, has no town proletariat approaching the size and importance of the Indian or Chinese. The million people in Cairo, and another three-quarters of a million in Alexandria, are mainly traders, artisans and Pashas, small and big, with a claim on the rents of the land. Eighty percent of the population is composed of the fellaheen [peasantry], who cultivate the fifty-mile fertile strip along both banks of the Nile and the wider strata of the Delta.

Neither Communism nor pure nationalism were therefore on the immediate agenda in Egypt, yet for James hope lay across the border in British Sudan, where 'tribes with a warlike tradition' were waiting for their chance.

The fellah will have to look to the oppressed and warlike tribes across the frontier in Sudan if he wants allies and direction in his fight for economic and political freedom. He will have to link up his fate with the elements which produced the Mahdi in the 'seventies and 'eighties of the last century. They, the Negro and Arab tribes of the Sudan, given a favourable opportunity, will again produce the necessary leadership and the movement for the final overthrow of Imperialism and feudal landlord tyranny in this corner of Africa. As the conquest of Egypt came from the Mediterranean

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<sup>137</sup> *Fight*, 1/1, (October, 1936).

coast, the liberation is to come from the hinterland, where tribes with a warlike tradition are just waiting for the chance. It is when the Imperialists are destroying each other in another war that the chance will come. Then Egyptian peasant and Sudanese tribesman will be able to deal with both foreign and native exploiters at the same time.<sup>138</sup>

But what would the Egyptian peasantry and Sudanese tribesmen do once they had 'dealt with both foreign and native exploiters', given the fact that there was the profound weaknesses of the local working class and so the lack of a material basis for socialism? The second issue of *Fight* in December 1936 tried to answer this question, by reprinting an extract from a speech Lenin had made in 1920 at the Second Congress of the Communist International, which stressed the possible significance of the 'peasant Soviets' which emerged during the Russian Revolution for the future 'development of backward peoples'. For Lenin,

... peasant soviets, the soviets of the exploited, are applicable not only to capitalist countries, but can be adapted also to pre-capitalist conditions, and that it is the absolute duty of the Communists and of those who are ready to organize the Communist parties to propagate the idea of peasant soviets and of soviets of the exploited everywhere, including the backward and colonial countries ... Not only must we form independent nuclei of party organisations, not only must we proceed at once to propagate the idea of peasant soviets and to adapt these soviets to pre-capitalist conditions, but ... with the assistance of the proletariat of the advanced countries the backward nations can arrive to the Soviet form of organisation and through certain stages pass on to Communism, obviating the capitalist stage ... all working masses, including those of the remotest nationalities, are susceptible to the Soviet idea.

Lenin's discussion of peasant Soviets, together with the Marxist theory of permanent revolution as developed by Trotsky, constituted the theoretical basis underpinning how James imagined how the African Revolution might unfold and develop. Whatever the relevance of 'peasant

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<sup>138</sup> *Fight*, 1/1, (October, 1936).

Soviets' with respect to colonial Africa, as James noted, 'Lenin had a profoundly original conception of the development of backward people'.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Fight*, 1/2, (December, 1936). See also Vladimir I. Lenin, 'Report of Commission on National and Colonial Questions [1920]', in Vladimir I. Lenin, *On National Liberation and Social Emancipation* (Moscow, 1986), pp. 284-89.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE

# FIGHT

FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

ORGAN OF THE BRITISH BOLSHEVIK-LENINISTS (TROTSKYISTS)

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## EDITORIAL

### THE NEED FOR A NEW INTERNATIONAL

THIS first number of our journal, FIGHT, appears at an opportune moment. The civil war in Spain has once more shown to all thinking toilers that, overpassing the national boundaries of States, the population of the world is divided into two camps, not war-loving States and peaceful, democratic States, but the workers and exploited peasants on the one side and landlords and capitalists on the other, with the lower middle classes wavering uncertainly in between. Whether Fascist or Monarchist, the propertied classes in Spain, with their foreign riff-raff and colonial mercenaries, disregarding the law and order and respect for Government with which they, and all such, continually bluff the exploited, have launched an attack at the Popular Front Government in Spain, and capitalists everywhere have rallied to their side. Italian Fascism and German Fascism have given help secretly and openly, for their workers are beaten and cowed. The British National Government, Conservative democracy, always preaching about the sanctity of lawfully-elected Governments, have stood aside and watched while Hitler and Mussolini gave all possible assistance to the rebels. They, like all capitalists, love democracy just so long as democracy loves them. The French Popular Front Government has rushed frantically about Europe knocking humbly at the doors of Hitler and Mussolini begging these notorious bandits to sign papers about neutrality. All these Governments, Fascist, Conservative or Popular Front, are capitalist Governments, controlled by banks and big industries, and none not even the Popular Front Government will stretch a hand

to the workers and peasants of Spain in their struggle against Fascist brigands. However much his own workers may press him, if Leon Blum dares to attempt any such thing the capitalists and financiers of France, come what may, will bring him crashing down. To-day with the Spanish workers and peasants, and yesterday with Abyssinia, there is a united front of the exploiters against the exploited. Once more the principles of Marx and Engels, and Lenin and Trotsky have been proved true, that always, but particularly in the great crises of war and revolution, the workers of the world must unite and trust neither to Conservative, Liberal, Labour nor Popular Front capitalist Governments but to their own independent action.

Yet at this moment, with the Spanish workers and peasants, men, women and children, fighting against landlord and capitalist tyranny with a gallantry and determination that stirs the heart of every fellow worker and drags a grudging admiration from even their bitterest class enemies, the workers of the world are impotent. Slanderers of the working-class movement call them apathetic. It is a lie and an excuse for treachery. The apparent passivity of the workers under the shattering blows that capitalism has struck at them during recent years is an unnatural thing. The smashing of the Unemployment Scales in Britain in January, 1935, the stay-in strikes in France and Belgium, and now the unparalleled courage and self-sacrifice of the Spanish workers and peasants have shown that the workers are willing to fight. To-day, under the competent leadership of a strong and courageous revolutionary international, the

Plate 12. The first issue of *Fight*, 10 October 1936.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>140</sup> [Article]. From *Fight*, 10 October 1936.

In the next issue of *Fight*, in an article on Kenya, James continued on this theme.

Lenin in the extract quoted last month, said that the colonial peoples need not pass through the capitalist stage. The socialist state can assist them to pass from their primitive conditions straight to the socialist form ... However admirable a form of life primitive communism is, thoughtful Africans realise today that in the modern world, this has no place. The African must adopt Western technique in production. To do this he must learn Western ways.

However, while Africans in revolt against colonialism 'have a real chance of success only when British Imperialism is being attacked at the same time by the British revolutionary workers,' until then, James told readers of *Fight*, 'there is a lot that can be done'.

Some of the African peoples, the Kikuyu of Kenya for instance, have representatives in London. Negro seamen live in London and can make contacts with Kenya and other parts of Africa. We can build up a real solidarity by fighting the cause of Africans, Indians, and other colonials here and by letting them know that we look to them to help us in the struggle ... a revolutionary movement in this country can never achieve final success unless in close understanding and cooperation with the revolution in the colonies.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Fight*, 1/3, (January, 1937).

## C.L.R. James and the International African Service Bureau

Though the I.A.F.A. had been merged into the Abyssinian Association, the questions it had raised about Africa and imperialist domination in general were more relevant than ever as Europe headed once again towards war.<sup>142</sup> Accordingly, from about June 1936, Padmore had tried to launch a new broad organization, the 'Pan-African Federation'. As well as referring to a publication, *Voice of Africa*, published by the 'Pan-African Congress (British section),' Special Branch files mention Kenyatta speaking at London meetings of this in June 1936 with Makonnen and the veteran West African Pan-Africanist Robert Broadhurst (1859/60-1948), who had been involved in Pan-African Congresses organised in London in 1911 and 1921.<sup>143</sup> On 31 July 1936, Padmore organised a public meeting of the 'Pan-African Federation' at Memorial Hall on Farringdon Street in London. Alongside Padmore, the platform of speakers had included Arthur Creech Jones and William Mellor from the Labour Party, Fenner Brockway from the I.L.P., Dorothy Woodman, secretary of the Union of Democratic Control (U.D.C.) and the Indian nationalist Krishna Menon. However, for whatever reason, little seems to have come of this initiative organisationally.<sup>144</sup> Makonnen, however, soon managed to secure the 'Pan African Federation' a place to meet, by renting a basement flat on 2 Calthorpe Street, and he remembers various black people in London 'came around simply because we provided a base and a talking point where the coffee pot was almost always on the stove ... the movement gradually proceeded'.<sup>145</sup>

Padmore would also soon benefit from one remarkable piece of good luck, discovering a large stock of his classic pamphlet *The Life and Struggles of Negro*

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<sup>142</sup> In 1937, Padmore had brought out a book (with Secker & Warburg), entitled *Africa and World Peace*, which argued the growing tensions in Europe were an extension of the colonial rivalries of the imperialist powers.

<sup>143</sup> Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, pp. 337-38, 387-88. In 1935, Padmore had apparently tried to launch a 'Pan-African Brotherhood'. On Broadhurst, see Marika Sherwood, 'Broadhurst, Robert (1859/60-1948)[2004]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2005, 'oxforddnb.com/view/article/67910' (11 February 2007).

<sup>144</sup> *New Leader*, 31 July 1936. James was at this time in Paris at the First International Conference for the Fourth International and so must have missed this meeting.

<sup>145</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, p. 118. Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, pp. 387-88.

*Toilers* (1931), which had long been withdrawn from sale and was languishing in the basement of the C.P.G.B.'s 'Workers' Bookshop', hidden away from the public, during that bookshop's move from King Street to Farringdon Road in 1936. Padmore was able to persuade a student left in charge one lunchtime to part company with the entire stock of this now rare and valuable work for a reduced rate, enabling him to sell them on to his growing contacts.<sup>146</sup> However, selling books at various and assorted meetings was no substitute for having an effective organisation, and many in the 'Pan-African Federation' were impressed by the impact Menon's India League had managed to make so far in Britain.<sup>147</sup> As Makonnen remembers, 'we were out to create a movement ... the existing African and West Indian organizations in England at the time were very mild, and also one could see a useful parallel in the Indian League with its powerful expatriate Indian nucleus working in close conjunction with the Labour Party intellectuals'.<sup>148</sup>

There seem to have been a number of preparatory meetings of what was then known as 'the Pan African Federation, known as the Pan Afro Group', in April 1937, including one attended by the young African-American academic, Ralph Bunche.<sup>149</sup> Yet more critical in importance still was the recent arrival in London of Isaac Theophilus Akuna Wallace-Johnson (1894-1965), secretary of the West African Youth League (W.A.Y.L.) and a towering giant of African trade-unionism originally from Sierra Leone.<sup>150</sup> In May 1937, just as the L.A.I. was finally wound up, the 'International African Service Bureau for the Defence of Africans and People of African Descent', (I.A.S.B.) was born, holding regular open-air meetings on Sunday

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<sup>146</sup> The full story of this episode is told in Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 23. As Hooker notes, 'precisely what the store managers thought when they learned of this transaction may be surmised.'

<sup>147</sup> T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon: A Biography* (London, 1964), pp. 51-57, and Owen, *The British Left and India*, pp. 239-59. James attended a meeting of Menon's India League in December 1936.

<sup>148</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, p. 117.

<sup>149</sup> Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, p. 338. Bunche was in London from February to September 1937, and Susan Pennybacker has made excellent use of his diary from this time. See Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 90-94, 304. In 1937 Padmore would write to Bunche of a 'Pan-African Federation for the Defense of Africans and People of African Descent', the 'Pan-African Book Agency' and the 'Pan-African Speakers' Bureau'. Bunche thought James a 'tall, nervous brilliant young W. Indian writer'. See Charles P. Henry, *Ralph Bunche: model Negro or American other?* (New York, 1999), p. 79. See also Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life* (London, 1993), pp. 64-72.

<sup>150</sup> Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, p. 338.

afternoon in Hyde Park. In its first issue of its monthly news bulletin, *Africa and the World*, in June 1937, the I.A.S.B. declared its aims and objectives.

The International African Service Bureau is an organisation representing the progressive and enlightened public opinion among Africans and peoples of African descent. It supports the demands of Africans and other colonial peoples for democratic rights, civil liberties and self-determination.

One of the chief functions of the Bureau will be to help and enlighten public opinion in Great Britain, especially the working and middle classes, as to the true condition in the various colonies, protectorates and mandated territories in Africa, the West Indies and other colonial areas. In this way we hope than the people of England will be in a better position to raise their voices in protest against abuses and injustices which obtain in many colonies.<sup>151</sup>

Makonnen remembers the I.A.S.B. was neither 'large' nor 'highly-organised' but rather 'it came together in an informal way'. 'Padmore was there, James Babalola Wilkie from Nigeria and perhaps another thirty fellows. But there wasn't any clear membership.'<sup>152</sup> They had support from several key intellectuals within the I.L.P. including not only Reginald Reynolds and Ethel Mannin, but also the independent Marxist F.A. Ridley, author of *Mussolini Over Africa* (1935).<sup>153</sup> By the time the I.A.S.B. held its first quarterly meeting in an Indian restaurant on 7 September 1937, the group, while in debt, could report steady progress (including for example pressurising sympathetic M.P.s to ask a total of 23 awkward questions in Parliament since May). Makonnen drew up a constitution, limiting 'Active Membership' to 'Africans and peoples of African descent, regardless of nationality,

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<sup>151</sup> *Africa and the World*, 1/1, (June, 1936).

<sup>152</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, p. 122. On Sunday 23 May the I.A.S.B. seems to have had one of its first meetings in Hyde Park, with speakers including I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, Ras Makonnen and Miss Mary Downes. Babalola Wilkey or Wilkie was a Nigerian formerly employed by the Customs and Lagos Town Council called Edward Sigismund. Wilkey later briefly took over the position of general secretary of the I.A.S.B. after Wallace-Johnson's return to Sierra Leone before being expelled in 1939 for alleged misappropriation of funds. See Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 346. and, for a fuller list of apparent members, Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, pp. 388-89, 418, and MacKenzie, 'British Marxists and the Empire', p. 232.

<sup>153</sup> Francis Ambrose Ridley (1897-1994) was to become great friends with Padmore. See Robert Morrell, *The Gentle Revolutionary; The Life and Work of Frank Ridley. Socialist and Secularist* (London, 2003), p. 10, and *Socialist Leader*, 18 March 1950 and 8 May 1965. Ridley's libertarian politics can be seen from his article on 'Anarchism and Marxism', *Controversy*, 23, (August, 1938).

political creed or religious faith, who accept its aims and abide by its Constitution'. The leadership that crystallised around Padmore, who became Chair, and James was also very strong. Wallace-Johnson, at this point still a Communist, became General Secretary. He had been the editor of a paper called *West African Sentinel* and now in Britain, in October 1937, launched a journal for the I.A.S.B., *African Sentinel*, 'A Journal devoted to the interest of Africans and peoples of African descent, all over the world'. The initial idea seems to have been that it would accompany the news bulletin *Africa and the World* which James had helped edit, but *African Sentinel* soon replaced the earlier bulletin. Amy Ashwood Garvey was Vice President, with Broadhurst treasurer. 'Associate Membership' was declared 'open to Europeans and members of other races who sympathise with the aims and objects of the Bureau', and by now the I.A.S.B. had an impressive list of patrons, enabling the group to take offices on Gray's Inn Road. Patrons included not only Nancy Cunard, Mary Downes, F.A. Ridley, Victor Gollancz, Sylvia Pankhurst and Dorothy Woodman but also four Labour M.P.s, (Philip Noel-Baker, D.N. Pritt, K.C., Ellen Wilkinson, and future Labour Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones).<sup>154</sup>

The first issue of *African Sentinel* spelt out clearly the independence of the I.A.S.B., but, reflecting the diversity of its patrons noted in a section on 'Our Policy' that though 'we owe no allegiance or obligation whatsoever to any organisation or group in this or any other European country' it aimed to be 'constructive, fair and liberal in our views and opinions, as far as we possibly can'.

Our main objective is to serve as a medium of information between the Colonial and European public - the British in particular - as well as to create a connecting link between the Africans at home (in Africa) and the Africans abroad (in the West Indies, United States of America and other Western countries) by the transmission of messages and information, news and views, from one to another, in the most accurate and concise forms. The fundamental cause for which we are out and which is to advocate and defend, as far as it may be possible, the cause of the oppressed sections of humanity, and particularly of the great majority of Africans and peoples of African descent who are scattered all over the face of the globe.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, p. 118, *African Sentinel*, 1/1, (October- November, 1937). Fryer, P, *Staying Power*, p. 345. On Wallace-Johnson, see Leo Spitzer and LaRay Denzer, 'I.T.A. Wallace Johnson and the West African Youth League', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 6/3, (1973), pp. 445-52.

<sup>155</sup> *African Sentinel*, 1/1, (October-November, 1937).

James remembers 'Padmore was tireless ... He had wide connections while he had been an official of the Comintern' with radical black Pan-Africanists and 'despite the vicious lying attacks that the Communists spread about him ... from Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere they came to him and his organisation in a ceaseless stream'.<sup>156</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards has convincingly stressed the importance here of Padmore's continuing close political relationship with the Paris-based Sudanese ex-Communist and Francophone Pan-Africanist Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté (1902-42), a relationship dating back to 1929, in shaping the subsequent strategic vision and organizational form of the I.A.S.B.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, thanks in the main to Wallace-Johnson, a whole host of West African radicals were brought onto becoming at least nominal members of the I.A.S.B. Executive.<sup>158</sup>

One remarkable aspect of the I.A.S.B. was the leading role played by West Indians rather than Africans. Kenyatta, Wallace-Johnson and Broadhurst aside, the leadership was dominated by West Indians, above all Padmore, James, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Makonnen (publicity secretary) and Chris Braithewaite (alias 'Jones'), organising secretary.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, James would later describe the I.A.S.B. as 'the most striking West Indian creation between the wars'.<sup>160</sup> Bill Schwarz has drawn attention to this, wondering at 'the hubris of this tiny group of West Indians, in the I.A.S.B. and its forerunners, in turning their attention to the entire stage of Africa,

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<sup>156</sup> James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', p. 161. Padmore later remembered 'by lectures and discussions, the Bureau soon attracted a group of brilliant young Negro intellectuals in Britain'. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* p. 147.

<sup>157</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, chapter 5, pp. 241-305. From Paris Kouyaté kept in contact with a wide range of contacts across Africa and the Americas, and helped Padmore develop a sense of the importance of a 'popular' journal that embraced culture as opposed to a narrow political propagandist orientation.

<sup>158</sup> West African radicals on the original executive included Nnamdi Azikiwe, J.J. Oquye, F. A. Bruce, L. M'Banafo, Elsie Duncan, K. Sallie Tamba, O. Mandoh, and E. Domanya. See Spitzer and Denzer, 'I.T.A. Wallace Johnson and the West African Youth League', p. 447, and Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, p. 389.

<sup>159</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, pp. 341, 345.

<sup>160</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 310. The Africans who joined the I.A.S.B. referred to the West Indians, according to James, as the 'Black Englishmen' or the 'black white men'. See James, 'George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary', p. 263. Bill Schwarz, 'George Padmore', in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester, 2003), p. 148.

believing they had it within their grasp to organize the emancipation of a continent'.<sup>161</sup>

There are indeed striking historical parallels with the work of a Trinidadian nationalist of an earlier generation, Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911) who had founded an 'African Association' in London which called the world's first Pan-African conference in July 1900. But a charge of 'hubris' made against the I.A.S.B. seems misplaced, for the very first editorial of *International African Opinion* in July 1938 explicitly acknowledged that 'we know our limitations'.

We know that we cannot liberate the millions of Africans and peoples of African descent from their servitude and oppression. That task no one can do but the black people themselves. But we can help to stimulate the growing consciousness of the blacks, to give them the benefit of our daily contact with the European movement, to learn from the black masses the lessons of the profound experiences that they accumulate in their daily toil, to point out certain pitfalls that may be avoided, to co-ordinate information and organization, to do an incessant propaganda in every quarter of Britain, exposing evils, pressing for such remedies as are possible, and mobilizing whatever assistance there is to be found in Europe for the cause of African emancipation.<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, as Makonnen recalled about how they settled on the name 'Service Bureau',

... we had naturally considered the possibilities of reviving Du Bois's pan-African movement, but it seemed safer to operate under the umbrella of service rather than risk a frontal attack by taking a bolder Pan-African title. The idea was therefore was to emphasize service to people of African descent in as many ways as possible - educational, economic, co-operative and political.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Schwarz, 'George Padmore', p. 140.

<sup>162</sup> *International African Opinion*, 1/1, (July, 1938), quoted in Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, pp. 300-301. A section of this quote was also reprinted in the inside cover of George Padmore, *Hands Off the Protectorates* (London, 1938), quoted in P. Olanwuche Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism; The Idea and the Movement, 1776-1991* (Washington, 1994), p. 105.

<sup>163</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, pp. 117-18.

In other words, they did not even regard themselves as worthy successors to the now more or less defunct movement around W.E.B. Du Bois, which had organised Pan-African conferences in London in the past, let alone arrogantly assuming they themselves could organize the liberation of Africa. Rather, the I.A.S.B. raised the case for and built solidarity with liberation struggles across the African diaspora. James remembers their ‘main weapon was propaganda’, and through public meetings, composing resolutions and statements, pressurising M.P.s and firing off letters to the British press they ‘prevented anyone being able to say that people were “satisfied” with the colonial situation or “apathetic”’. By 1938, the I.A.S.B., thanks to the fundraising talents of Makonnen, had also managed to raise the necessary money to rent a new base at 12a Westbourne Grove, ‘the upper floor of a large building where we held meetings and had rooms for strangers visiting London’.<sup>164</sup> Aside from holding their own meetings, the I.A.S.B. also held large rallies in Trafalgar Square on a fairly regular basis, in solidarity with the Caribbean labour rebellions and African struggles, while on ‘Empire Day’ on the 24 May 1938, the group organised an anti-colonial exhibition at London’s Conway Hall.<sup>165</sup>

Padmore remembers many black intellectuals around the I.A.S.B. ‘held Marxist views on economic and political problems, although they were never members of the British Communist Party’. By May 1938, the C.P.G.B. had retreated from offering British colonies independence and were merely committed to supporting interim democratic charter rights, but ever since the turn to the ‘Popular Front’, James, Braithwaite and Padmore used to go to C.P.G.B. meetings to expose the Communists ‘pretensions at being revolutionists’.<sup>166</sup> As James remembered, they would speak about the struggles of French and British colonial subjects who now had been forgotten as Britain and France were declared grand ‘peace-loving democracies’ and bulwarks against fascism. ‘While I would ask a question, and Padmore might say

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<sup>164</sup> James, ‘Writings from *The Nation*’, pp. 292-93. See Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 55. James, ‘Black Intellectuals in Britain’, p. 161. For mention of Westbourne Grove, see *African Sentinel*, 1/4, (March-April, 1938).

<sup>165</sup> Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 53.

<sup>166</sup> Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* p. 148. See also the May 1938 C.P.G.B. statement ‘Peace and the Colonial Question’, discussed in Owen, *The British Left and India*, p. 244.

a word or two, it was Chris Jones [Braithewaite] who made a hell of a row.<sup>167</sup> James recalled of Braithewaite, a veteran organiser of West Indian seamen on the London docks who was key to the distribution of I.A.S.B. literature into colonial Africa and the Caribbean, that ‘at the shortest notice, he could generate indignation at the crimes of imperialism and the betrayals of Stalinism as to shock into awed silence hundreds of British people in the audience’.<sup>168</sup> The close links these I.A.S.B. members had with the I.L.P. ensured their uncompromisingly anti-Imperialist argument reached a small but significant audience on the British Left, and clearly influenced many intellectuals, including George Orwell.<sup>169</sup>

Yet despite pressures on him to do so, James did not drop out of Trotskyist activity in order to concentrate on working solely for the I.A.S.B.

I used to go into Hyde Park and ... I would speak for the Trotskyist movement and then walk about a hundred yards to where the black movement was speaking. There was always a lot of comic laughter about that with which I was well acquainted. Anyway that is what I used to do.<sup>170</sup>

He recalled that some friends in the I.A.S.B.

... attacked me for not devoting all my time and attention to the Negro movement. “We are few. There are enough white people to be Trotskyists. Look at all the time you spend on them.” They could not get very far with that ... I was doing as much work as any of them.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 269. See also Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 6. ‘Chris Jones was a very fine comrade. Chris would get himself into a temper and explode and make a revolution at the back of the hall.’

<sup>168</sup> James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, p. 36. As James later recalled of Braithewaite’s interventions at C.P.G.B. meetings, ‘he would intervene and say: “You say that the bourgeoisie in India can make the revolution, but I have been in the Party and you have said that this was impossible. Comrade James, you have the document. Read out what they used to say”. I always kept the documents with me ...’ MacKenzie, ‘British Marxists and the Empire’, p. 236.

<sup>169</sup> See for example Orwell’s famous article ‘Not Counting Niggers’ in *The Adelphi* in July 1939, republished as George Orwell, ‘Review of *Union Now* by Clarence K. Streit’, in Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, Vol. 11 (London, 1998).

<sup>170</sup> Schwarz, ‘George Padmore’, p. 137. Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>171</sup> James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, p. 29.

Equally, Anthony Bogue has alleged 'many in the Trotskyist movement would not have been happy with James's dual political practice', working with the I.A.S.B.<sup>172</sup> Paul Buhle has gone as far as to talk of 'Eurocentric Trotskyism'.<sup>173</sup> No doubt some British Trotskyists at the time were uneasy about James's Pan-Africanism, and their views are doubtless reflected in the manner in which Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, in their still unsurpassed history of the early British Trotskyist movement, *Against the Stream*, suggest James became 'more preoccupied with international events, and particularly the colonial revolution and his books than with the particular problem of party building here'.<sup>174</sup> Yet, while it may be true that other British Trotskyist groups at this time did not pay a great deal of attention to anti-colonial struggles, James's Marxist Group at least could hardly be accused of 'Eurocentrism'. As James remembered, his comrades 'read and sold the African paper and the African nationalists attended each other's meetings and there were nationalists who read and sold the Trotskyist paper [*Fight*] ... there was no problem because we had the same aim in general: freedom by the revolution'.<sup>175</sup>

*Fight* kept up its regular reports on colonial issues, carrying reports on Ethiopia, Egypt, the Caribbean, South Africa, Palestine and India.<sup>176</sup> In early December 1937, the Marxist Group held a two day 'International Socialist Fair' in Mornington Crescent, to raise money for the '*Fight* Fund' and as well as offering raffles and 'Revolutionary Christmas Cards', the programme advertised 'stalls to represent Africa, West Indies, India, China, France, U.S.S.R., etc., etc.', giving some indication of the group's internationalism.<sup>177</sup> And while James was not uncritical of

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<sup>172</sup> Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 38.

<sup>173</sup> Buhle, 'C.L.R. James: Paradoxical Pan-Africanist', p. 161.

<sup>174</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 264. James himself recalled that 'I got into a certain amount of trouble with my Trotskyist comrades for the militant nationalism of the International African Friends of Ethiopia. They accused me also, if not in so many words, of Negro chauvinism. I did not let them bother me because theoretically I was certain I was right.' James, 'Notes on the Life of George Padmore', p. 30.

<sup>175</sup> James, 'Towards the Seventh', p. 242.

<sup>176</sup> See for example *Fight*, 1/6, (May, 1937), *Fight*, 1/8, (July, 1937), *Fight*, 1/10, (September, 1937), *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937), *Fight*, 1/2, (May, 1938), *Fight*, 1/4, (August, 1938).

<sup>177</sup> Advertised in *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937).

the international Trotskyist movement, when he called for an ‘International Colonial Bureau’ to be set up by the Fourth International at its launch conference in September 1938, this was agreed.<sup>178</sup>

James also took on more responsibility for I.A.S.B. affairs when in April 1938, Wallace-Johnson returned to Sierra Leone. Alongside his editing of *Fight*, James now took on editing what had been the *African Sentinel* but was now re-launched as *International African Opinion*, with the motto ‘Educate, Co-operate, Emancipate: Neutral in nothing affecting the African Peoples’.<sup>179</sup> James’s envisioned it, not as a ‘literary journal or giver of advice from the mountain-tops’, but ‘a journal of action’ which aimed to be ‘a living weapon in the struggle’ and his editorials gave it and the I.A.S.B. a much more militant ‘class-struggle’ outlook.

We base ourselves upon the great masses of the people. The individual achievements of a few black men do not and cannot solve the problems of the blacks. One of our most important tasks is to make clear to the black intellectuals and other members of the middle class, that in the present state of world affairs there is no way out for them by seeking crumbs from the tables of their imperialist masters. They must identify themselves with the struggle of the masses ...<sup>180</sup>

As Brent Hayes Edwards notes, James’s editorials recalled ‘earlier work such as Kouyaté’s “Vox Africae” and Padmore’s editorial stance in the *Negro Worker* in

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<sup>178</sup> Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, p. 271. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 47. When James wrote his ‘Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question’ in 1939, an internal document for Leon Trotsky, he noted ‘the neglect of the Ethiopian question by the Fourth International (the British Section included) is a grave strategic error. The Ethiopians are in the field fighting and are going to be there for years. If there is any break in Italy during a war, these fighters will sweep the isolated Italian force out of the country. The African revolution today has a starting point in Africa. It is obvious what effect any such sweeping victory by the Ethiopian army will have on French black troops in Western Europe, and on Africans.’ Scott McLemee (ed.), *C.L.R. James on the “Negro Question”* (Jackson, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>179</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 346. James was helped by the black American William Harrison, an L.S.E. student under Prof. Laski. See Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* p. 150. There is a generally good and detailed discussion of the journal *International African Opinion* in Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, pp. 299-305, and Matthew Quest, ‘George Padmore’s and C.L.R. James’s *International African Opinion*’, in Fitzroy Baptiste and Rupert Lewis (eds.), *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary* (Kingston, 2009).

<sup>180</sup> *International African Opinion*, 1/1, (July, 1938). James also declared in his first editorial that ‘we shall be merciless to those blacks who in pursuit of their own narrow interests so frequently betray the great masses of the Negroes, the large majority of them are the working poor’.

its effort at a theoretical articulation of the complex relations between radical intellectual work in the metropole and black mass resistance in the colonies themselves'.<sup>181</sup>

The British authorities certainly regarded *International African Opinion* as 'inflammatory', and suppressed it from open sale. James remembers they 'tried all ways' to get the journal into the colonial world and 'we had one or two people who worked on the waterfront. They gave the pamphlets to seamen and people in boats.'<sup>182</sup> While Makonnen would later remember that in the early stages, 'like many papers' of its kind, 'we would sometimes concoct letters purporting to come from the Congo and many other places', the experience and contacts of Padmore and Braithwaite, and the network around Wallace-Johnson, meant *International African Opinion* soon began to circulate among Africans.<sup>183</sup> James's last editorial for the journal before he left for America in October 1938, which noted 'War Springs From Capitalist Rivalry' and 'Only African Freedom Ensures Lasting Peace', gives a flavour of the kind of revolutionary politics he was trying to inject into the I.A.S.B.

If we must fight, then Africans and peoples of African descent will fight for themselves, confident that in taking this course we, like the Blacks of San Domingo, will be playing an historical role in liberating not only ourselves but other sections of oppressed humanity ... Peace and Empire are irreconcilable. Imperialism must be destroyed.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, p. 300.

<sup>182</sup> Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, p. 223. Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 6.

<sup>183</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, p. 120. The first issue of *African Sentinel* reported for example that *Africa and the world* had been banned in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast under the 'sedition laws'. *African Sentinel*, 1/1, (October-November, 1937).

<sup>184</sup> *International African Opinion*, 1/4, (October, 1938). As the anti-war pamphlet the I.A.S.B. put out in September 1938 stressed, 'Europe's Difficulty is Africa's Opportunity'. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 53.

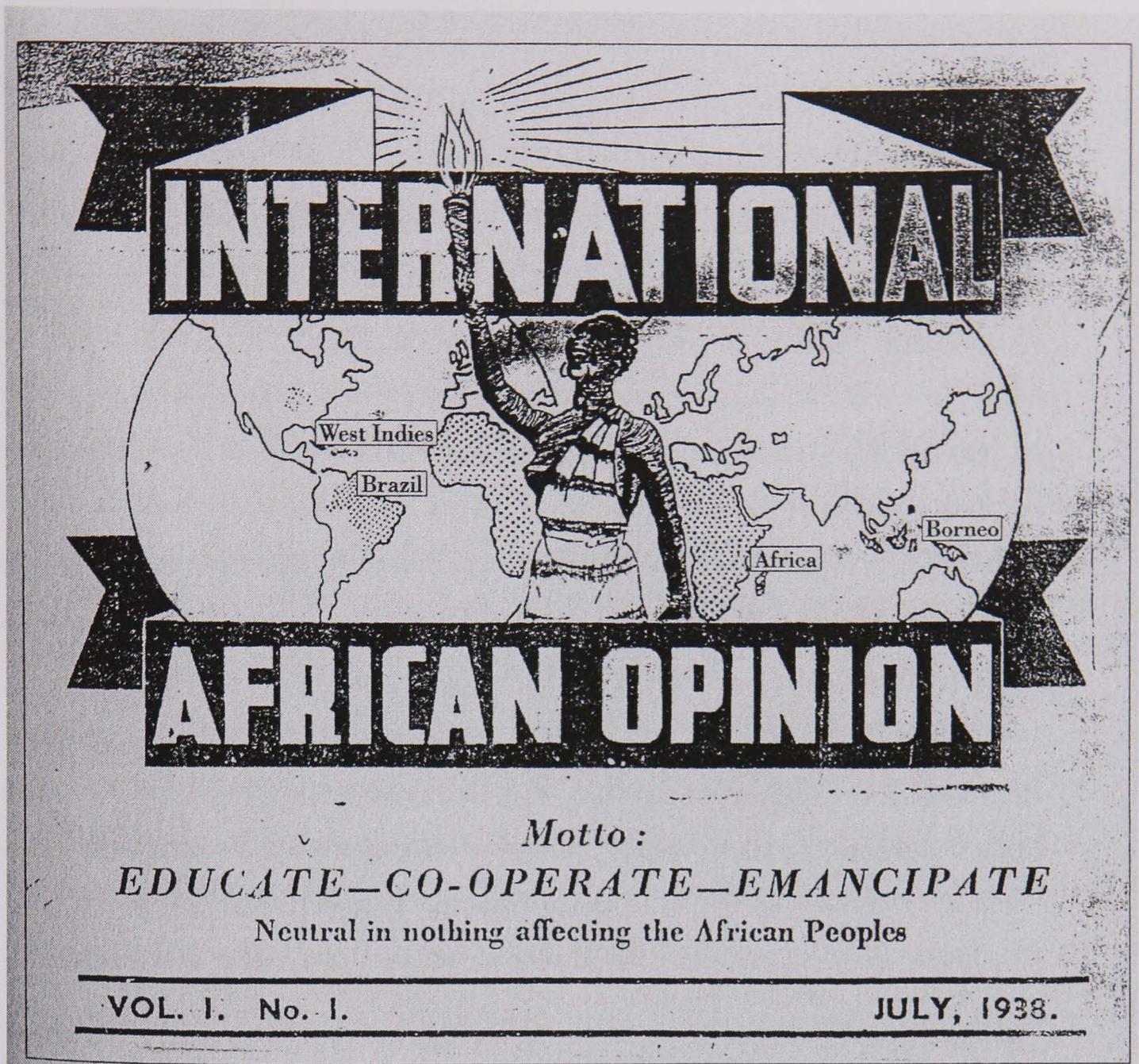


Plate 13. The first issue of *International African Opinion*, July 1938.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>185</sup> [Article]. From Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, p. 301.

## *A History of Negro Revolt*

Testimony to the growing profile of the I.A.S.B. was the fact that Raymond Postgate, founder and editor of the new left wing monthly review *F.A.C.T.*, asked Padmore for a piece on 'Negro revolt'. However, it is perhaps revealing of Padmore's own politics, and perhaps also that his *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* was now back in circulation, that, claiming pressures of I.A.S.B. activity, he instead referred Postgate onto James. James, by this time 'within Padmore's circle of associates, the most articulate theoretician of Pan-Africanism' according to Manning Marable, wrote what became *A History of Negro Revolt* rapidly, finishing by April 1938.<sup>186</sup> In September 1938, the work was published, and James remembered it 'could be seen on all bookshops and railway stalls'.<sup>187</sup> Just as *World Revolution* was in essence a synthesis based on a compilation of Trotskyist literature, now James put his growing repertoire of knowledge of the history of Pan-African struggles to good use.<sup>188</sup> James recalled how Padmore 'brought his great knowledge of Africa to bear' in the writing of this work, and 'we had a marvelous time putting in a number of provocative statements which we knew Postgate would object to. But by putting in those and then agreeing to take them out, much really good stuff was sure to get in.'<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 54. Manning Marable, *Black Leadership* (Harmondsworth, 1999), p. 91. Postgate would have known of James, and had reviewed *World Revolution* for the *New Statesman*. See Raymond Postgate, 'Du Côté de Chez Trotsky', *New Statesman*, 8 May 1937. *F.A.C.T.* ran for 27 issues from April 1937 to June 1939, when it ran out funds. Its Editorial Board was quite prestigious, and included Stephen Spender, Joseph Needham, Storm Jameson, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Leonard Barnes, Lancelot Hogben, Margaret Cole, H.G. Wells, and George Lansbury. See John Postgate and Mary Postgate, *A Stomach for Dissent; The Life of Raymond Postgate: Writer, Radical Socialist and Founder of The Good Food Guide* (Keele University, Staffordshire, 1994), pp. 198-99.

<sup>187</sup> James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', p. 160.

<sup>188</sup> Anthony Bogues has picked up on James's use of the word 'primitive' to describe the 'territories' of Eastern and Central Africa in *A History of Negro Revolt*. Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 46. Yet it might be noticed James is using the term to describe the territories of these areas (of often white settlement) rather than the black African people themselves (who James simply calls 'tribes').

<sup>189</sup> James, 'Notes on the Life of George Padmore', p. 37. James paid tribute to Padmore in the text, noting 'the files of the *Negro Worker* give many accounts of these revolts, and *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, by George Padmore, contains a great deal of coordinated information which is not easily available elsewhere'. James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 53.

One piece of ‘really good stuff’ that James was particularly keen to discuss was a spontaneous mass strike of copper miners in Northern Rhodesia (what is now Zambia) in May 1935. The Copperbelt miners had struck in protest at an increase in the poll tax at a time of rising economic insecurity, a strike that was bloodily repressed with six miners left dead and twenty-two wounded. Frederick Cooper has drawn attention to the creativity of the miners and their supporters during this strike.

The Northern Rhodesian mineworkers strike of 1935 was organised without benefit of trade unions, and it spread from mine to mine, from mine town to mine town, by personal networks, dance societies, religious organisations, and eventually mass meetings. The movement embraced nonminers in the towns, women as well as men.<sup>190</sup>

One can imagine the growing excitement for a class struggle Pan-Africanist like James in Britain as he gradually learnt more and more about what had actually taken place. The movement was centred around the ‘native proletariat’ - Copperbelt miners - yet the remarkable manner in which the struggle had spread seemed to almost suggest something akin to Lenin’s vision of ‘peasant soviets’. For James, the parallels between the glorious self-activity and capacity for improvisation displayed by the supporters of the striking Copperbelt miners and the enslaved Africans who had made the Haitian Revolution were compelling. ‘Should world events give these people a chance, they will destroy what has them by the throat as surely as the San Domingo blacks destroyed the French plantations.’<sup>191</sup>

James made such a statement after noting that the official 1935 *Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the Disturbances in the Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia*, a Commission chaired by Sir Alison Russell, had found that ‘the Watch Tower Movement has some influence among the Rhodesian natives’.<sup>192</sup> In 1936, in *How Britain Rules Africa*, Padmore had described how the ‘Watch Tower Movement’

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<sup>190</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society; The labor question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 58. For more on the strike, see Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa; Industrial strategies and the evolution of an African proletariat in the Copperbelt 1911-1941* (London, 1979), pp. 207-17.

<sup>191</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 81.

<sup>192</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 82. See the *Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the Disturbances in the Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia*, Cmd. 5009 (London, 1935), pp. 42-51.

of Jehovah's Witnesses and others was 'one of the most formidable organisations of tribal-"religious" character' in Africa.

The *Watch Tower Movement*, although originating in Nyasaland, has widespread ramifications into the Belgian Congo, Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika. Much of its activities is so interwoven in the tribal life of the people that it is difficult for Europeans to keep track of its underground activities.<sup>193</sup>

For James, the 'Watch Tower Movement' was a symbol of the coming African Revolution. 'It is difficult to say exactly the true influence of the Watch Tower. The writer has been informed by Negro sailors that its influence is widely spread throughout Africa, and that it is the most powerful revolutionary force in Africa today.'

Using such sources as well as the detail in the Russell Commission, James went on to spell out a pioneering Marxist analysis of the appeal of this millenarian movement based on 'Revelations of St. John the Baptist' in the Bible to those suffering under European colonial domination in Africa.<sup>194</sup>

The Watch Tower bases its teaching on the second coming of Christ ... [and declares] all the governments which are ruling the world, especially Great Britain and the United States of America, are organisations of Satan, and that all churches, especially the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, are emissaries of Satan. Religion thus becomes a weapon in the class struggle.

Indeed, James described how Watch Tower preached 'a transparent doctrine' in colonial Africa, 'a fierce resentment against all the imperialist Powers'. 'It does not seek to distinguish between the Fascist and the democratic imperialisms. To the vast body of Africans in Africa such a distinction is meaningless.' Watch Tower saw Great Britain as the 'blasphemous name' of the seventh head of 'the Beast', which represented the ruling powers of the world under the control of the Devil, 'given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation'. The League of Nations

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<sup>193</sup> Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa*, p. 365.

<sup>194</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 83.

was a 'false prophet' born of the Devil and the British Empire, another beast that 'exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast ... he deceived the inhabitants of the earth'. As James commented, 'the gentle Jesus, meek and mild, of the missionaries cannot compete with the Watch Tower God'.<sup>195</sup>

Such are the ideas moving in the minds of these African copper miners. They are absurd only on the surface. They represent political realities and express political aspirations far more closely than programmes and policies of parties with millions of members, numerous journals and half a century of history behind them.

Just as James saw voodoo as 'the medium of the conspiracy' for the illiterate enslaved Africans on Saint Domingue in *The Black Jacobins*, James declared 'Watch Tower says what the thinking native thinks and what he is prepared to die for'.<sup>196</sup>

It is the possibilities that 'the African Revolution' could come through first a series of spontaneous uprisings, some possibly waged by those inspired by the Watch Tower Movement that surely helped strengthen James in his decision to end both *The Black Jacobins* and *A History of Negro Revolt* with these Copperbelt miners in colonial Africa as opposed to the more explicitly political labour rebellions of the colonial Caribbean.

Though often retarded and sometimes diverted, the current of history, observed from an eminence, can be seen to unite strange and diverse tributaries in its own embracing logic. The San Domingo revolutionaries, the black army in the Civil War, were unconscious but potent levers in two great propulsions forward of modern civilisation. Today the Rhodesian copper miner, living the life of three shillings a week, is but another cog in the wheels of a creaking world economy ... but Negro emancipation has expanded with the centuries; what was local and national in San Domingo and America is today an international urgency, entangling the future of a hundred million Africans with all the hopes and fears of Western Europe. Though dimly, the political consciousness immanent in the historical process emerges in groping and neglected Africa. If Toussaint wrote in the language of '89, the grotesquerie of Watch Tower primitively

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<sup>195</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 82-84.

<sup>196</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 83, James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 69.

approximates to the dialectic of Marx and Lenin. This it is which lifts out of bleakness and invests with meaning a record of failure almost unrelieved.<sup>197</sup>

James stressed the continuing relevance of the Haitian Revolution for the modern African diaspora throughout *A History of Negro Revolt*, which focused on the ‘series of revolts, which have never ceased’ since the European ‘scramble’ for the continent in the 1880s up to the general strike in the Gold Coast in 1937, rather than detail the precise differences in terms of capital formation and imperial rule that marked each individual colony, in the manner of Padmore’s *How Britain Rules Africa*.<sup>198</sup> In his account of the Kadalie movement in South Africa in the 1920s, for example, James noted ‘the real parallel to this movement is the mass uprising in San Domingo. There is the same instinctive capacity for organisation, the same throwing up of gifted leaders from the masses.’ Once again he stressed the importance of the relationship between resistance in the colony and in the metropolis. ‘Whereas [with Haiti] there was a French Revolution in 1794 rooting out the old order in France, needing the black revolution, and sending out encouragement, organisers and arms, there was nothing like that in Britain.’ While the absence of a revolutionary situation in post-war Britain ultimately ensured the movement in South Africa ‘could not maintain itself ... seen in that historical perspective, the Kadalie movement can be seen for the profoundly important thing that it was’.<sup>199</sup>

At the end of *The Black Jacobins*, James had described modern Africa as a ‘vast prison’, and now James described how ‘the African bruises and breaks himself against his bars in the interests of freedoms wider than his own’.<sup>200</sup> But *A History of Negro Revolt* stressed that a mass prison breakout was not just necessary but in certain conditions possible as there were so few white people who could act as guards around. Indeed, given ‘the real basis of imperialist control in Africa is the cruisers

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<sup>197</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 85.

<sup>198</sup> As James noted, ‘the difference between the native under Belgian imperialism plain and simple, and Belgian imperialism carrying out the mandate of the League of Nations, is that the Belgian Government presents a report at Geneva on the working of the mandate. The native, however, is not likely to know this.’ James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 37, 55-56.

<sup>199</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 62.

<sup>200</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 303, and James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 85.

and aeroplanes of Europe', the looming inter-imperialist war provided possibilities for African revolutionaries. 'If, for instance a revolt began in the Congo and spread to South Africa, East Africa, West Africa, the Africans could easily overwhelm the whites if these could no longer receive assistance from abroad.'<sup>201</sup>

Overall, if Paul Robeson could in 1953 declare he had 'discovered Africa' and come to consider himself 'an African' in London, his home from 1927 to 1938, in part through studying African languages and folksongs at what is now the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, the same was true for James, though he of course undertook no formal academic study.<sup>202</sup> Rather James developed his Pan-Africanism through reading and discussing with the likes of Padmore, and organising alongside African activists such as Wallace-Johnson and his compatriot from Sierra Leone, Robert Broadhurst, a man Wallace-Johnson once described as 'the Grand Old Man of African nationalism'.<sup>203</sup> Some, like Kenyatta, would go on to play leading roles in the process of decolonisation after the Second World War. This chapter has not been able to explore James's relationship with individual Africans such as the Kenyan nationalist Mbiyu Koinange and the Ugandan Prince H.H. Akiki K. Nyabongo.<sup>204</sup> James doubtless would have also learnt much from discussions with white South African Trotskyists who came to Britain during the 1930s such as Ralph Lee, Max Basch (Sid Frost), Charlie Van Gelderen, and Ted Grant.<sup>205</sup> James's

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<sup>201</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>202</sup> Foner (ed.), *Paul Robeson Speaks*, pp. 351-53. See also Nicole King, 'C.L.R. James, Genre and Cultural Politics', in Christopher Gair (ed.), *Beyond Boundaries; C.L.R. James and Postnational Studies* (London, 2006), pp. 18-19. As Robeson noted, 'it was in London, in the years that I lived among the people of the British Isles and traveled back and forth to many other lands, that my outlook on world affairs was formed'. See Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, p. 171, C.L.R. James, 'Paul Robeson: Black Star', in C.L.R. James, *Spheres of Existence; Selected Writings*, Vol. 2 (London, 1980), p. 260.

<sup>203</sup> Sherwood, 'Broadhurst, Robert'.

<sup>204</sup> St. Clair, 'Mbiyu Koinange and the Pan-African Movement', pp. 174-77. In the 1950s, James's group would publish a book by Koinange to further the struggle against British rule in Kenya. See Mbiyu Koinange, *The People of Kenya Speak for Themselves* (Detroit, 1955). James reviewed Nyabongo's *Africa Answers Back* in the *New Leader*. See James, "'Civilising" the "Blacks"'. There is a longer review of it in *The Keys*, 4/1, (July-September, 1936). On Nyabongo, see Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds.), *Selected letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 477.

<sup>205</sup> James would have known Ted Grant and Max Basch from their arrival in London in December 1934, as they joined the Marxist Group inside the I.L.P. Van Gelderen arrived in December 1935, and initially also joined the Marxist Group but soon left with Grant to join Harber's group in the Labour Party (Basch stayed in the Marxist Group). Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, pp. 169-70, 243, 268. Lee arrived with another group of South African Trotskyists in the summer of 1937. Bornstein and Richardson, *War and the International*, p. 2, Hunter, 'Raff Lee and the Pioneer Trotskyists of South Africa'.

I.A.F.A. included Mohammed Said from Somaliland and a number of West Africans on its executive, while the I.A.S.B. Executive had African members on it from the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and French West Africa.<sup>206</sup> It might be enough to surmise here that against the idea that James 'had a long way to go to come to terms with the distinctive African contributions to human civilisation' once he had become a Marxist, it seems that his contact with black Africans in imperial Britain during the 1930s only served to strengthen his initial feelings about the human capabilities of African people as a whole which he had developed growing up in the Caribbean.<sup>207</sup> As James concluded in *The Black Jacobins*,

Imperialism vaunts its exploitation of the wealth of Africa for the benefit of civilisation. In reality, from the very nature of its system of profit it strangles the real wealth of the continent - the creative capacity of the African people. The African faces a long and difficult road and he will need guidance. But he will tread it fast because he will walk upright.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 345.

<sup>207</sup> The quote is from Anthony Bogues. Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, p. 46.

<sup>208</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 304.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 'That Dreadful Country': C.L.R. James on American Civilisation

Scholarly discussion of C.L.R. James tends to assume that not simply did his first American sojourn from 1938 to 1953 profoundly transform him, but from his first arrival the United States appeared as almost a completely new world for him to explore.<sup>1</sup> As Scott McLemee puts it, 'in the prime of his career, at the height of his powers, James drastically changed course' and became 'fascinated by the details of ordinary life in the United States - its social diversity and its popular culture (movies, comic strips, sports) as well as the country's sheer size'.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the move to America marked more than simply just 'a "turn" in James's career. It marks a profound shift in the coordinates of his personal identity: from Europe to America.'<sup>3</sup> As Bill Schwarz once suggested, in America 'an important metamorphosis occurred' as 'the English James came irretrievably to be displaced by the James of the black Atlantic'.

A number of transformations took place. He became more conscious of himself as black; the intensity of his Englishness declined, and with it went his earlier disdain for Americanised mass culture ... by seeing black America, he could see with new eyes the co-ordinates of his own Caribbean culture.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> So, for example, Anna Grimshaw tells us 'from his arrival in the USA in 1938 James had set out to understand American culture'. Grimshaw, 'Notes on the Life and Work of C.L.R. James', p. 17. See also Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart, 'American Civilization: An Introduction' in C.L.R. James, *American Civilization* (Oxford, 1993), p. 13. Here it is suggested that after arriving in 1938 James 'rapidly immersed himself in a study of American history and literature', almost as if he had no prior knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> McLemee, 'Introduction: The Enigma of Arrival', p. xv.

<sup>3</sup> Though McLemee is careful enough to note that there were 'deep continuities' that do bridge the divide, he maintains these were fundamentally political in character. Only 'a single link - an abiding concern or theme - connects James's British years with his American sojourn. That nexus is revolution.' McLemee, 'Afterword: American Civilization and World Revolution', pp. 217-18.

<sup>4</sup> Schwarz, 'Black Metropolis, White England', p. 193. Schwarz since this 1996 article has shifted from what he more recently called 'a putative division between an "English" James and an "American" James' towards understanding him 'through the optic of the black Atlantic'. Bill Schwarz, 'C.L.R. James's *American Civilization*', in Christopher Gair (ed.), *Beyond Boundaries: C.L.R. James and Postnational Studies* (London, 2006), pp. 128-29.

One piece of evidence often cited in support of this apparent ‘profound shift’, ‘metamorphosis’ and ‘transformation’ comes from an evocative comment made by James in 1952.

I landed in the United States in October, 1938. The British and the European educational systems pay little attention to the United States, and I knew more about France and Russia and Ancient Greece and Rome than I did about this country. I remember my first journey from Chicago to Los Angeles, by train - the apparently endless miles, hour after hour, all day and all night and the next morning the same again, until the evening. I experienced a sense of expansion which has permanently altered my attitude to the world. From that beginning, stage by stage I have spared no pains to understand the United States and become a part of the American people.<sup>5</sup>

Yet perhaps the idea of simply an American ‘turn’ in James’s thinking after 1938 retains value. While it is certainly striking that James discusses how his ‘British’ (and for that matter ‘European’) education at Q.R.C. in Trinidad ensured he knew more about ‘Ancient Greece and Rome’ than contemporary America, he merely notes that such a system of education paid ‘little attention’ to the U.S. He states that arriving in America allowed him to experience simply ‘a sense of expansion’ and an increased desire to understand and identify with its society and people, but surely this was equally true of his relationship to French society after first experiencing ‘Black Paris’ in 1933. That James knew more of Russia than America by 1938 should not greatly surprise us either, given his reading of Trotsky’s *History* and subsequent Trotskyism. James certainly needed the lived experience of over a decade spent in America itself before he seriously felt able to write a full work on ‘American Civilization’, to borrow from the title of a highly original but sadly unfinished manuscript embarked upon during the winter of 1949.<sup>6</sup> Yet the fact that his thoughts on American society and culture began to be formed as far back as Trinidad and continued on while he was in Britain surely deserves more consideration. This chapter will also take for granted that James was already a paradigmatic ‘black Atlantic’ intellectual before his American sojourn and so will explicitly challenge

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<sup>5</sup> James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> C.L.R. James, *American Civilization* (Oxford, 1993).

assumptions of an 'English' or 'European' James, someone who, according to one writer, 'had never paid attention to the condition of the African Americans in the United States' before 1938.<sup>7</sup> If James could later reflect that before arriving in Britain, 'about Britain, I was a strange compound of knowledge and ignorance', then the same it will be argued was essentially true of James about America too.<sup>8</sup>

## In Trinidad

'My mother's taste in novels was indiscriminate', James tells us in *Beyond a Boundary*. 'She was a reader, one of the most tireless I have ever known.' Of the novels that James describes picking up 'as she put them down' as a boy included at least two towering American novelists, Nathaniel Hawthorne and James Fenimore Cooper. The young James particularly admired Cooper's vivid accounts of native American tribes fighting for survival against British and French colonialism, such as *The Deerslayer*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Prairie*.<sup>9</sup> In 1944, James described in a letter to Constance Webb how one day, when a small boy, 'my mother put down *The Last of the Mohicans*'.

I picked it up and read it ... when I finished the Last of the M  
I got a copy-book and began to write a story of my own. But after  
two chapters my mother read it and said it was exactly like the Last  
of the M and I stopped ... she should have told me to go on and I  
would I have written it to the end I think.<sup>10</sup>

If it is indeed the case that when James went to Q.R.C. English literature came to dominate over say, American literature, at least he had already got some sense of how European colonialism had shaped American history. Moreover, some of James's favourite English novelists wrote at length about American society, including

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<sup>7</sup> E. San Juan Jr, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (London, 1998), p. 245.

<sup>8</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 114.

<sup>9</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 26. Small, 'The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist', p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> Grimshaw (ed.), *Special Delivery*, p. 171.

Thackeray, 36 volumes of whose writings were in the Q.R.C. library and were systematically devoured by James.<sup>11</sup> In the 1850s, Thackeray had twice visited America, and in *The Virginians*, (1857-59), for example, wrote about a slave-holding family in colonial America in the second half of the eighteenth century, making what Deborah Thomas notes as his ‘most explicit fictional description of American slavery’.<sup>12</sup> During the 1920s, as a young modern intellectual James kept up to date with American literature, subscribing ‘for some time’ to the *Nation* and the *New Republic*, and reading novelists such as William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway.<sup>13</sup> James also tackled Melville’s *Moby Dick* for the first time.<sup>14</sup> He also became not simply a fan but an expert on jazz, and bought and played many records coming out of America during this period. ‘Particularly Louis Armstrong was one of my favourites.’<sup>15</sup> One of James’s best friends during the 1920s and early 1930s, Alfred Mendes, remembered that James had ‘an uncanny memory for music and literature’, even American literature.

I can remember one evening putting him to the test. I said “Look, Nello, we are going to put you to a test now. We have always heard of this memory that you have for reciting pieces of literature. You must let us choose the piece that we want you to recite, but you can choose the author.” So James chose O. Henry. James started off with the story, and I held it with the others overlooking the book. It was the typical O. Henry short story with the startling denouement. James missed up on a few words, but no

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<sup>11</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas notes that ‘the idea of slavery haunted Thackeray’s imagination’. Deborah A. Thomas, *Thackeray and Slavery* (Athens, 1993), pp. 1, 140.

<sup>13</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 70-71. James would later impress the English novelist Edith Sitwell in 1932 by naming the novelist William Faulkner after she had alluded to ‘a young American writer of 31 or 32 who was a far finer novelist than D.H. Lawrence’ but then refused to name him. Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, pp. 24-25. Sitwell once composed poems about West Africa. See Edith Sitwell, *Gold Coast Customs* (London, 1929).

<sup>14</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 117, 168. Louise Cripps also remembers James discussing the idea of writing on *Moby Dick* with her in England during the 1930s, as a work that illuminated ‘Man’s struggle against Fate, and how his own obsessions could destroy him’.

<sup>15</sup> Buhle, ‘The Making of a Literary Life’, p. 59. According to MacDonald Celestin Taylor, James was offered a job as ‘manager of the new musical departmental store on Frederick Street’ as a result of his expertise in the area of jazz and classical music. See Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 249. For one brief later comment by James on the history of jazz, see James, *American Civilization*, p. 137.

sentences. He got the whole goddamn thing, and it was a story of about three or four thousand words!<sup>16</sup>

It is impossible here to do justice to the way in which America, in particular the 'Negro Metropolis' of New York, home of the Harlem Renaissance, appeared attractive to black West Indians.<sup>17</sup> As James wrote in 1938, the U.S. was 'the Mecca of all West Indian Negroes before the slump'.<sup>18</sup> There was a huge wave of migration to the 'black Mecca' of New York in particular, and even James might have considered joining his childhood friend Malcolm Nurse (George Padmore) when he made the move in 1924. As James remembered, 'Padmore shook the dust of the cramping West Indies from his feet in the early 1920s and went to the United States'.<sup>19</sup> James instead stayed and gravitated around a group of young intellectuals, black and white, who formed independent literary journals, *Trinidad* and then, more substantially, *The Beacon*. The editor of *The Beacon*, Albert Gomes, had a conscious aim to help foster a national 'West Indian literature' and he was inspired by American literature.

The day will come when we, like America, will produce our Walt Whitman; then, and only then will the movement towards an art and language indigenous to our spirit and environment commence. One has only to glance through the various periodicals published in this and the other islands to see what slaves we still are to English culture and tradition.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Reinhard W. Sander, 'The Turbulent Thirties in Trinidad: An Interview with Alfred H. Mendes', *World Literature Written in English*, 12/1, (1973), p. 70. James would quote from an O. Henry short story, 'Brickdust Row', in one of his 1932 articles for the *Port of Spain Gazette*. See Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, pp. 100, 135.

<sup>17</sup> There is extensive discussion of this in Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia; Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 310.

<sup>20</sup> *The Beacon*, II/12, (June, 1933). In a 1932 article on 'Al Capone' in *The Beacon*. Gomes noted that 'the rise of such a man as the Chicago gangster reveals unmistakably the nature of the system under which we all live in the Western World'. Yet Gomes celebrated the fact that 'some of the finest brains in Europe and America today are openly on the side of a classless socialist society: G.B. Shaw, Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, and others'. See *The Beacon*, I/12, (April, 1932).

*The Beacon* had a number of Americans who would contribute to the journal, including two socialists based in America who were involved in editing and contributing to the journal from the outset, Sheldon Christian and Nathan Schneider.<sup>21</sup>

James himself in the 1920s while in Trinidad was already also beginning to grapple for the first time with the systematic racism of American society. A reader of such towering black American figures as Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois, in August 1931, in *The Beacon*, James was well prepared when he wrote his famous article on 'The Intelligence of the Negro'. James here paid particular tribute to the black American artist and activist James Weldon Johnson, who had just retired from his position as N.A.A.C.P. secretary.

How may white people, particularly Colonials, hear of a man like Johnson? How many men today know what was the real quality of Booker T. Washington? To most he was a clever, even a distinguished negro, and nothing more. Time will right all these things. When names like Hoover, Coolidge, Mellon, Stimson and Walker, which fill the American news today, are dead as dust, there will yet be a place in history for Booker T. Washington, James Weldon Johnson, Moton of Tuskegee, Burghardt du Bois, and others of their kind who, in the face of every imaginable difficulty, have fought and are still fighting the cause of negro emancipation.

Surely there is a case for saying that James's profound writings on 'the Negro Question' in America date from this article written in Trinidad in 1931, rather than say 1939. However, James insisted on making a qualification.

I am not touchous on the race question. If at times I feel some bitterness at the disabilities to which my being a negro has subjected me it is soon washed away by remembering that the few things in my life of which I am proud, I owe, apart from my family, chiefly to white men, almost all Englishmen and Americans, men

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<sup>21</sup> Brinsley Samaroo (ed.), *The Beacon, Volumes I-IV, 1931-1939* (New York, 1977), p. xviii. Nathan Schneider was a supporter of the Communist Party in America, and wrote articles for *The Beacon* on the appeal of Communism in America during the Great Depression. See *The Beacon*, I/1, (March, 1931) and *The Beacon*, I/2, (May, 1931). Hazel V. Carby has argued that these two Americans had a significant influence in shaping the direction of *The Beacon*, in accordance with orthodox Communist approaches to literature. I think whatever the merits of this position in general, there is no evidence to suggest that James himself was influenced significantly by this, as he had left Trinidad before *The Beacon* made any serious 'Communist turn'. Hazel V. Carby, 'Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature: C.L.R. James and the Politics of the Trinidadian Renaissance', *New Formations*, 10, (1990).

some of them of international reputation, who have shown me kindness, appreciation, and in more than one case, spontaneous and genuine friendship.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, even before James arrived in Britain and became a Marxist, he was fundamentally committed to the idea that class usually explained far more than race. On his way to Britain, James stopped off in Barbados and got talking to a small black boy, 'a boy with a grievance'.

[The boy] told me that the white people took terrible advantage of the coloured. I asked for one instance. He said that years ago, fourteen men used to be employed lifting goods in a certain place. But the wicked white people had brought a crane which needed only one man to operate and so threw that thirteen out of work. I wanted to explain to him, but I didn't. I had had enough of in my life of explaining things to people.<sup>23</sup>

Yet James was of course not unaware of the way in which racial oppression was often intimately linked with, and reinforcing of, brutal class exploitation.

It must be a terrible thing to want work and not be able to get it. People say that the West Indian negro is lazy. They lie. I wish some of them would try going out to work in the sun at 40 cents a day. During the evidence given before the Sugar Commission in Barbados, Lord Olivier was astonished to learn that for years thousands of pounds, about a hundred thousand pounds had come into Barbados every year from the Canal Zone and America, saved by Barbadian black people who had gone out there to work.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, while James was doubtless more than aware of the horrors of racism in American society, epitomised in this period by the Scottsboro case, there is a sense in which his early view of America was also shaped by a kind of dismissive, even snobbish, attitude derived from English writers. Matthew Arnold for instance, so important an intellectual influence on the young James, was rather 'anti-American'

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<sup>22</sup> C.L.R. James, 'The Intelligence of the Negro', *The Beacon*, 1/5, (August, 1931).

<sup>23</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Barbados and the Barbadians', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 20 March 1932.

<sup>24</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Barbados and the Barbadians, II', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 22 March 1932.

for reasons other than slavery and black oppression. As Stefan Collini notes of Arnold, 'his assessment of American civilization had always been unflattering'.<sup>25</sup> James's descriptions of America in the early 1930s arguably need to be read with this in mind. In *The Life of Captain Cipriani* James denounced American politics as poisoned by 'corruption ... naked and unashamed', while American 'men of business' were 'given to fraud'.<sup>26</sup> As James put it in an article sent back from London to the *Port of Spain Gazette* in 1932, America was truly a 'dreadful country'. Indeed, British and French official politics may be 'bankrupt', Italy may be languishing under Mussolini, Germany may be stuck between 'a feudal baron like von Papen and a cinema gangster like Hitler', but 'Western Europe can say at least that she is better off than America - if that is any comfort'.<sup>27</sup>

## **In Britain**

Readers who know of James's later fascination with American popular culture particularly Hollywood movies, might be surprised to know that his love of films was not so apparent while he was in Britain. Ross McKibbin has noted 'the cultural hegemony of the American film in the interwar years' in England, yet in 1932, James had criticised 'the English people' for being 'still mentally adolescent' as 'they live on cheap films'.<sup>28</sup> Critically, black people were barely shown in any films made in America at this time, and those that did, the 'Jungle pictures' of the 1920s, portrayed black people in a deeply racist fashion, either as servants or savages from 'Darkest Africa'.<sup>29</sup> As Paul Robeson - whose portrayal of *The Emperor Jones* in 1933 was a critical moment in breaking away from this tradition - was to note in *Film Weekly* in

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<sup>25</sup> Collini, *Arnold*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 434, Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> In May 1933, the Hollywood classic 'King Kong' had come out. Pioneering special effects aside, the racial undertones of a film about a giant male gorilla whose love for a white woman ultimately meant he got captured and then ultimately killed - 'beauty killed the beast' - were not, one suspects, missed by black people living in Western countries at the time. For one hostile review of King Kong, see the *Daily Worker*, 8 May 1933.

September 1933, 'Hollywood can only visualize the plantation type of Negro - the Negro of "Poor Old Joe" and "Swanee Ribber". It is absurd to use that type to express the modern Negro as it would be to express modern England in the terms of an Elizabethan ballad.'<sup>30</sup> As James himself would put it in 1938,

... the millions who watch the films always see Negroes shining shoes or doing menial work, singing or dancing. Of the thousands of Negro professional men, of the nearly two hundred Negro universities and colleges in America which give degrees in every branch of learning, and are run predominantly by Negro professors, of this the American capitalist takes good care that nothing appears on the screen.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, Hollywood also eagerly embraced propaganda films about the British Empire, and as *The Times* noted in 1937, 'the Union Jack has in the last few years been vigorously and with no little effect waved by Hollywood'. British film censors repaid this debt, and as John MacKenzie notes, 'no film was banned for showing black people in an unpleasant or derogatory light'.<sup>32</sup> No wonder that James in 1932 was quick to blame racial prejudice he experienced at the hands of 'an ordinary, middle-class, commonplace Englishman' on 'his *Daily Express*, cinema-fed mind'.<sup>33</sup> In June 1933, in the midst of their debate on African art, Stanley Casson had recommended that James go and see a recent film.<sup>34</sup> As James had replied, 'valuable as must be the privilege of thoroughly understanding Mr. Casson's writings, I regret that I shall have to forego it if an expedition to the pictures is necessary'.<sup>35</sup>

In Britain, James's knowledge about 'American civilisation' was no doubt expanded by conversations with friends and comrades who had been politically active in America. These ranged from the Canadian Earle Birney to other West Indians in

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Noble, *The Negro in Films* (London, 1948), pp. 48, 56.

<sup>31</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 80, 95.

<sup>33</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>34</sup> *The Listener*, 7 June 1933. The film in question was the 1932 Disney film, 'Flowers and Trees', part of the 'Silly Symphonies' cartoon series, one of the first technicolour cartoons. For James's later appreciation of Disney, see James, *American Civilization*, pp. 135, 142.

<sup>35</sup> *The Listener*, 14 June 1933.

the Pan-Africanist movement who had spent time organising in America, such as Padmore, Makonnen and Amy Ashwood Garvey. He would also have some contact with Africans who had been students in America before coming to Britain to study.<sup>36</sup> But perhaps more significantly, in London James would also meet a number of black Americans, including Ralph Bunche and of course Paul Robeson himself. In March 1933, for example, at the first weekend conference of the L.C.P., James would have heard Harry Roberts, a black American visiting lecturer at the L.S.E., give a presentation on 'The American Negro'. Roberts 'drew a picture of the slave trade, proving it to be Capitalism at its worst' before dealing with the Scottsboro case, and then 'the contributions of the Negro to American civilization - music, poetry, literature, politics and fine arts'.<sup>37</sup>

Such internationalist and critically-minded contacts perhaps presented James with a rather misleading and idiosyncratic view of American civilization - one that ignored what Kent Worcester has called the 'sheer insularity of life as lived by ordinary people outside the micro-landscapes of Los Angeles, Cambridge, San Francisco and Manhattan'.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, James's knowledge about race in America inevitably expanded from such contacts, together with his wider reading. In March 1934, James discussed 'the American situation' at some length in a lecture on 'The Negro' he gave to the Nelson Sunday Lecture Society. After noting there had been 7,300 lynchings over the past thirty years, James commented that 'the position of the masses of negroes in the Southern States was just as precarious as it was in the days of slavery'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> These included the Ugandan prince Nyabongo and the Kenyan nationalist Mbiyu Koinange.

<sup>37</sup> *The Keys*, 1/1, (July, 1933). Roberts was on the L.C.P. Executive alongside James, as was another American, Warren H. Scott, from 1933-34. See *The Keys*, 1/2, (October, 1933). Roberts returned to America in December 1934. See *The Keys*, 2/3, (January-March, 1935), which also has a photo of Roberts.

<sup>38</sup> Kent Worcester, personal communication, 28 October 2009. I am grateful to Worcester for his comments on this chapter in draft.

<sup>39</sup> *Nelson Leader*, 16 March 1934. See Appendix C.

## The Rebellion of American Labour

When James joined the Trotskyist movement in Britain in 1934, he joined a tiny group inside the I.L.P. that did not have the resources for a paper of their own and so his group initially had to make do selling the American Trotskyist paper *Militant*.<sup>40</sup> From July 1934, the American Trotskyist movement also began publishing the *New International*, a theoretical journal edited by James Burnham and Max Shachtman. Through reading the *Militant* and the *New International*, James would have been able to follow quite closely political events in Roosevelt's New Deal America, above all the explosion of American trade unionism during the 1930s. For example, in the first issue of *New International* Alfred Weaver described how he had rightly predicted in December 1933 that

... considering the present historic period, and the deep-going wage cutting, speed-up, and general suffering (unemployment, etc.) which the present crisis has brought to the American proletariat, any appreciable revival of industry carries with it the perspective of a strike movement of hitherto unseen proportions.<sup>41</sup>

In September 1934, the editors of *New International*, noting that 'rarely do strikes anywhere in the world last as long as in the United States; rarely are they fought with such spontaneous vigour and even violence', described how the peculiarities of the American working class gave it its spirit of militancy.

We have before us a proletariat unique in world labour history. Peculiar historical circumstances have combined to keep the political development of the workers as a class at an inordinate distance from the economic development of the country ... once started on the road of radicalisation, the American workers will move with seven league boots and more likely than not, tend to skip over stages in which the workers in other countries lingered for

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<sup>40</sup> As Trotsky noted in August 1934, 'the "Minority" that entered the I.L.P. has maintained its internal solidarity and its connection with the international Bolshevik-Leninists, has made large use of the publications of the League in America'. Quoted in Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 194.

<sup>41</sup> Alfred Weaver. 'Strikes and the Economic Cycle', *New International*, 1/1. (July, 1934).

longer periods. As soon as the retarding burden of its petty bourgeois past is shaken off, it will shoot to the top with phenomenal speed, just as a deep sea diver, divesting himself of artificial lead weights, would surge to the surface with all the greater speed the deeper and denser the level at which he was working.<sup>42</sup>

Such information and reports meant that James was confident enough to not just expose some of the failures of the Communist International under the leadership of Stalin and Zinoviev with respect to America in *World Revolution*, but also to pass comment on the rising wave of industrial struggle there for *Fight*.<sup>43</sup> The year 1937 saw what James noted was ‘a welcome revival in Britain of working class militancy’ since the Lancashire cotton workers’ strike in 1932. This was ‘an extension of the widespread international strike wave’ that had begun in Spain in 1935 and since spread to France, Belgium and the U.S.A. In America, ‘amid all the social and political corruption of a highly developed Imperialism, with different races and stratas among the proletariat, the workers are noted for their extreme economic militancy and political backwardness’. ‘The struggle has taken the form of a fight for industrial unionism’, James noted, and he wrote about the rise of the Committee of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) and its ‘partial victories’ despite ‘the sabotage of the A.F. of L. [American Federation of Labour], use of State troops, tear gas, company thugs and all the other methods of “restoring industrial peace,” so expressive of American Imperialism’.

The issue has been in general for recognition of the Committee and its affiliated unions to represent the workers. Its importance is that it organises the workers in units, based on the factory. The form of struggle has been mass “sit-down” strikes; thousands of workers have occupied the factories, and the usual brutal methods of repression have failed to break their spirit ... the situation presents great opportunities for the militants to play the leading role in the struggle for Industrial Unionism. In this way they can strengthen the workers’ fighting power for the future revolutionary struggles of the factory committee, council or Soviet. The importance of American Imperialism in world politics renders

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<sup>42</sup> *New International*, 1/3, (September-October, 1934).

<sup>43</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 195.

the raising of the struggle in that country of vital importance to the international proletariat.<sup>44</sup>

It therefore seems likely that it was the rise of industrial action on such a large scale, increasingly around the C.I.O., which pulled into the struggle black workers for the first time in mass numbers, and James's Marxist understanding of the significance of such struggle, that led him to rethink his opinion of American society and culture while still in Britain. In 1938, Bob Edwards, Chair of the I.L.P. Industrial Committee, visited Detroit and reported back in glowing terms about the class struggle in America for the *New Leader*. In an article on 'Sit Down Strikes', Edwards described the growth of the auto workers union from 30,000 in 1936 to 400,000 by 1938. 'Nowhere in the world has the Trade Union movement advanced so rapidly. Nowhere in the world of labour have the masses developed such a militant programme of struggle.'<sup>45</sup> In September 1938, Edwards, now back in Britain, reported on the growth of the C.I.O. from one million members to four million members over the last three years through struggle in an article titled 'America Now Leads'. 'I left the American scene full of hope and enthusiasm for the CIO, and full of an eagerness to share my impressions, experiences and estimations ... a new spirit is abroad in America. A new workers' army is on the march.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> 'Lessons of the International Strike Wave', *Fight*, 1/7, (June, 1937).

<sup>45</sup> *New Leader*, 15 July 1938.

<sup>46</sup> *New Leader*, 2 September 1938. Edwards had visited Spain during the Spanish Civil War and in 1955 later became a M.P. Such optimism was shared by the editors of the *New International*, who noted in January 1938, 'it is increasingly clear that the centre of gravity of the revolutionary labour movement is shifting Westward' to the United States where 'the labour movement is experiencing a sweeping upsurge'. 'The Aims of Our Review', *New International*, 4/11, (January, 1938).

## A Revolutionary Answer to 'the Negro Question'

As Editorial Director of the publications of the I.A.S.B., James would deepen his already quite advanced understanding of the systematic racism in America, what Trotskyists at the time called 'the Negro Question'.<sup>47</sup> *Africa and the World* carried reports on 'West Indians in America' on 14 August 1937, its successor, *African Sentinel*, reprinted an article from the *Afro-American* on 25 Sept 1937 while *International African Opinion* carried a regular section, entitled first 'American Notes' and then 'The American Scene'. One issue of *International African Opinion* in August 1938, for example, among other things, carried an obituary of James Weldon Johnson, discussed Joe Louis's triumph over white German boxer Max Schmeling - seen by many as a symbolic blow to fascist ideology - the proposed establishment of a 'Negro Division for the U.S. Army', the novelist Richard Wright, and published a poem by the black American writer Langston Hughes on the Scottsboro Boys, alongside a 'Brief History of the Case' which ended as follows:

Lynch terror is the weapon in the hands of the white ruling class in order to keep the Negro workers in subjection and misery, so that the boss class can wring their super profits out of them. The subjection of the Negro workers is also used as a club to beat down the standards of the white workers. Thus by breeding this racial discrimination, white and black workers are pitted against each other.<sup>48</sup>

As Matthew Quest notes, in various news items, *International African Opinion* sought to 'foster autonomy from the Democratic Party at their best' during the era of the New Deal and to challenge 'the increasing loyalty of African-Americans to Franklin Roosevelt's Democratic Party machine' through exposing 'the American ruling elite regardless of party affiliation' on the question of black

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<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, according to James's Special Branch file, James was from late 1935 in contact with the former American Communist leader Jay Lovestone and his group in America, who sent him copies of their *Negro Voice* and *Race*, and put him in contact with their black American contacts. TNA: KV/2/1824/1z.

<sup>48</sup> *International African Opinion*, 1/2, (August, 1938). James was assisted in editing this journal by a black American student at the L.S.E., William Harrison.

liberation.<sup>49</sup> Yet James's greatest elucidation on 'the Negro Question' in America, before he left for America itself, came in his short work *A History of Negro Revolt*, where James discussed 'The Old United States', 'The [American] Civil War' and 'Marcus Garvey'. In his discussion of the Antebellum South, James briefly discussed a huge variety and number of slave revolts which had taken place, some with the Haitian Revolution in the background, from the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina in 1739 to Turner's Revolt in 1831, making good use in particular of 'an admirable and well-documented' article by the American Communist historian Herbert Aptheker on 'American Negro Slave Revolts' which had recently appeared in the summer 1937 edition of the American journal *Science and Society*.<sup>50</sup> Nat Turner's revolt, James noted, 'had an effect out of all proportion to its size'.

Though there are reports of slave conspiracies and of plots all over the Southern states for the next thirty years, nothing on a large scale seems to have been attempted. On the other hand at the time of the Turner revolt the Southern slave owners realised that the unrest "was not confined to the slaves." Henceforth the fear of unity between the blacks and the poor whites drove the South to treat with great severity any opposition to slavery in the South from whatever source it came. A rigid censorship was instituted. In the years before the American Civil War the turmoil among the slaves was widespread all over the South. Their chance came, however, not from the poor whites of the South but from the economic and political necessities of the Northern whites.<sup>51</sup>

James noted that if the American Civil War 'resulted in the abolition of slavery it was not fought for the benefit of the slaves'.

Negro slavery seemed the very basis of American capitalism. Slavery made cotton king; cotton became the very life food of British industries, it built up the New England factories. This accounts for not merely the support given to the South by

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<sup>49</sup> Quest, 'George Padmore's and C.L.R. James's *International African Opinion*', pp. 113-14.

<sup>50</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 22. For James's later analysis of Aptheker's work, see C.L.R. James, 'Stalinism and Negro History' in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James, 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 24-25.

Conservatives but even by certain British Liberals ... The South had dominated the Federal Legislation for more than half a century, but with the increasing industrial expansion of the North, that domination was now in danger. Both North and South were expanding westward. Should the new states be based on slavery as the South wanted or on free capitalism as the North wanted?

‘This was not a moral question’, yet ‘Karl Marx hailed the Civil War as the greatest event of the age ... What he could see so early was the grandeur of the civilisation which lay before the States with the victory of the North’.

What we are really witnessing here is not that sudden change in the conscience of mankind so beloved of romantic and reactionary historians, but the climax of a gradual transformation of world economy. Where formerly landed property had dominated, the French Revolution marks the beginning of the social and political domination of the industrial bourgeoisie. It began in the French Revolution, in Britain its outstanding dates are the Reform Bill of 1832 and the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, and it reached its culmination with the Civil War in America. The process worked itself out blindly and irrationally.<sup>52</sup>

Abraham Lincoln originally ‘said openly that to save the Union he would free all the slaves, or free some, or free none’ and ‘long maintained his attitude. It was the pressure of war which forced him to accept emancipation.’ Lincoln now ‘saw the necessity of at least using slaves for labour purposes. Refugees poured over to the Northern forces’ and soon ‘were establishing themselves in the army as capable teamsters, mechanics, and general workers’.

They were industrious and loyal. The South was proving more difficult to conquer than had first been thought, and the Negroes would have to be used as soldiers ... thus Lincoln’s objections were finally overcome by the necessity of events.<sup>53</sup>

By the end of the war 178,875 blacks had been enrolled in the Union army and while ‘unfair treatment affected the morale of the blacks ... of their military

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<sup>52</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>53</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 29-30.

quality there was never any question'. They were 'fighting for freedom' and 'defeated some of the crack Southern troops, men who had formerly owned them ... Lincoln himself admitted that but for the assistance given by the Negroes, the North might have lost. He spoke more wisely than he knew.'<sup>54</sup> Among the slaves still in the South,

... after the proclamation of emancipation, the news spread and it is claimed that there took place a sort of general strike, an immense sabotage, which helped to bring the South to its knees. Slavery degrades, but under the shock of great events like a revolution, slaves of centuries seem able to conduct themselves with the bravery and discipline of men who have been free a thousand years.

After victory in the Civil War,

... the Negroes themselves knew what they wanted - the land - and had they been strong enough to take it, or had the Northern capitalists the wisdom to give it to them, the possibilities opened up for the Negro and American capitalism would have been immense ... Only a revolution in which the poor were the driving force would have held out its hand to the blacks and made common cause of its own objectives and land for the blacks. There was no such revolution in America ... monopoly capitalism was on its way ... in another generation, Northern monopoly capitalism had America in its grasp. It left the Negro to his fate, and the South turned on him. Landless, his Northern collaborators gone, he was whipped back to an existence bordering on servitude.<sup>55</sup>

Robin D.G. Kelley once claimed of 'James's analysis of the slaves' actions during the conflict', from his 'invocation of the "general strike" to his description of the slaves' hesitant responses toward the Union soldiers', that they are 'taken straight' from Du Bois's monumental 1935 work *Black Reconstruction in America; An Essay*

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<sup>54</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>55</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 31-36. James did not pass over the period of 'Reconstruction' when blacks played a part in the government of some Southern states in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War and were able to implement 'the policy of a people poor and backward seeking to establish a community where all, black and white, could live in amity and freedom. It deserves to be remembered.' For more on Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (London, 1990).

*Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880.*<sup>56</sup> It is testament to James's historical skill that his writing evokes Du Bois, and James did indeed take note of 'Negro scholarship in America' as well as the claim of a 'general strike'. However, if this confirms James was aware of some of the recent historical debates around the Civil War, it does not necessarily confirm his having read *Black Reconstruction* itself.<sup>57</sup>

James finally turned his attention to 'the Garvey Movement' from 1919-26. In modern America, James wrote, 'the prevailing attitude to the Negro is one of strong and sometimes ferocious prejudice', usually related to notions of black sexual promiscuity, but 'the Negro question' is not one ultimately of race but 'a social and political question'. 'The Negro must be kept in his place.' 'All Negroes are aware of the mass of lies on which the prejudice is built, of the propaganda which is designed to cover the naked economic exploitation,' a propaganda particularly apparent with respect to Hollywood. But despite barbarous racism, there was no 'clash of civilisations' in America.

The American Negro, in language, tradition and culture is an American. He was in America almost from the beginning and he has helped to make the country what it is ... literate, Westernized, an American almost from the foundation of America, [he] suffers from his humiliations and discriminations to a degree that few whites and even many non-American Negroes can ever understand. The jazz gaiety of the American Negro is a semi-conscious reaction to the fundamental sorrow of the race.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, 'Introduction', to C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Chicago, 1995), p. 15. Cedric Robinson had previously also advanced the case that James during the 1930s was influenced by *Black Reconstruction*. See Robinson, *Black Marxism*, pp. 380, 409.

<sup>57</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 22, 31-32, 34. The only articles James refers to are Aptheker's effort in *Science and Society* from 1937 and one by a 'Southerner' from April 1938 in the *American Mercury*. Indeed James himself later commented that he 'had no idea what Du Bois was doing' with respect to the history of the American Civil War until he left Britain for America. M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 275. In a lecture in 1971, James reiterated that 'I learnt quite a few things in the United States. Among them I learned the work of Dr Du Bois, than whom no more important name in the political and intellectual development of the twentieth century can be called.' James, 'The Old World and the New', p. 209.

<sup>58</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 63-66.

It was a combination of disillusion among black Americans who had returned home having fought for nothing during the Great War coupled with the tireless dedication, exceptional oratorical talents and militant vision of Marcus Garvey that gave birth to what, by 1920 was 'proportionately the most powerful mass movement in America'. 'That nine-tenths of the Negroes in America were listening to him is probable ... his name rolled through Africa.' James himself as we have already noted elsewhere used to read Garvey's paper, the *Negro World*, in Trinidad and briefly met Garvey himself in 1927, just as the movement was in decline. However, in London, James had become closely acquainted with Garvey's first wife, Amy Ashwood, who had been there from the start. 'The King of Swaziland told a friend [Amy Ashwood] some years after that he knew the names of only two black men in the Western world: [the boxer] Jack Johnson and Marcus Garvey.'<sup>59</sup> James later recalled Kenyatta once told him that illiterate Kenyan nationalists in 1921 would gather around and listen to one person read aloud an article from the *Negro World* two or three times. 'Then they would run various ways through the forest, carefully to repeat the whole, which they had memorized, to Africans hungry for some doctrine which lifted them from the servile consciousness in which Africans lived.'<sup>60</sup>

As a Marxist, James was naturally highly critical of the apparent glaring contradictions of Garvey's politics. Garvey 'attacked lynching, he formulated militant demands, equal rights for Negroes, democratic liberties, etc' but also 'negotiated with the Ku Klux Klan for the repatriation of Negroes to Liberia'. He 'attacked imperialism' but 'appointed himself President, Emperor, King and what not, of Africa' and ultimately 'made his peace with British imperialism'. Garvey 'viciously attacked Communism and advised the Negro workers against linking up with white workers in industrial struggles' at a time when 'revolution was in the air, and the Negroes were ready for revolution'. Garvey's alternative to revolutionary politics was not only 'confused' but 'pitiable rubbish'. He spoke of 'Africa for the Africans', but as James pointed out when it came to an actual programme 'for the Afro-Americans he had none, not even a bad one'.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 310.

<sup>61</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 68-70.

Yet James knew that an understanding of Garveyism, less of Garvey himself but what his movement represented and signified, was absolutely critical as it showed 'the fires that smoulder in the Negro world, in America as in Africa'. 'Negroes wanted a leader and they took the first that was offered them ... desperate men often hear, not the actual words of an orator but their own thoughts.' But there was 'one thing Garvey did do'. 'He made the American Negro conscious of his African origin and created for the first time a feeling of international solidarity among Africans and people of African descent. In so far as this is directed against oppression it is a progressive step.'<sup>62</sup> The 'revolutionary answer to the Negro Question' therefore for James in 1938 lay in building on the strong foundation laid by Garvey in providing a militant lead for black Americans, and igniting 'the fires that smoulder' among them in a revolutionary conflagration directed against the racism of the American state and the capitalist system in general. No wonder that Trotsky was so keen that the newly formed American S.W.P. should invite him over for a lecture tour.<sup>63</sup> Aware that 'a new workers' army' was now also 'on the march' in America in the form of the C.I.O., it seems doubtful James took much persuading.

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<sup>62</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 69, 71.

<sup>63</sup> In the summer of 1938, on Trotsky's urging, James P. Cannon had invited James to do a speaking tour for the S.W.P. that winter on Europe, the coming war and 'the Negro question'. As James later proudly remembered, he 'had written the history and articles. So I brought to the Trotskyist movement some international reputation.' Grimshaw (ed.), *Special Delivery*, p. 8. Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, pp. 11-12.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **‘A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain’: C.L.R. James and the Caribbean Labour Rebellions**

Stuart Hall, in a discussion about the genesis and formation of C.L.R. James’s magisterial *The Black Jacobins*, on the sixtieth anniversary of its first publication in 1938, stressed the importance of the Caribbean labour rebellions of the 1930s.

Those workers involved in the sugar industry, in oil, and on the docks - the most proletarianised sectors - became conscious of their power. James was certainly fired by that. But what is riveting about him is the way in which the historical work and the foregrounded political events are part of a kind of seamless web. They reinforce one another. It’s not that he’s a historian with a separate political role. His work on the Haitian revolution and his work on West Indian self-government is part of the same story.<sup>1</sup>

Yet whenever historians have tried to piece together this ‘seamless web’ they have often stumbled on apparent seams. After noting the way in which *The Black Jacobins* represents a central way into thinking about ‘how the riots and rebellions which swept across the Caribbean in the 1930s entered historical consciousness: how blackness had come to be articulated as a political project, and how the memories of these events had been enlisted as a political resource for the future’, Bill Schwarz uncovered a problem, what he called ‘an extraordinary silence’.

One could read the James of the period and, with exception of four pages in a relatively slight work [*A History of Negro Revolt*] and one short article in a revolutionary paper he edited [‘British Barbarism in Jamaica’, *Fight*, June 1938], find no mention of the dramatic occurrences of the Caribbean.

Indeed, *The Black Jacobins* ended with a slightly abstract prophecy of revolution in colonial Africa rather than a concrete discussion of the revolts that one might have thought would have been a logical place to conclude an inspiring grand narrative of the greatest ever revolt in the Caribbean. As Schwarz asks of James,

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, ‘Breaking Bread with History’, pp. 20-21.

‘why did he, of all people, prove so reticent in making the connections between the political present and the historical past?’<sup>2</sup> This paper will not engage in a full discussion of the many issues raised by Schwarz’s own thought-provoking and imaginative answer to that question, but rather will aim to interrogate the question itself, through an examination of what James’s actual relationship was to these upheavals.<sup>3</sup> In the process, it is hoped some of the apparent seams between the Caribbean labour rebellions and *The Black Jacobins* may be ironed out.

### *The Life of Captain Cipriani*

In *Beyond a Boundary*, James recalled the time when ‘the Trinidad workers in the oilfields moved’ during 1937. ‘They were followed by masses of people in all the other islands, closing one epoch in West Indian history and opening another. One Government commentator, in reviewing the causes, was kind enough to refer to the writings of C.L.R. James as helping to stir up the people.’<sup>4</sup> The chief culprit here was James’s ‘political biography’ of T.W.A. leader Captain Andre Cipriani. James had written *The Life of Captain Cipriani; An Account of British Government in the West Indies* before leaving colonial Trinidad and it had been published in September 1932

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<sup>2</sup> Bill Schwarz, ‘Not Even Past Yet’, *History Workshop Journal*, 57, (2004), pp. 104-105. The question is also posed in Bill Schwarz, ‘C.L.R. James and George Lamming: The measure of historical time’, *Small Axe*, 14, (2003).

<sup>3</sup> James’s *A History of Negro Revolt* ended with discussing revolts in the Gold Coast and Northern Rhodesia but also Trinidad. Yet James explained there why he felt the 1935 Copperbelt mineworkers’ strike (with which he also ended *The Black Jacobins*) was of such potential significance, and ‘of more importance’ than either the revolt in Trinidad ‘a small island in the West Indies’ or in ‘the coastal districts of West Africa’. The Copperbelt mineworkers’ strike gave, as the other two didn’t quite give, ‘a very clear picture of what is going on in the mind of the great masses of Africans’, ‘the millions of Negroes in Central, East and Southern Africa’. For a Marxist internationalist this therefore mattered more than any kind of personal attachment James felt for the events in the Caribbean. James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 124. For a personal account of the Trinidad strikes, together with much other factual background information about the Caribbean labour rebellions, see Marika Sherwood (ed.), *Ernest Bowen and printers’ unions in British Guiana and Trinidad, 1927-1941* (London, 1999). I am indebted to Marika Sherwood for kindly allowing me access to her collection of very rare I.A.S.B. material. For a useful overview of the impact of the rebellions on British colonial elites, Cary Fraser, ‘The Twilight of Colonial Rule in the British West Indies: Nationalist Assertion vs. Imperial Hubris in the 1930s’, *Journal of Caribbean History*, 30/1-2, (1996). See also O. Nigel Bolland, *On the March; Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39* (Kingston, 1995) and Howard Johnson, ‘The Political Uses of Commissions of Enquiry (1): The Imperial-Colonial West Indies Context; The Forster and Moyne Commissions’, *Social and Economic Studies*, 27/3, (1978).

in Nelson, Lancashire before being sent back to the West Indies. It was not a large work, just 107 pages, and aimed at 'bringing before all who may be interested the political situation in the West Indies today'. James did not just simply expose the hypocrisy and brutality of colonial rule, what he called 'the bad manners, the injustice, the tyranny, and the treachery of Crown Colony Government'.<sup>5</sup> In his lucid and unaffected easy-going style, James with a penetrating and impeccable logic also subjected the official intellectual arguments put forward to justify mass black political dis-enfranchisement across the British Caribbean to a ruthless criticism.

The defenders of Crown Colony Government in the region advocated the idea of 'Trusteeship for Backward Peoples'. To quote one prominent advocate of this policy, the Beit Professor of Colonial History at Oxford University, Reginald Coupland (1884-1952), trusteeship was necessary to manage what he called 'a clash of civilisations', 'the paramount problem which besets the whole Colonial Empire - the problem created by the contact of civilisations'.

Within a very short time, as history goes, and with irresistible force, we have imposed our rule on a variety of coloured peoples - some of them at a primitive stage of development, some of them with civilisations of their own, all of them quite different from us. Not only through our government, but through a multitude of human agencies - schools, churches, cinemas, shops - and through a host of individuals - missionaries, settlers, travellers, prospectors - our habits and ideas, our beliefs and practices, our virtues and vices, all our ways of life have been brought up against the native ways.<sup>6</sup>

Trusteeship, Coupland therefore argued, involved on the part of the British 'a genuine determination to help the native peoples to acquire the capacity in course of time to govern and protect themselves'.<sup>7</sup> In Trinidad, after the upheaval and general strike of 1919, despite the introduction of repressive legislation such as the 'Seditious Acts and Publications Ordinance' of 1920 and the refusal to consider the legalisation

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<sup>5</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Reginald Coupland, 'Political Development of the Colonial Empire: Crown Colony Described', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 3 October 1936. On Coupland, see Richard Symonds, *Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause?* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 53-55, and Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies*, pp. 154-60.

<sup>7</sup> Reginald Coupland, 'The British Commonwealth and Colonial Empire. Trusteeship for Backward Peoples', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 October 1936.

of trade union activity as had happened in Guyana and Jamaica, there had been minor constitutional reform in the early 1920s.<sup>8</sup> The 1921 Wood Commission proposed an elective element to the Legislative Council and 1925 had seen the first 'general election' in Trinidad, since seven members out of the twenty-six strong body were now elected. However, suffrage was restricted to just those with property or high income, or some mere 21,794 people out of a total population of over 300,000.<sup>9</sup> For James, the success and rapid growth during the 1920s of the T.W.A., which after 1925 even carried weight beyond Cipriani himself inside the Legislative Council, was proof if proof were needed that the people of the British Caribbean were already manifestly capable of governing and protecting themselves. In his *Life of Captain Cipriani*, James noted there was no 'clash of civilisations' underway as the black majority of the British Caribbean 'are not savages, they speak no other language except English, they have no other religion except Christianity, in fact, their whole outlook is that of Western civilisation modified and adapted to their particular circumstances'. Indeed, the barbaric experience of slavery had given the black majority a very good introduction to 'Western civilisation', even if it had come at the expense of losing touch with African civilisation, and James argued that West Indians were a profoundly modern people as a result in comparison with the native peoples of India and Africa.

There is in these colonies today no conflict between freshly assimilated ideas of modern democracy and age-old habits based on tribal organisation or a caste system. This lack of tradition, this absence of background, is in one sense a serious drawback. It robs the West Indian of that national feeling which gives so much strength to democratic movements in other countries. But it has its advantages, for it robs those who would wish to deprive him of his political rights of one of the chief arguments which they flourish so glibly when speaking of other non-European peoples.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Hart, 'Origin and development of the working class in the English-speaking Caribbean area 1897 - 1937', in Malcolm Cross and Gad Heuman (eds.), *Labour in the Caribbean* (London, 1988), p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, pp. 33-34. Algernon Aspinall, *The Handbook of the British West Indies* (London, 1926), pp. 25, 27.

<sup>10</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 10.

While forcefully putting the case for West Indian self-government rather than Crown Colony Government, James, following Cipriani, did not at this stage in 1932 call for complete independence from Britain, but rather for autonomy for the West Indies within the Empire along the lines of the white Dominions. Though he left much uncovered, James closed with a promise to write more in the future.

How far Crown Colony Government was useful, its ineradicable defects, the astonishing variety of governments tried in the West Indies during the last hundred years, the differences from island to island, the only road to solution, these and kindred subjects will be dealt with in a succeeding volume.<sup>11</sup>

James remembered that *The Life of Captain Cipriani* was ‘a grand success’ when it was sent back to the West Indies in September 1932.<sup>12</sup> As Cary Fraser notes, ‘James’s prescient critique of crown colony rule captured the spirit of the emerging challenge to colonial rule in the West Indies over the next three decades’.<sup>13</sup> It certainly received high praise at the time in reviews in papers from across the Caribbean, including British Guiana and Barbados.<sup>14</sup> In Trinidad itself, where the politics of Cipriani, and even those of James, were already known by many, it created a great deal of controversy and provoked extensive debate in newspapers and literary journals alike. James had not just lampooned ‘white supremacy’ but also acutely analysed the snobbery and racism associated with ‘philistines’ among the black and coloured middle class of Trinidad, who were forever trying to ingratiate themselves with those of lighter skin colour than themselves while despising those with darker

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<sup>11</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 122. The *Port of Spain Gazette* carried the following advert: ‘Life of Captain Cipriani by CLR James. “A book to read and keep” price 1/6. 107 pages.’ See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 18 September 1932.

<sup>13</sup> Fraser, ‘The Twilight of Colonial Rule in the British West Indies’, pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> The reviewer in the *Daily Chronicle* of British Guiana of 20 September 1932 felt that *The Life of Captain Cipriani* by ‘the distinguished author’ James is ‘a book which is certain to enhance his reputation in the West Indies’. ‘Brilliantly written and stimulating to West Indian thought, the book deserves to be widely circulated throughout these colonies’. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 5 October 1932. J.E. Brome in the *Barbados Advocate* on 8 October 1932 declared James was ‘a brilliant West Indian writer’, noting ‘there is much to be said for this book and the most casual reader will admit that Mr. James has a bright future before him’. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 October 1932.

skin.<sup>15</sup> A white Trinidadian journalist and football correspondent, Courtney Hitchens, in the *Sunday Guardian* of 11 September 1932, tore into James's book hailing 'Captain Cipriani as a hero' on the grounds that he 'attacks everybody except the very black'. James quickly had a tireless local defender in Dr. M.A. Forrester, who noted that while 'it is not a pleasant picture that Mr. James has painted - it is none the less a picture absolutely true to life'. As for the idea that James was some sort of black chauvinist in matters of race, Forrester pointed out that 'as the gallant Captain is a very white Creole, Mr. Hitchens gets out of his depth at the very outset and simply makes a monkey of himself'. After savaging the 'nebulous' Mr. C. Hitchens, Forrester commended James's work as a 'spirited attack' on colonial rule and 'a brilliant and scholarly exposure of the rank absurdities which characterise Crown Colony Governments in these parts'.<sup>16</sup>

There was also wide-ranging and detailed critical discussion of the book in *The Beacon*.<sup>17</sup> Ralph Mentor declared James was right to link white supremacy to colonial rule, telling critics of James to 'study British imperialism with an understanding mind. They will surely notice that there is not a single state having dominion status in the British Commonwealth of Nations in which Coloured humanity has the reins of government.' Yet Mentor argued that 'Mr James seems to cherish the notion that Crown Colony rule is responsible for the prevalence of race

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<sup>15</sup> The editor of *The Beacon*, Albert Gomes, felt some of this material would have made better literature than political biography. 'Mr. James, we suggest, can best use this characteristic of local life for purposes of fiction'. See *The Beacon*, II/5, (September, 1932). James seems to have had the same idea already, composing a wickedly satirical tale about one 'Hon. Peter Delaney'. See C.L.R. James, 'Proconsuls, Beware: A Cautionary Tale', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 September 1932, Appendix A. For probable background to this story, see James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Port of Spain Gazette*, 15 and 17 September 1932. There was an extended debate between Hitchens and Forrester. Forrester subsequently wrote an article entitled 'Tri-Nitro-Toluene' which was a reply to several critics of James's book published in *The Caribbee*, a bi-monthly magazine. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 1 January 1933.

<sup>17</sup> Gomes declared the book was neither a biography nor an account of British government and should instead be titled 'Some incidents in the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago with their Colour Implication'. *The Beacon* group had recently fallen out with Cipriani because he had opposed the new divorce legislation in the colony because of his Catholicism, and many of them like Gomes, were opposed to self-government and federation despite their hatred of Crown Colony Government. Instead of self-government, Gomes counter-posed 'a classless society, a communist society'. A black Barbadian, Joshua E. Ward, however, thought James was far too militant and too racially conscious. See *The Beacon*, II 5, (September, 1932). The next edition of *The Beacon* carried a more balanced appreciation by Ralph Mentor which noted 'it will be widely read in these parts. To be candid, it deserves to'. Ralph Mentor, 'A Study of Mr. James' Political Biography', *The Beacon*, II 6, (October-November, 1932).

prejudice in the West Indies. He is entirely wrong ... It is a barbaric relic of slavery days.'<sup>18</sup>

### **The Caribbean Labour Rebellions**

In *Beyond a Boundary*, James recalled how his 'Nelson publication' was one of those books which made an impact, at least among some young intellectuals, in the British Caribbean during the 1930s.

I continually meet middle-class West Indians and students who say this: When the upheavals did take place these books were high on the list of those few that helped them to make the mental and moral transition which the new circumstances required. At such times literary values are not decisive. There must be new material, new in that its premises are the future, not the past.<sup>19</sup>

Yet the title itself may have limited the book from winning a wider appeal, for Cipriani was increasingly becoming eclipsed as the self-declared 'champion of the barefooted man' in Trinidad. In 1932, the T.W.A. had successfully finally persuaded the colonial governor to introduce legislation enabling legal trade union activity (albeit without the authorisation of peaceful picketing or the protection of actions in tort). Yet rather than now register the T.W.A. as a trade union and try and build the organisation up through struggle on that basis, Cipriani, on the advice of the British T.U.C., decided instead it should continue to function as a loosely organised reformist political party without a trade union basis, indeed renaming it the Trinidad Labour Party (T.L.P.) in 1934.<sup>20</sup> Since 1933, there had been several demonstrations of unemployed workers in Port of Spain, and even some short-lived strikes on Trinidad's sugar plantations.<sup>21</sup> In 1934, the colonial government had been forced to

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<sup>18</sup> Mentor, 'A Study of Mr. James' Political Biography'.

<sup>19</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, pp. 37, 39. In 1934, the T.L.P. had some 130,000 supporters.

<sup>21</sup> Hart, 'Origin and development of the working class in the English-speaking Caribbean area 1897-1937', pp. 57, 65, 75.

cancel the performance of Calypso, a medium which had become a popular means of expressing working-class discontent at social and economic injustice.<sup>22</sup> In Spring 1935, there was a short lived strike of oil workers followed by a 'hunger march' to Port of Spain, led by a sincere and talented orator, Uriah Butler, a former oil-field worker turned radical preacher.<sup>23</sup> Cipriani disavowed both the 'unconstitutional' demonstration and Butler himself, despite the agitator's membership of the T.L.P.<sup>24</sup> The Trinidadian novelist Ralph de Boissière, in his literary representation of the class struggle in 1930s colonial Trinidad, *Crown Jewel*, brings alive the struggle between Cipriani and Butler in the context of a deepening economic crisis and a growing mood for a fightback amid the materially impoverished working class very well.<sup>25</sup>

In late 1936, Butler severed relations with Cipriani's T.L.P. and tried to build an independent oil workers' union. When he called for a strike on 19 June 1937, a warrant was issued for his arrest but a crowd violently resisted police efforts to capture him, and he went into hiding.<sup>26</sup> James later described how 'among the oilfield workers in Trinidad, the largest proletarian grouping in the West Indies, a strike began. Like a fire along a tinder track, it spread to the entire island, ending in an upheaval at the other end of the curve, in Jamaica, thousands of miles away.'<sup>27</sup> As Daniel Guérin later noted, 'following the American-style sit-down strike, the strikers' action included occupying one of the oil properties'.<sup>28</sup> Or to quote James again, 'the

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<sup>22</sup> In 1936, calypso records themselves were censored in Trinidad. Howard Johnson, 'The Black Experience in the British Caribbean in the Twentieth Century', in Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (eds.), *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 332-33.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Guérin, *The West Indies and their future* (London, 1961), p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Jacobs, 'The Politics of Protest in Trinidad', p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> There is even a mention of James, in the context of the character representing Butler's discussion of what such a literary group as *The Beacon* could achieve if it was revived. 'He was thinking that he knew just what would happen: there would be discussions on art no one would understand, and abstract discussions about Nazism in Germany; some professor would declare that the shape of the Negro's skull proved he could never be the white man's equal in intelligence, and some Negro schoolteacher would put an opposing view; and nothing would be achieved, people who were on the oilfields, the sugar estates, nothing would be done to bring them together - it would all end in armchair chatter.' Ralph de Boissière, *Crown Jewel* (London, 1981), p. 293. For James's review of *Crown Jewel*, see C.L.R. James, 'Trinidad society', *New Society*, 11 June 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Hart, *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean Region Colonies* (Ceredigion, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 316.

<sup>28</sup> Guérin, *The West Indies and their future*, p. 131.

stay-in strike in Trinidad in 1937 was directly inspired by the sit-down strikes in America which ushered in the C.I.O. The British, blind as only the doomed are blind, fought to retain all possible political power.<sup>29</sup> A 'state of emergency' was declared, and the *Port of Spain Gazette* felt the general strike had created a situation 'which assumed a proportion previously unknown in the history of labour agitation' in Trinidad.<sup>30</sup> James later reflected on this historic moment:

Had Cipriani been the man he was ten years earlier, self-government, federation and economic regeneration, which he had advocated so strenuously and so long, could have been initiated then. But the old warrior was nearly seventy. He flinched at the mass upheavals which he more than anyone else had prepared, and the opportunity was lost.<sup>31</sup>

Rather than taking a lead, Cipriani's T.L.P. put out a statement calling for calm, noting 'it is regrettable that egged on by certain irresponsibles in the Colony certain units of workers have set about in the endeavour to institute mob rule in Trinidad'. Two British warships, H.M.S. Everest and H.M.S. Ajax, rushed to the island, as they had done in 1919, and marines and sailors landed. With the help of the local military, and conciliatory measures from the Governor, Sir A.G. Murchison Fletcher, and others in authority, 'law and order' was restored in Trinidad by the end of July. Fourteen people had been left dead, fifty-nine people had been wounded and hundreds had been arrested and imprisoned, including later Butler himself.<sup>32</sup> Yet the strikers' actions had won concessions from their employers in terms of pay and conditions, while new and powerful trade unions were formed and recognised in many industries over the coming years.<sup>33</sup> The British Colonial Secretary under

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<sup>29</sup> C.L.R. James, 'On *The Negro in the Caribbean* by Eric Williams [1943]', in Scott McLemee (ed.), *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question"* (Jackson, 1996), p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> *Port of Spain Gazette*, 23 June 1927.

<sup>31</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 316. By 1935, colonial officialdom in Trinidad were already praising Cipriani as a 'statesman and a patriot'. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Hart, *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean Region Colonies*, pp. 14-15. See also Guérin, *The West Indies and their future*, p. 131. Butler was arrested and imprisoned for two years in September for sedition.

<sup>33</sup> The main unions to emerge here were the Oilfield Workers' Trade union and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers' Trade Union. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, p. 59. Jacobs, 'The Politics of Protest in Trinidad'.

pressure from the sugar and oil companies 'advised' the moderate Governor Murchison Fletcher 'to resign' and quickly appointed the former Governor of Northern Rhodesia, Hubert Young, who had presided over the brutal crushing by force of the Copperbelt mineworkers' strike of 1935, in his place.<sup>34</sup> Yet, though the British had successfully contained this 'outbreak of democracy', they were forced to concede the introduction of a measure of universal suffrage into the Trinidadian constitution. As one historian of Trinidad, Selwyn Ryan, has noted, the labour rebellion from below meant that 'the year 1937 was perhaps the most decisive watershed in the colony's history ... it made the survival of the old colonial system virtually impossible'.<sup>35</sup>

### C.L.R. James's response

Had James not left for Britain, or had he returned to Trinidad after only a few months with Constantine, how would the young aspiring novelist have reacted to the general strike in Trinidad? It is highly possible James would have been inspired by the eruption from below and like the editor of *The Beacon*, Albert Gomes, thrown himself into political activity building solidarity. Yet James held a quite respectable job teaching at the Government Training College and it is also possible he would have followed the lead of Cipriani and stood rather aloof from the mass movement.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, p. 60. George Padmore describes sitting next to Murchison Fletcher in the Visitor's Gallery of the House of Commons during the debate on the Report of the Royal Commission on the disturbances in Trinidad. Thanks to a superb anti-imperialist speech by James Maxton, 'the debate was the most spirited to which I have ever heard on colonial matters'. George Padmore, 'Parliament Upset by West Indies', *The Crisis*, 45/4, (April, 1938).

<sup>35</sup> Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, pp. 5, 60, 66-68. In 1946, elections were held for the first time on a basis of universal adult suffrage. Hewan Craig, *The Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago* (London, 1952), p. 152.

<sup>36</sup> One very minor character in de Boissière's novel *Crown Jewel*, called 'Robert La Forest', is described as 'very tall, good-looking, brown-skinned and a devil of a dresser. He possessed no few scholastic attainments. In his year he had just missed the only scholarship that could have taken him abroad to study medicine. His parents having no money to fill the breach he applied for a job in the service. He was blessed with charm as well as talent and, what was more to the point, knew how to employ them to secure his advancement. Already at twenty-eight he commanded an excellent position in the Accountant-General's department.' It is possible this character, who seems to stand aside from the struggle when it erupts, was in part based on James. See de Boissière, *Crown Jewel*, p. 269.

Such hypothetical questions are impossible to answer. Yet what was James's actual reaction to the upheavals in the Caribbean while in Britain?

Among the many towering West Indian figures in Britain during the 1930s, James certainly had one of the highest profiles.<sup>37</sup> Initially James achieved recognition in Britain for his campaigning work around 'The Case for West Indian Self-Government' and his cricket reports for the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>38</sup> By June 1937, James was established in Britain as a revolutionary Marxist intellectual, the author of *World Revolution*, but with a public reputation as a playwright and writer that extended beyond the far left. 'Even my forgotten novel saw daylight', James remembered. In November 1936, *Minty Alley* (which James had written in Trinidad) was published as if 'by accident' as he put it. Warburg, who had already decided to publish what would become *World Revolution*, 'heard me talk about it, asked to see it, and published'. There was little publicity for it, and priced at 7 shillings and 6 pence, commercially it was, Warburg remembers, 'unsuccessful'. However, as James was to later note, 'it was the first of the West Indian novels to be published in Great Britain' and so 'henceforth the West Indies was speaking for itself to the modern world'.<sup>39</sup>

As we have discussed elsewhere, James was also centrally involved in the tiny Pan-Africanist movement in London, both in the I.A.F.A. and I.A.S.B. It is sometimes claimed that the I.A.S.B. 'devoted most of its attention to African colonies' meaning 'there was no ready-made machinery for action on the Caribbean crisis'.<sup>40</sup> In fact the organisation seems to have come into its own campaigning in solidarity with the Caribbean labour rebellions. James was the editor of its newsletter, *Africa and the World*, and the first issue of this came out in early July 1937, carrying a report on 'The Trinidad Strike', which concluded by noting 'it is the

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<sup>37</sup> Others included Marcus Garvey, W. Arthur Lewis, George Padmore, Eric Williams, Learie Constantine, Harold Moody, Ras T. Makonnen, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Sam Manning, Chris Braithewaite, Arnold Ward and Una Marson.

<sup>38</sup> James kept up commentary on 'West Indies Self-Government' in *The Keys* until April 1934, around the time he joined the British Trotskyist movement. See *The Keys*, 1/4, (April-June, 1934), where James commented on the 'Commission on closer union between Transvaal, the Leeward and Windward islands', and quoted Captain Cipriani's critical judgment of it approvingly.

<sup>39</sup> Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, p. 185, James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 124, and Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James', p. 18. See the review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31 October, 1936.

<sup>40</sup> Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, pp. 100, 103.

duty of the British working class movement to support these West Indian workers in their struggle for better economic and social conditions and to raise the voice of protest against the repressive measures of the Employers and the Government to deprive them of the right to collective bargaining and trade unionism.’<sup>41</sup> In order to rally solidarity in Britain with the workers of Trinidad, the I.A.S.B. launched its first serious campaign, a ‘Trinidad Defence Committee’ and called a rally for Sunday 9 August 1937 in Trafalgar Square. The day before the rally, James and Padmore went to listen to Marcus Garvey speak in Hyde Park, heckling him when he refused to declare his support for the Trinidad strikes on the grounds such struggles were ‘not the theme of his speech’. As Wallace-Johnson remembered, Garvey ‘was challenged and made a public laughing-stock by Mr. C.L.R. James’.<sup>42</sup> Solidarity with the workers of Trinidad and the Caribbean more generally was however the theme of the speeches at the I.A.S.B. rally in Trafalgar Square the next day, which successfully attracted hundreds of people.<sup>43</sup> According to the two Special Branch police officers who attended, James was the principal speaker.

James gave a resume of the history of the West Indies, explaining that, after the native Caribs had been wiped out, negro slaves had been imported to labour in the islands. Slavery had only been abolished when the British bourgeoisie realised that it was less expensive to pay the negroes starvation wages than to feed them. He compared the West Indian general strike of 1919 with the recent one, saying that black workers had learned much during the last 18 years from events throughout the world. They now knew how to enforce their rights, and how to remain solid in the face of threats and persecution. They were no longer afraid of strike-breaking police, militia and marines.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Africa and the World*, 1/1, 6 July 1937.

<sup>42</sup> I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, ‘Marcus Garvey and the International African Service Bureau’ [1937], in Robert A. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. X; *Africa for the Africans, 1923-1945* (London, 2006), pp. 647, 650. Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, pp. 173, 268. Garvey was at one time apparently considered to be a suitable patron for the I.A.S.B., but Garvey’s hostile position towards Haile Selassie during Italy’s war on Ethiopia coupled with his then apparent critical support for British imperialism against Hitler and Mussolini made this impossible. He did however donate ten shillings and six pence to the I.A.S.B. when it was formed.

<sup>43</sup> *Africa and the World*, 1/3, 14 August 1937.

<sup>44</sup> TNA: KV/2/1824 13a. See also Public Record Office, London: CO: 318/427/11, quoted in Schwarz, ‘C.L.R. James and George Lamming: The measure of historical time’.

Other speakers included James's fellow West Indians, the Trinidadian Padmore and Chris Braithewaite, from Barbados, which had also just been rocked by riots. Two Africans, Jomo Kenyatta and I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson also spoke, as did Reginald Bridgeman, from the Colonial Information Bureau.<sup>45</sup> The meeting adopted the following resolution, copies of which were sent to the Colonial Office, the Governor of Trinidad, and to the British Trades Union Congress (T.U.C.) which was due to meet at Norwich on 6 September, 1937.

This mass meeting of British and Colonial workers, held at Trafalgar Square, on Sunday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1937, under the auspices of the INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN SERVICE BUREAU, sends fraternal greetings to the toiling workers of Trinidad and Barbados, and other West Indian Colonies, and pledges its wholehearted support for the right of Trade Unionism, Collective Bargaining, and for general economic and social development. It condemns the repressive measures adopted by the representative of vested interests in these islands in trying to prevent these West Indian workers from securing their legitimate economic demands of increased wages and shorter hours, and calls upon the Colonial Office to institute enquires into the labour conditions in the West Indies. This meeting also appeals to the British Trade Union movement to keep a vigilant watch over labour conditions in the Colonial Sections of the Empire and to render these colonial workers the maximum amount of support, advice and aid in establishing and developing the principles of Trade Unionism, as the only means of preventing British Imperialism from using the Colonial workers to lower the standard of wages of the English workers.

Following the successful demonstration, a delegation from the I.A.S.B. had submitted a memorandum for the Royal Commission to inquire into the 'disturbances' in Trinidad, which had ruled that it was not allowed to give verbal evidence. 'The strikes in Trinidad have been basically for economic demands, but they have taken a form which prove conclusively that the population of the island has reached a stage far beyond the constitution under which it is governed.' Indeed, 'the

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<sup>45</sup> *Africa and the World*, 1/4, 1 September 1937. For more on Bridgeman, see John Saville, 'Bridgeman, Reginald Francis Orlando (1884-1968)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, VII. (1984). Though Bridgeman had worked closely with the I.A.F.A. around James, his relationship to the I.A.S.B. seems to have deteriorated after he accused Padmore of declaring 'race war' by raising the slogan of 'Africa for the Africans' in *How Britain Rules Africa* in a review of that work in September 1937 for the Communist *Labour Monthly*. See MacKenzie, 'British Marxists and the Empire', p. 204, and Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, pp. 132-33.

IASB claims that the future of Trinidad and other West Indian islands should be decided by the people themselves.' In particular, the memorandum noted that:

- 1) That oil-field workers attempted a stay-in strike, a form of industrial action practiced by the most advanced bodies of workers in France and America.
- 2) Among the demands is that for a forty hour week, which again shows the workers to be in close touch with modern developments.
- 3) The workers in the harbour demanded equality of pay with Europeans for the same work.

The I.A.S.B. proposed a more democratic constitutional arrangement:

- a) A Constitution of the type of Ceylon which gives full power over finance to the elected representatives of the people.
- b) Manhood suffrage.
- c) The reduction of the scandalously high qualification for candidates who seek to get in the Legislature.<sup>46</sup>

One person who was not so impressed by all this activity by the I.A.S.B., perhaps unsurprisingly given the apparent lack of deference shown to him by James and Padmore, was Marcus Garvey. Garvey had been invited by Cipriani to visit Trinidad in October 1937, and in late August 1937 the London correspondent of the *Trinidad Guardian* interviewed Garvey about the industrial unrest in Trinidad. Garvey used the interview to not only side with Cipriani over the militant and heroic struggle of the workers themselves, but also to launch an astonishing attack on the 'communist' I.A.S.B., a tiny organisation not even six months old, and barely known in London, let alone the West Indies.<sup>47</sup> Before Garvey's comments, the notion that 'outside agitators' and Communist propaganda were somehow behind the upheaval had previously only been seriously advanced by the rich and reactionary Duke of Montrose, chairman of Trinidad Consolidated Oilfields, one of the highly profitable

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<sup>46</sup> *Africa and the World*, 1/4, 1 September 1937. This was a 'Special West Indian Edition' of *Africa and the World*. The I.A.S.B. also noted it was preparing a pamphlet on the 'West Indies Today', which appeared in 1939 edited largely by W. Arthur Lewis. See International African Service Bureau, *The West Indies Today* (London, 1939). *Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances 1937; Report of Commission*, Cmd. 5641 (London, 1938), p. 96.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, p. 271.

oil companies in Trinidad, in a widely reported speech in the House of Lords on 28 July 1937.<sup>48</sup> While Garvey, unlike the Duke of Montrose, did appreciate that Trinidadian workers 'had grievances that needed looking into', as Rupert Lewis has noted of Garvey's anti-communist tirade, 'such views suited the right-wing and the colonial authorities' and the *Trinidad Guardian* made the interview front page news.

Garvey's comments were widely discussed in Trinidad, revealing as they did just how out of touch he seemed to be with the national social, economic and political situation.<sup>49</sup> Garvey's conservative position did not exactly endear himself to many of the workers in Trinidad, and even the local Port of Spain branch of the U.N.I.A. had to distance themselves from his views, their President, E.M. Mitchell, noting Garvey had made an 'unjustified, a serious blunder ... due to misinformation and ignorance of local conditions'. In October 1937, Garvey's speeches while in Trinidad were remarkably moderate in tone, refusing to blame colonialism and the owners of the sugar and oil companies for the poverty of the mass of Trinidadians, noting that it is instead 'the mind of man that keeps him down'. This led to a further disillusion about Garvey among many militant workers. Back in London, Wallace-Johnson responded to Garvey's comments on behalf of the I.A.S.B. by insisting that while once the U.N.I.A. had been an important 'stepping stone' for the developing Pan-African movement, now Garvey had 'outlived his usefulness'.<sup>50</sup>

Yet Garvey was not mistaken about the revolutionary politics of some in the I.A.S.B. leadership, and in the British left wing press, both James and Padmore subsequently expanded on their view of the significance of the Caribbean revolts.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Port of Spain Gazette*, 2 September 1937. The Duke had also asked for 'a Fleet Air Arm' to be permanently stationed in Port of Spain. 'Just think - the largest oil supply area in the British Empire being defended by a half a dozen shotguns and pistols! The whole thing seems ridiculous.' Incidentally, the Duke of Montrose was a supporter of Scottish independence. See *New Leader*, 4 March 1938. For how even M.I.5 rejected the idea that Communist agitation was behind the rebellions, see Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, p. 400.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, pp. 270-71. The *Port of Spain Gazette* felt duty bound to inform its readers that the 'African Service Bureau' who were apparently undermining black unity with 'communism' was an organisation 'led by George Padmore and the popular C.L.R. James, of Trinidad'. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 14 September 1937.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, pp. 269, 272. Wallace-Johnson, 'Marcus Garvey and the International African Service Bureau', pp. 646, 648. This article appeared in the *West Indian Crusader*, published in St Lucia, on 27 November 1937.

<sup>51</sup> For Padmore's analysis, see for example George Padmore, 'Fascism in the Colonies', *Controversy*, 17, (February, 1938) and George Padmore, 'An Outrageous Report', *Controversy*, 18, (March, 1938). Padmore also wrote regularly on colonial matters for the I.L.P. paper, *New Leader*, as well addressing

In the Trotskyist paper, *Fight*, for example, which James edited, a fiercely written editorial spelling out 'A Revolutionary Policy for the British Workers' in November 1937 noted that:

In India, South Africa, Palestine, Egypt and Trinidad [sic], the struggle continues to flare up. British Imperialism knows only one method of crushing these struggles. Guns, bayonets and bombs; flogging and imprisonment. We must ruthlessly denounce the brutality of our Imperialist John Bull. We must give all possible material aid to the oppressed nationalities by independent workers' action, by legal and illegal methods. Our aim is the complete independence of the colonial peoples.<sup>52</sup>

It was with the Trinidad events still very much in mind that James in the winter of 1937 put the finishing touches to his masterful epic *The Black Jacobins* and began work on what would become his pioneering study 'A History of Negro Revolt'.<sup>53</sup> In this latter work, James devoted a section of his final chapter to spelling out the significance of the Trinidad revolt. Firstly, this involved reiterating the profound modernity of the West Indian masses. 'The blacks speak French, English or Spanish. They have lost all sense of their African origin and have become Westernized in their outlook.'<sup>54</sup> As a result, in Trinidad 'self-government is one of the questions of the day, and the Legislative Council now has elected members'. Yet secondly, James also sketched out how the dynamics of uneven but combined development of capitalism in Trinidad had given the working class tremendous power.

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meetings of the I.L.P. See the report of Padmore's speech for the I.L.P. 1938 Summer School, 'Why workers of the W.I. Revolt', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 25 November 1938. For more on Padmore's analysis of 'colonial Fascism' see Schwarz, 'George Padmore'.

<sup>52</sup> *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937). In May 1938, *Fight* carried a 'May Day Manifesto of the Revolutionary Socialist League', which noted that 'In France, in China, in Palestine, the United States, the Gold Coast and Trinidad, the masses have shown their willingness to fight, their audacity in attack, their tenacity in action.' *Fight*, 1/2, (May, 1938).

<sup>53</sup> 'This study was already in proof when the Jamaica revolt [May 1938] forced the appointment of a Royal Commission [in June 1938]'. James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 80.

<sup>54</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 73-74.

What has created the new Trinidad, however, has been the development of the oil industry, which now employs nearly 10,000 men concentrated in the southern part of the island. Large-scale industry has had the inevitable result of developing a high sense of labour solidarity and growing political consciousness. The slump threw the population into great poverty and the inadequacy of the social services intensified the resultant suffering. The Ethiopian question sharpened the sense of racial solidarity and racial oppression. News of the stay-in strikes in France and America was eagerly read by these workers. They found a leader in Uriah Butler ... he went to the South and carried on his agitation among the oilfield workers. In June of last year the oilfield workers staged a stay-in strike for higher wages. The consequences were unprecedented.<sup>55</sup>

James presented events in colonial Trinidad, particularly once the oilfield workers in the South of the island made their move, as a telling example of the Marxist theory of permanent revolution.

Thenceforth the strike spread ... the strike was complete in Port of Spain, the capital, a town of 80,000 inhabitants, which is at the opposite end of the island, some 40 miles away from the scene of the first outbreak. This, the most outstanding feature of the disturbances, is referred to parenthetically in the official report as follows: "The same morning Port of Spain, where work at all the industrial establishments had ceased..." The Indian agricultural labourers, who might appear to have little in common with the black proletariat, no sooner saw these blacks in militant action than they too followed them and began to strike. In many parts of the island stoppage of work was complete.<sup>56</sup>

Even though two cruisers were sent, the general strike in Trinidad continued until the Governor intervened and attempted conciliation. Yet James wrote that 'what is important, however, is the political awakening which it has crystallized' among the working class, in particular the oilfield workers.

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<sup>55</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>56</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 78.

Trade unions are being formed all over the island, and the advanced workers are clamouring for revolutionary literature of all sorts, by Marx and Engels and other writers on Communism, and literature dealing with the Ethiopian question. In the recent elections, in the key Southern constituency, the workers' candidate was Mr. Rienzi, an Indian lawyer, president of the new unions. Some of his opponents tried to raise the race question, Negro as opposed to Indian. But Rienzi had fought with them side by side all through the days of the strike. They refused to be distracted. They and their leaders poured scorn on the racial question and proclaimed that the issue was one of class. Thus these workers have almost at a single bound placed themselves in the forefront of the international working class movement.<sup>57</sup>

There was nothing to be hoped for by way of solidarity with this movement from the black and coloured middle classes. 'They grumble at racial discrimination, but their outlook is the same as that of the rich whites, and indeed their sole grievances are that they do not get all the posts they want, and that the whites do not often invite them to dinner.' After the general strike, 'the Negro middle-classes are already aligning themselves and making the issue clear. They are with the whites. Industrialisation has been the decisive factor here'. Still, even this realignment had its compensations for the workers movement, as arrayed against both white capital and the black middle classes, 'racial feeling will gradually take a less prominent part in the struggle than hitherto'.<sup>58</sup> If there was hope for the West Indies, James concluded, it lay with the proletariat.

While it is unwise to predict, the clamour for literature shows how strong is the urge to know what is happening abroad and follow suit. Already a local pamphlet has been written on Fascism. The movement is clearly on its way to a link with the most advanced workers in Western Europe.<sup>59</sup>

Testament to this came on May Day in 1938, when seven hundred organised workers led a demonstration in Port of Spain under the banner of the 'Workers' United Front', and with militant slogans such as 'Long Live Uriah Butler', 'Long

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<sup>57</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 74, 80.

<sup>59</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 80.

Live the International', 'We Want Bread, not Bullets' and 'The International Unites the Human Race'.

Clement O. Payne, chairman of the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association, acted as chairman of the May Day Committee. In his opening address he outlined the history of May Day and the struggle of the European workers for the eight-hour day, with reference to the trade union efforts of pioneers. The meeting passes a resolution protesting against the Sedition Ordinance, the recent Commission's report, sentences of hard labour on political prisoners, prohibition of the freedom of speech and assembly. Greetings were sent to the British working class through the I.L.P., to the International African Service Bureau, and to the Chinese, Spanish and Ethiopian peoples, who are so heroically struggling against their imperialist invaders.<sup>60</sup>

May 1938 marked the start of a strike wave in Jamaica, triggering another labour rebellion there. Again the I.A.S.B. organised a protest meeting in solidarity with the West Indian workers in Trafalgar Square on Sunday June 26 1938, with James, Padmore, Braithewaite and F.A. Ridley among the speakers.<sup>61</sup> In the midst of this upheaval, Sir Leonard Lyle, President of Tate and Lyle, wrote to *The Times* declaring that 'the West Indian labourer does not even remotely resemble the English labourer'. James picked up on what he called 'the solemn shamelessness' of this comment and countered immediately. 'The real trouble is, of course, that he resembles the English labourer too much for Mr. Capitalist Lyle.'

Tate & Lyle, as everyone who buys sugar should know, make a fortune every year by selling to the British workers sugar grown by Jamaican workers. They must keep these two divided at all costs ... Tate and Lyle are planning to open factories in Jamaica. They want take advantage of labour which has not the right as yet to protect itself. Thus black is used against white and Leonard Lyle seeks to poison the mind of the British worker against the colonials.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> 'May Day in the West Indies', *International African Opinion*, 1/1, (July, 1938). As James proudly ended his discussion in *A History of Negro Revolt*, after noting recent developments in Jamaica and British Guiana, 'in Trinidad mass demonstrations are still taking place. The history of all these territories is in essence the history of Trinidad.' James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 110.

<sup>61</sup> *International African Opinion*, 1/2, (August, 1938). Hooker, *George Padmore*, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup> Sir Leonard Lyle's comments appeared in a letter to *The Times* on 10 May 1938. C.L.R. James, 'British Barbarism in Jamaica: Support the Negro Workers Struggle!', in C.L.R. James, *The Future in*

It was in part to provide an antidote to such poison that James wrote *The Black Jacobins*, which came out in autumn 1938. James had doubtless been inspired to hear that ‘when British troops landed in Trinidad in 1937 some of them told the people: “Go ahead. We don’t want to shoot you.”’<sup>63</sup> Indeed, to a greater extent than has so far been registered in the literature, James’s history was a work written with both the working class of the British West Indies and of Britain itself in mind. James used the anglicised term for Saint Domingue, ‘San Domingo’, or ‘St. Domingo’, almost certainly to make it easier for a British audience to comprehend. Saint Domingue was twice described as a territory ‘nearly as large as Ireland’ so that a British audience might be able to get a better sense of the Haitian Revolution.<sup>64</sup> James made sure to indict the ‘British bourgeoisie’ for their crimes at every point throughout, as he did not want British readers to finish reading his history of the Haitian Revolution left with the impression that the rulers of imperial France, and the white planter class of French Saint Domingue in particular, were unparalleled in their barbarism. ‘From no classes of people have Negroes suffered more than from the capitalists of Britain and America. They have been the most pertinacious preachers of race prejudice in the world.’<sup>65</sup>

Overall, if *The Life of Captain Cipriani* was new in that it raised the question of West Indian self-government in an uncompromising manner, and so found an echo during the Trinidad upheavals, then the revolutionary spirit of those rebellions in turn went into the making of *The Black Jacobins* as yet another new work, ‘new in that its premises are the future, not the past’. As A.W. Singham once noted of *The Black*

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*the Present; Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (London, 1977), pp. 86-88. This article originally appeared in *Fight*, 1/3, (June, 1938). On 30 September 1937, Tate and Lyle had declared a profit of £1,236,074 after tax. In five years it had made over £7 million profit. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 25 November 1938.

<sup>63</sup> James, ‘On *The Negro in the Caribbean* by Eric Williams’, p. 124. James’s memory of how ineffective the local troops had been during the 1919 General Strike in Trinidad helped him imagine the Caribbean upheavals in the 1930s, as he later recalled in an interview with Richard Small. ‘I remember that the soldiers didn’t frighten anybody. That had a lot to do with my attitude later because the people were not afraid, so that in 1938-9 although I was not there I read the report and could visualize it. The trouble in a Caribbean island is that the army cannot be depended on to shoot down the population and it is a serious problem up to today.’ Small, ‘The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist’, p. 55.

<sup>64</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 3, 194.

<sup>65</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 185.

*Jacobins*, ‘the first goal of James in writing the book was to demonstrate to his fellow West Indians at that time that they could and should wrest control of their own destiny, as Haiti had done over a century earlier’.<sup>66</sup> *The Black Jacobins* was then designed in part to arm the people of the Caribbean for the fire next time, the coming struggle for colonial liberation, and to simultaneously attempt to win ordinary people in Britain to an understanding of the need to demonstrate solidarity with that struggle. The idea that an ‘extraordinary silence’ pervades James’s writings with respect to the Caribbean labour rebellions surely needs revision, while Stuart Hall’s judgment, that James’s ‘work on the Haitian revolution and his work on West Indian self-government is part of the same story’, appears characteristically astute.

There is a nice coda to this story. In 1937, a small group of independent Marxists in Jamaica had come together and in May 1938 amid the mass strike and upheaval decided to launch a little double-sided news bulletin, the *Jamaica Labour Weekly*. One of those involved, a young law student called Richard Hart, remembers the *Jamaica Labour Weekly* was ‘Jamaica’s first “communist” newspaper’ and ‘an important part of the popular awakening and a milestone in labour journalism’. Though it printed only ‘a couple of thousands’ each week, it was widely distributed throughout the island and was proving ‘very popular’, and what was by now a four page paper soon came to the attention of the colonial authorities. In late July 1938 the editor and printer were prosecuted for seditious libel and after a trial in October 1938 were imprisoned for six months, temporarily silencing the paper, though Hart was able to relaunch it in December 1938, with a wide variety of contributors.<sup>67</sup>

On 1 April 1939, the *Jamaica Labour Weekly* published an article from one contributor entitled ‘Trinidad - An Example for Jamaica’, which celebrated the fact that ‘it was in Trinidad that the Royal Commission investigating conditions in the British West Indies received the most uncompromising and, in a sense, the most unanswerable demand for self-government for any of the units of British Empire in this part of the world’. It praised various Trinidadian politicians and labour leaders but also found space to acknowledge ‘the shining example’ of C.L.R. James, then about to meet Trotsky in Mexico to discuss perspectives for black liberation in

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<sup>66</sup> A. W. Singham, ‘C.L.R. James on the Black Jacobin Revolution in San Domingo - Notes Toward a Theory of Black Politics’, *Savacou*, 1/1, (1970), p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Hart, *Rise and Organise; The Birth of the Workers and National Movements in Jamaica (1936-1939)* (London, 1989), pp. 12, 16, 46, 123-24.

America, and also George Padmore. It is therefore perhaps appropriate to end with this tribute to James and Padmore, published in a newspaper which had been born out of the class struggle in the West Indies. The *Jamaica Labour Weekly* described the two Trinidadian 'Left Socialists' as 'veritable thorns in the side of Great Britain' who having shaken off 'the deadening incubus of British imperial propaganda' were 'using their education and ability, not to slavishly hymn the praises of England like so many educated Jamaican parrots do, but to expose the Empire for what it really is'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings; The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath* (London, 1978), pp. 404, 432. Post suggests the author was Wilfred A. Domingo (1889-1968), a Jamaican radical in contact with Hart's group. There is another quite amusing story about this article. In 1938, Hart's group had, almost it seems by accident, made contact with the Communist International through the C.P.G.B. See Hart, *Rise and Organise*, pp. 147-48. When Ben Bradley, a C.P.G.B. member in London, read the article praising the Trotskyist James and the 'renegade' Padmore he promptly intervened to (successfully) bring the Jamaican comrades into line. On 17 May 1939 Hart wrote to Bradley: 'Thanks for yours of 17<sup>th</sup> April, containing information about the political line being adopted by C.L.R. James and George Padmore, and suggesting that no further prominence be given to these men. At this end we are entirely in agreement with you, and shall avoid further mistakes in future. The article appearing in the issue of 1<sup>st</sup> April was submitted to us by a Comrade who is one of our best writers. He seems to have been an acquaintance or friend of Padmore, and being a person who feels strongly on the injustices meted out to the negro race, I fear that he was momentarily unduly sympathetic also to James.' See the TNA: KV/2/1824/46b. On 23 May 1939, Bradley replied, noting that 'in connection with the question of C.L.R. James and G. Padmore, there is no doubt that they have contact with people in the island, and will probably use any channel to get publicity. Now that you know the political position of these people, you will be able to take such steps as are possible to make this known.'

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **'Black Paris' and Red Spanish Notebooks: Race and Revolutionary Politics in Imperial Europe**

Stuart Hall once drew attention to C.L.R. James's 'very profound and complicated feelings towards Europe', noting 'he's formed by Europe, he feels himself to be a European intellectual' but also himself always maintained 'he was in, but not entirely of Europe'.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will offer a tentative examination of some of the complexities of James's early relationship to continental Europe, particularly with respect to France, which it seems James visited on at least five separate occasions during the 1930s, and to Spain during the Spanish Civil War. James's visits to Paris, in large part for archival research in order to write his classic history of the Haitian Revolution, are generally registered in the literature. Yet there remains a sense among many scholars that, as Brett St Louis put it, as a political thinker James was 'less fixated' on 'the struggle over the maintenance of international socialism, epitomised by the Spanish Civil War, within the European arena than other orthodox Trotskyists were'.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will explicitly challenge such an assumption through an examination of what James actually thought of the tremendous class struggles in both France and Spain, which erupted in both countries during 1936 to create a moment of great hope for revolutionaries internationally. Moreover, for James as a black colonial subject and Pan-Africanist, his experience of Paris and his understanding of the Spanish Civil War were viewed through the lens of colour, allowing us an important insight into how race and the colonial dimension of metropolitan politics manifested themselves in imperial Europe during the 1930s. Though in part this chapter will simply confirm an assessment of what might be expected given James's Trotskyism - the disastrous failure of the Spanish 'Popular Front' government to even adequately defend 'bourgeois democracy' from the menace of fascism, let alone challenge capital - his criticisms of the continuities with respect to empire maintained by both 'progressive' governments in France and Spain repay revisiting in more detail.

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, 'Breaking Bread with History', p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> St Louis, *Rethinking Race, Politics, and Poetics*, p. 96.

## A Francophile in Port of Spain

From 1498 until its capture for the British Empire in 1797, Trinidad had been part of the Spanish Empire, and as James grew to maturity, he could have been only too conscious of this Spanish inheritance.<sup>3</sup> The name of Trinidad's capital where James went to school and lived during the 1920s for example was Port of Spain. There were 'Spanish' schools for 'sons of Venezuela' in Trinidad, and the Roman Catholic Church was not without power on the island during the 1920s, as seen by the resistance when the British colonial government legalised divorce. Some of James's early short 'barrack-yard' stories use this Spanish inheritance in the Caribbean as a backdrop, whether discussing Venezuelan politics in 'Revolution' or religion in 'La Divina Pastora'.<sup>4</sup> Yet James never seems to have particularly identified with Spanish culture, though he developed a keen interest in French literature, no doubt perhaps stimulated by learning French at Q.R.C. 'They told me to read Balzac, *Les Chouans*, but I finished my *Chouans* in about ten days and I went off and read a lot of other Balzac.'<sup>5</sup> His mother was also a great reader of Balzac, and he himself would come to soon also appreciate others including Molière, Corneille, Racine, Flaubert, Théophile Gautier, Victor Hugo and Lamartine.<sup>6</sup>

Trinidad had also once been a French colony, and if not before, James would have been aware of the dark side of French civilisation when, in 1921, he read the Martinican writer René Maran's award winning novel, *Batouala*, a devastating

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<sup>3</sup> Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> James discussed the controversy over divorce legislation in Trinidad in his *The Life of Captain Cipriani*. C.L.R. James, 'Revolution', in C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory; Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 1984) and C.L.R. James, 'La Divina Pastora', in C.L.R. James, *Spheres of Existence; Selected Writings*, Vol. 2 (London, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James', p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 26, 118, Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 17, Dance, 'Conversation with C.L.R. James', p. 112.

expose of French colonialism in Africa.<sup>7</sup> Once when giving English lessons to the French consul, James remembered ‘we talked about European history’.

He was strong on Bismarck’s policy towards the East, I on imperialist intrigues resulting in the partition of Africa. He passed disparaging remarks on the colonial policies of Great Britain; I pointed out the similarities with those of his own country. We had a good time and he told me a lot about diplomacy that isn’t written in books. After a while we talked quite familiarly.<sup>8</sup>

In his *Life of Captain Cipriani*, James, in keeping with his very Victorian notion of ‘national character’, declared that ‘the Frenchman, the Spaniard, the Chinaman’ and ‘the Englishman’ and so on ‘are recognised types’. James was not uncritical of ‘the Frenchman’. Like the Americans, their ‘men of business’ were ‘given to fraud’ and the French overall lacked ‘a streak of idealism in their nature’ and so perhaps unduly suffered ‘from the follies of a life of reason’. Yet according to James they found ‘ordinary social intercourse’ easy, even with ‘persons of different race and upbringing to themselves’ and the fact they had ‘little or no colour prejudice’ made them ‘in intellectual and social culture the most advanced people in Europe’.<sup>9</sup>

James’s Francophilia was perhaps influenced by that of Matthew Arnold, who would always praise the French Revolution as ‘the greatest, the most animating event in history’, an event which had created a distinctively modern nation, ‘the country in Europe where *the people* is most alive’.<sup>10</sup> While in Trinidad, James would of course have already begun thinking of writing about how the French Revolution ‘animated’ the enslaved people of French Saint Domingue to make their own great revolution, and he made further research a priority on arrival in England. Soon after

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<sup>7</sup> Small, ‘The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist’, p. 56. On Maran and *Batouala*, see Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State; Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (London, 2005), pp. 162-65.

<sup>8</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, pp. 2-4. It might be worth noting that James, aware of the historic crimes of the Spanish Empire, did note ‘the Latin peoples’ have ‘been cruel and callous’.

<sup>10</sup> Keating (ed.), *Matthew Arnold*, p. 137.

arriving in London in 1932, James happened to meet a Frenchwoman, a little older than himself.

One day I walked into a bookshop to buy a couple of French magazines ... a woman of about forty, dressed in black, came into the shop. She stood looking at some magazines for a while and then when the shop assistant turned her back, she came up to me and spoke in French. Did I read French a lot? As much as I could. Where did I come from? *La Trinité - les Antilles Britanniques*. Was I staying in London a long time? Yes. For some years, I thought. Did I hope to visit France someday? Yes, I very much hoped to. That was very nice. I smiled appreciatively. Goodbye. Goodbye. A slight but charming episode.<sup>11</sup>

### Researching the Haitian Revolution in 'Black Paris'

Looking back at his six months spent researching the Haitian Revolution in France during the winter of 1933 to spring 1934, James was always very proud that, as both a Francophile and a black colonial subject from the British Caribbean, he was able to surprise librarians at *La Bibliothèque Nationale* with his knowledge of the French language.<sup>12</sup> James covered ground 'at a tremendous rate', in various archives by the banks of the Seine.<sup>13</sup> Intellectually, the experience of Paris also led James to radicalise 'at a tremendous rate'.<sup>14</sup> In his unpublished and unfinished autobiography,

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<sup>11</sup> In London in 1932, James also appreciated some sketches by Pablo Picasso when he came across them. Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, pp. 12, 75-76.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, 'Breaking Bread with History', p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xv. The original 1938 Bibliography in *The Black Jacobins* lists in details the archives in Paris James visited during the 1930s in Paris. Aside from *Les Bibliothèque Nationale*, these were *Les Archives Nationales*, *Les Archives du Ministère de la Guerre*, *Les Archives du Ministère des Colonies*, and *Les Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London, 1938), p. 317. In 1971, James told an audience something of his daily routine at this point, finding it amusing that the French concern for food meant the archives closed for two hours in the middle of the day for lunch. See James, 'Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*', p. 70. His research also took him outside Paris, and he recalled that 'when I was preparing *The Black Jacobins*, I had to leave Paris and spend some days in Bordeaux and in Nantes ... in pursuit of material on the slave trade and the West Indies'. See James, 'Dr. Eric Williams', p. 345.

<sup>14</sup> It was in Paris, James recalled, that he first encountered what he would later term 'the French historical school of the French Revolution ... one of the greatest historical schools of Western

James for example revealed how he now discovered the French philosopher Henri Bergson.

I remember my first break with the philosophy of rationalism. It was Bergson, 1934. His work had come at the turn of the century. And it was startling to me on two counts.

(1) He attacked the abstractions of Understanding, their mechanical categorisation, etc., and opposed to this, Intuition.

(2) Humour, he said, was the fulfillment of the desire to see the snob and the aristocrat humbled. So that the well-dressed man slipping on a banana peel was his classic example of humour. It is still individualistic, as it would be in this philosopher, but I remember it broke me with morbid and melancholy philosophy speculation.<sup>15</sup>

Rationalism, which was championed by the Enlightenment, has been defined as an attempt to 'reconstruct reality by insisting that only those aspects of the world which conform to preconceived canons of reason have any true substance; the rest is insubstantial illusion bound to be condemned to oblivion as rationality gains ground against error and superstition'.<sup>16</sup> However, Bergson had been part of a wider revolt against 'positivism' and 'naturalism' that swept Europe during the 1890s, rejecting the tendency to discuss human behaviour through analogies drawn from natural sciences and seeking instead to explain and understand what had previously been dismissed as 'superstition' and the 'irrational'. For the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, Bergson therefore stood outside of 'the main philosophic tradition' for which 'the reified world appears henceforth quite definitively ... as the only possible world, the only conceptually accessible, comprehensible world

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civilization'. James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 331-32. James went on to discuss this tradition which ranged from Jules Michelet to Jean Jaurès and his *Socialist History of the French Revolution* to George Lefebvre's lectures at the Sorbonne.

<sup>15</sup> C. I. R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Chicago, 1986), p. xxii. For more on Bergson, see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society; The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (Brighton, 1979), pp. 115-18, 121-22, 341.

<sup>16</sup> John Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution; The Dialectic and the Classical Marxist Tradition* (London, 1998), p. 4.

vouchsafed to us humans'. Instead, Bergson represented an attempt to 'radically question the value of formal knowledge for a "living life"'.<sup>17</sup>

That James found reading Bergson liberating should not really surprise us.<sup>18</sup> Bergson's stress on 'intuition' was to prove an inspiration to several black colonial subjects in France during the 1930s including Léopold Senghor (later president of Senegal), who would soon help develop the philosophy of Negritude. Against the white supremacist claims of European imperialism, Senghor drew courage from Bergson's argument that 'the objects of discursive reason were only the superficial surface that must be surpassed, by *intuition*, in order to have a deeper vision of the *real*'. As Gary Wilder has noted,

Negritude's critique of colonial modernity linked a liberal discourse grounded in republican rights and rationality to a postliberal discourse grounded in racial alterity and irrationality. This dimension of Negritude drew on various countercurrents of the Western tradition, including vitalist philosophy (Nietzsche, Bergson, Heidegger) ... Negritude's critique of (colonial) reason may be read as one among many interwar attempts to exceed, overturn, or find alternatives to materialism, individualism, and instrumental rationalism.<sup>19</sup>

Senghor's invocation of Bergson also reminds us that for many black colonial subjects Paris was more than just an intellectual centre of the West. Invoking Walter Benjamin's 1939 description of Paris as 'Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in *The Arcades Project*, Jonathan P. Eburne and Jeremy Braddock in 2005 suggested twentieth-century Paris was also 'Capital of the Black Atlantic'. This manifested itself not only in 'the transatlantic circulation of ideas, texts, and objects' that resulted from those black writers from across the African diaspora having visited Paris, but also in 'the Benjaminian sense of a wish image of diasporic imagination', where 'Black Paris' became a mythological space of tolerance and enlightenment with respect to race.

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<sup>17</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness; Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (London, 1971), p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> Incidentally, Lukács himself was influenced by Bergson before he became a Marxist. See Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (London, 1979), p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, pp. 246, 257-58, 262.

In place of the romanticized image of Parisien cafes and book stalls as the cosmopolitan meeting-place of great literary minds ... [Black Paris was] the product of a dialectical relationship between actual and virtual conditions of intellectual life, through which black writers of international origin made a “resolute effort to distance [themselves] from all that is antiquated”(Benjamin) ... Most immediately, this meant a separation from the “antiquated” conditions of colonialism, segregation, and racial violence from which Paris could be construed, however problematically, as a refuge.<sup>20</sup>

In Paris during the early 1930s, black journals such as *La Revue du Monde Noir* and black organizations such as *Légitime Défense* flourished and were important precursors to the Negritude movement, born in 1935.<sup>21</sup> It was in ‘Black Paris’ that Nancy Cunard finished compiling her monumental and militant *Negro*, an 855 page anthology to which George Padmore had contributed, and which was banned in the West Indies.<sup>22</sup> James himself got a taste of the heady atmosphere of this racialized space when he met the Haitian military historian, Colonel Auguste Nemours, ‘an enthusiastic admirer of Toussaint but exceptionally fair’, who was keen to explain the war of independence to him ‘in great detail, using books and coffee cups on a large table’.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan P. Eburne and Jeremy Braddock, ‘Introduction: Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51/4, (2005), pp. 732-33. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin wrote ‘To the form of the new means of production which in the beginning is still dominated by the old one (Marx), there correspond in the collective consciousness images in which the new is intermingled with the old. These images are wish images, and in them collective attempts to transcend as well as to illumine the incompleteness of the social order of production. There also emerges in these wish images a positive striving to set themselves off from the outdated - that means, however, the most recent past.’ See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (London, 1993), p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> The Martinican poet Aimé Césaire first coined the term ‘Negritude’ in the March 1935 issue of *L’Étudiant Noir*, a French journal. See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York, 2000), p. 12. For James’s thoughts on Negritude, see M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 270. Also see Michael Fabre, ‘Rene, Louis, and Leopold: Senghorian Negritude as a Black Humanism’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51/4, (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Cunard (ed.), *Negro*. Anne Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard* (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 272. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, p. 53. For discussion of this work, see Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, pp. 309-18.

<sup>23</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. xvi, 329. In one of the few discussions of this meeting with Nemours in ‘Black Paris,’ Charles Forsdick notes that ‘James’s generous comment on an invaluable source disguises the radical differences between the two men’s interpretations’. Nemours, Forsdick notes, continues ‘a Haitian tradition that transforms Toussaint into the messianic figure who some thought

James returned to Britain inspired by his experience of 'Black Paris'.<sup>24</sup> In March 1934, he went back up to Nelson and gave a lecture on 'The Negro' which was reported at length in the *Nelson Leader*. In this meeting, James denounced French colonialism in Africa as being even worse than the British in South Africa, noting 'between 1911 and 1926 3,250,000 natives died in French Equatorial Africa. Big holes were dug and the natives were thrown into them and blown up with dynamite.' Yet James contrasted the level of racial prejudice in France with that of Britain positively.

The average person in England did not understand the negro. They saw him only dancing and kicking his heels like a half-crazy lunatic; the screen always presented him in an unfair position. People could not get away from the idea that he was fit for nothing better than the role of shoe-black or railroad porter ... If hearers went across the Channel and investigated conditions in France...they would find negroes in the French Cabinet, in the ranks of retired naval and army men, in the professions, universities and colleges. France had already disregarded scientific theories, and judged the negro on results.<sup>25</sup>

Soon after his return from France, James decided to join the British Trotskyist movement, and according to the memoirs of one member of that movement, Louise Cripps, he made another visit - according to Cripps his third - to France, probably in Spring 1935. This time James took Cripps and another friend and comrade, Esther Heiger, and they stayed in Montparnasse in Paris, where the local cafés were 'favourite meeting grounds for the Trotskyists at that time (as well as the rendezvous

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was urgently required during U.S. occupation'. James, however, 'discovers in Toussaint an incendiary figure with extra-Caribbean implications, whose example had connotations for current and future anticolonial struggle (as well as revolutionary struggle more generally)'. See Charles Forsdick, 'The Black Jacobin in Paris', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 5/3, (2005), pp. 17-18, 21. It is interesting to note, as Forsdick does, that while in Paris Nemours published an article on Toussaint in *La Revue du Monde Noir*. See Auguste Nemours, 'History of the family and descendents of Toussaint-Louverture', *La Revue du Monde Noir (The Review of the Black World)*, 6, (1932).

<sup>24</sup> According to Louise Cripps, when James returned to Nelson full of enthusiasm about Paris 'and in particular about a beautiful woman he had met there', he and Harry Spencer made another trip to Paris 'for several days' and 'it is said that all three went out and had a good time together.' Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, p. 49. There is also a seven page document on 'Harry Spencer and his trip to Paris' in the James archives, but this apparently concerns a trip to France 'just before the outbreak of war' and so in late 1938. It is possible they made two trips. See Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive*, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> 'Racial Prejudice in England', Appendix C.

for artists and writers)'.<sup>26</sup> James did not miss out on sampling the culture of 'Black Paris', and one evening, James took Cripps to one of Paris's black nightclubs, *Le Bal Negre*. 'It was not a very fancy place, but it was filled with people. There were blacks of every height, weight, and shades of colour from all parts of the world where there are Africans or people of African descent ... we danced and danced.'<sup>27</sup> The little party also took in French Impressionist art in the Jeu des Paumes in the Tuilleries Gardens, and in general did a lot of sightseeing, taking in Le Louvre, the Bastille, Napoleon's Tomb, the Palace of Versailles, with James 'giving us several lectures as we wandered from place to place'.

We meandered along the Left Bank, turning over and looking at all the books on the stalls. Esther and James went to the top of the Eiffel Tower. I stayed below because I am afraid of heights. With not much enthusiasm, Esther and I accompanied James to the Military Museum. It was springtime in Paris, the loveliest time of the year, and we sat outside the cafes, drinking wine and trying our first taste of absinthe ... it was an exciting time ... the memory of that French vacation stayed with all three of us for a long time.<sup>28</sup>

Yet this trip was not purely social, and Cripps recalled James in particular spent some time researching and a lot of time 'meeting with French comrades'. Trotsky himself was in hiding in France in 1935, and so Paris temporarily became, in an important sense (and to invoke Benjamin again), 'Capital of International Trotskyism'. 'Esther and I were not seeing James all the time, since he was visiting

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<sup>26</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 48-55. Cripps, like so much else in her memoirs, did not date this trip as 'it is hard for me to pinpoint dates of events that occurred more than sixty years ago', but she leaves enough clues for the careful biographer to be able to use her narrative. She describes it being 'springtime in Paris' and after James's previous two trips to France in 1933 and 1934 and before his trips 'on political business as a representative of our group to two conferences [1936 and 1938]', which leaves either Spring 1935 or Spring 1936. Given the fact that Spring 1936 was an incredibly busy time for James politically and with his play, and the chronological place of her description of this trip in her memoirs, Spring 1935 seems most likely.

<sup>27</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, p. 50. As Jonathan Derrick notes of black entertainment in this city, 'Langston Hughes, revisiting Paris before going to Spain, found that Montmartre in 1937 was "a little Harlem" and Bricktop "the reigning star of the Parisien night", and the French West Indian biguine was a fashionable dance'. Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, p. 407. See also Nicholas Hewitt, 'Black Montmartre: American jazz and music hall in Paris in the interwar years', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 5/3, (2005).

<sup>28</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 48-50. Though James could clearly read French well, Cripps recalled his spoken French in comparison was less strong, something that 'really angered him' as 'he could not fully express his views'. Accordingly, on that trip 'he became almost fluent in French in three weeks'.

other people. I think he went to see Lev Sedov, Trotsky's son'.<sup>29</sup> In December 1934, the murder of Kirov had led to a wave of repression (including the arrest of Zinoviev) in the Soviet Union. The exiled Trotsky was being smeared by the Stalinist regime as among those implicated, so necessitating a high level of security for leading Trotskyists. This comes through well in one story Cripps, a journalist and editor, tells of this trip to France.

One day, James came to us in our lodgings and pulled me aside from Esther, and said, "I want you to go out with me this evening." James told me to wear something that was unobtrusive ... It was nearly dark when I met him - *l'heure bleu*, a time of slight *tristesse*, a slight sense of sadness, of foreboding. We met without Esther Heiger, and there was a good deal of cloak-and-dagger stuff. We would go a little way on the metro, then we would hurriedly change, and then we would change again, and then we would go by bus, and then we would change again. It was all to prevent our being followed. I did not take this too seriously ... [but] James had been quite serious and had hardly spoken until then. On the other hand, I was a little excited, and felt we were off on a small adventure.

'Finally, we arrived on the outskirts of Paris and went to a rather large glass-enclosed restaurant ... we approached a young man sitting alone and pulled up our chairs to his table.' Introduced to her only as 'Adolf' [Adolphe], the young man was actually Rudolf Klement, a German political émigré and one of Trotsky's secretaries, and she remembered 'the idea of adventure was quickly erased by the tensions of the young man we had joined'.

The young man I think was in his thirties, thin, not very tall ... [and] was highly nervous, his eyes darting to the door of the restaurant and searching around the outside glass windows. He had a cup of coffee in front of him but was not drinking it. James ordered coffee for us, but except for a first sip or two, we also left ours untouched. My excitement turned to confusion. What was this meeting? ... James sat unusually quiet ... the young man looked me over and started asking questions about myself: how long I had been in the movement; my education; my professional experience ... Then one after the other, both started telling me what they wanted of me.

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<sup>29</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, p. 48. Leon Sedov, born in 1905, was Trotsky's eldest son and a tireless revolutionary activist and writer. He died in suspicious circumstances, almost certainly poisoned by Stalin's agents in a French hospital in February 1938. See Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, pp. 395-97, and the obituary by Hilary Sumner-Boyd in *Fight*, Second Series, 1/1, (April 1938).

It was a serious proposal, and I sensed the urgency in them. I realised I had to make up my mind hurriedly ... The two men had proceeded to ask me if I would act as Trotsky's secretary and assistant for three months. The need was obviously urgent, so that the questions and reply were repeated. I thought about the proposal; finally said no. After my decision, Adolf [Adolphe] left very quickly, slid away like a shadow ... obviously, James was disappointed in me. He had felt I would have suitably fit into the role ... he had been sure of me: sure that I was free, was capable; would somehow find enough money to support myself and that my reason for refusing, to go home to look after my husband, was too trivial. But he made no effort to dissuade me.<sup>30</sup>

Fascist Italy's war on the people of Ethiopia, and French and British acquiescence with such barbarism had showed, as James put it, that 'Mussolini, the British government and the French have shown the Negro only too plainly that he has got nothing to expect from them but exploitation, either naked or wrapped in bluff'.<sup>31</sup> Yet in an 'author's note' written for the programme of his March 1936 play about the Haitian Revolution, *Toussaint Louverture*, James again remarked on the comparative lack of racial prejudice in modern France.

The former French colony of San Domingo, today Haiti, is a member of the League of Nations, and Colonel Nemours, its representative, a man of colour, presided over the eighth assembly of the League. The closest and most cordial relationship exists today between white France and coloured San Domingo. The French take a deep interest in a people whose language, cultural traditions and aspiration are entirely French.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 51-53. Klement, who used the pseudonym 'Adolphe', had been Trotsky's personal secretary in Barbizon during 1933. In July 1938, Klement, still a secretary of the Fourth International, was abducted by Stalin's secret police while in Paris and murdered, his horribly mutilated body later found in the River Seine. See Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, pp. 407-408, and *Fight*, Second Series, 1/4, (August, 1938). As James later told David Widgery of his clandestine meetings with Trotskyists in Paris, 'they were very serious days. There was a German boy very active in our movement. One day we found him at the bottom of the Seine.' Widgery, 'C.L.R. James', pp. 123-24.

<sup>31</sup> James, 'Abyssinia and the Imperialists', p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Author's Note', *Toussaint Louverture* programme, (March, 1936), Theatre Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. James would repeat this argument in 1938 in *The Black Jacobins*. 'Once the French had recognized Haytian independence, the Haytians turned back to France ... the race-hatred of two centuries, the fiercest that the world has known, has vanished. Its roots were in economic exploitation and the political tyranny necessitated by it. It is on that evil basis that is built the whole superstructure of what we know as the race question.' James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], p. 313.

In late July 1936, James again had a chance to squeeze in more archival research on the Haitian Revolution when he returned to Paris as a British delegate for the 'First International Conference for the Fourth International'.<sup>33</sup> At the conference itself, James remembered meeting revolutionary socialists from the dictatorships of Nazi Germany and Austria, and made friends in particular with the Belgian comrade, Leon Lesoil.<sup>34</sup> It was a perfect opportunity for James to develop his knowledge about the international movement, and he himself made an impression at the conference. 'I would say a few words and speak, as I could speak in French,' but he distinctly felt that the others 'had come from the revolutionary movement, but we [in Britain] had not ... what was happening in Britain was nothing'.<sup>35</sup>

In France itself, in May 1936, a 'Popular Front' Government had been elected.<sup>36</sup> With the memory of the General Strike of 1934 still fresh in the minds of militants, another massive strike wave shook France to its foundations in the aftermath of the election. As James noted, 'les Soviets partout', 'the Soviets everywhere' became 'the most popular slogan in the whole of working-class France' as over a million workers seized and occupied their factories and millions rushed into trade unions to 'join' in the class war.<sup>37</sup> In June 1936, Trotsky triumphantly declared 'The French Revolution has begun!' and even the British ambassador compared the

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<sup>33</sup> The British contingent consisted of James representing the Marxist Group (with Bert Matlow as an observer), together with Harber (and Van Gelderen) from the Bolshevik-Leninist group inside the Labour Party. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, p. 447.

<sup>34</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, pp. 248-49. Leon Lesoil (1892-1942), a miner who had been a founding member of the Belgian Communist Party, until his expulsion for 'Trotskyism' in 1927. Lesoil had been one of the leaders of the Belgian General Strike of 1932, and his group had entered the main social democratic party Parti Ouvrier Belge, in 1934 as instructed, but had found the experience of work there extremely frustrating. See 'Leon Lesoil' in *Revolutionary History*, 7/1, (1998), pp. 69-73, and also David Cotterill (ed.), *The Serge-Trotsky Papers; Correspondence and Other Writings between Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky* (London, 1994), p. 223. James later described him as 'one of the finest men I ever knew ... hard as steel, honest as the day, gentle and very kind'. See Grimshaw (ed.), *Special Delivery*, p. 85. Lesoil died in a Nazi concentration camp.

<sup>35</sup> James recalled there were even one or two veteran Left Oppositionists from the Soviet Union who 'came in secretly'. 'I remember them sitting there, and I spoke with them. It took some time, they smiled and said, "Yes". But I know now that they were saying, "You are nothing but left wing Labour democrats".' Socialist Platform, *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism*, p. 9, and Archer, 'C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism, 1932-38', p. 64.

<sup>36</sup> In the July 1936 issue of *Controversy* - an issue it seems no surviving copies of remain - James apparently wrote an article on 'France Today'. See *New Leader*, 10 July 1936.

<sup>37</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 394.

situation of the mass stay-in strikes to Russia in 1917, with the premier of the 'Popular Front' Government, Socialist leader Léon Blum, in the ill-fated role of Kerensky.<sup>38</sup> The French Communist Party had grown massively in the run up to the June days, and was seen as the clear anti-capitalist choice for newly radicalised workers. Yet rather than working towards being able to counter-pose 'Soviet Power' to the Popular Front Government, the French Communist Party argued that the economic gains that had been won by the strike movement should now be consolidated. As their leader Maurice Thorez declared, 'we must know how to end a strike when satisfaction has been gained'.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, though scathing about the Communists in particular and Blum's Popular Front government in general, James retained his optimism about the potential possibilities that might flow from further independent activity by the French working class.<sup>40</sup> In May 1937, James noted 'the French workers have a revolutionary tradition. Their spirit is high. This May Day [1937] there will be tremendous demonstrations. Before another May Day arrives, there are likely to be barricades in the streets.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cliff, *Trotsky, 1927-1940*, p. 196, and Harman, *A People's History of the World*, p. 496.

<sup>39</sup> Cliff, *Trotsky, 1927-1940*, p. 195. For more on the French Popular Front, see McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 120-39.

<sup>40</sup> 'The masses act and create a situation. Revolutionary leaders must recognise it, for such chances come very rarely in history'. James, *World Revolution*, p. 393. In 1939, James would discuss the French Trotskyist movement with Trotsky, noting the incongruity in 'the tremendous rise in the fighting temper of the French workers and the actual decline of our movement in that period'. James, 'Discussions with Trotsky', pp. 51-58. See also James's later reflections on this discussion in Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James*, p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> *Fight*, 1/7, (June, 1937). Sadly, May 1938 brought not a revival in workers' militancy but 'capitalist offensive in France' and the fall of the Popular Front government.

## Building Solidarity with the Spanish Revolution

If France in June 1936 had been a great moment of revolutionary hope, the atmosphere at the 'First International Conference for the Fourth International' was to be further electrified by the news from Spain, where workers and peasants had spontaneously begun to resist an attempted coup against the democratically elected Republic by General Francisco Franco in mid-July 1936. The long term causes for the Spanish Civil War are many and complex, but the immediate event had been the election of an extremely loose 'Popular Front' coalition involving liberal Republicans, social democratic Socialists and the Spanish Communist Party in February 1936 after five years of deep crisis and instability. The Spanish Right spread the idea the Left had stolen the elections in an illegitimate fashion and their electoral failure encouraged the ruling elite to turn to the extreme Right. Popular resistance to Franco as the Republican state disintegrated led quickly to the eruption of a social revolution from below across much of Spain, in particular Catalonia and Aragon.<sup>42</sup>

James was clearly as thrilled and excited by the outbreak of revolution in Spain as anyone. In mid-August 1936, 'a comrade in Barcelona' had sent an eyewitness report of 'the insurrection of July' to the Marxist Group, entitled 'Struggle for a Soviet Spain; The workers in Catalonia'. The comrade noted 'great labour history is being made. In great red letters the Spanish proletariat is engaged in writing the pages of it ... Night and day the revolution labours in Spain, and revolution is the finest architect in the world'.<sup>43</sup> In October 1936, James republished this article in the first issue of the Marxist Group's new journal, *Fight*, and in an editorial comment, saluted 'the Spanish workers and peasants, men, women and children, fighting against landlord and capitalist tyranny with a gallantry and determination that stirs the heart of every fellow worker and drags a grudging admiration from even their bitterest class enemies'. International working class action in solidarity, James argued, was the only hope for the Spanish Revolution as

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<sup>42</sup> Andy Durgan, *The Spanish Civil War* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 23-27, 31, 79.

<sup>43</sup> 'Struggle for a Soviet Spain; The workers in Catalonia', *Fight*, 1/1, (October, 1936).

there was no point ‘begging capitalist Governments to help smash Spanish capitalism’.

Yet James was optimistic as ‘the smashing of the Unemployment Scales in Britain in January, 1935, the stay-in strikes in France and Belgium, and now the unparalleled courage and self-sacrifice of the Spanish workers and peasants have shown that the workers are willing to fight’. Before the Communist International had begun to organise International Brigades to Spain, James urged the raising of money ‘not only for food and medical units but for guns, munitions and planes’ and for the formation of ‘battalions, large or small, that would carry in person the message of solidarity’. By doing this ‘in all parts of the world’ workers ‘would build a steel ring of proletarian support for the United States of Soviet Spain, and by so doing carry themselves nearer to their own victory’.<sup>44</sup> On 4 October 1936, members of James’s Marxist Group (then still working inside the I.L.P.) joined the victorious ‘Battle of Cable Street’ in the East End of London which saw at least 100,000 workers successfully block a march by Mosley’s B.U.F. through a predominantly Jewish area. The rallying slogan of the anti-fascists, ‘They Shall Not Pass’, was inspired by the slogan of those defending Madrid, ‘No Pasaran’.<sup>45</sup>

In November 1936, the I.L.P. decided to organise volunteers to go and fight with the P.O.U.M., the ‘Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification’, its Spanish sister party, who encouraged English supporters to ‘FIGHT for the World Revolution - ENLIST in the P.O.U.M. Militia’.<sup>46</sup> It seems James wanted to join the I.L.P.

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<sup>44</sup> ‘Editorial: The Need for a New International’, *Fight*, 1/1, (October, 1936). In the next issue of *Fight*, James acknowledged the Communist International Brigades, noting that in ‘the International Column, which is creating a name for itself by its fighting, socialists of many nationalities have taken up arms for the cause of their class’. ‘Spain: International Battle’, *Fight*, 1/2, (December, 1936).

<sup>45</sup> As James reported in his editorial of *Fight* in December 1936, ‘the Trotskyists issued a leaflet on October 4<sup>th</sup> calling for the Workers’ Defence Corps. The militant workers in the East End are ready to meet Fascist hooligans with their own organised force.’ ‘Editorial: The Popular Front in Britain’, *Fight*, 1/2, (December, 1936). On the Battle of Cable Street, see Dave Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (London, 2000), pp. 18-20, and Christopher Hall, ‘Not just Orwell’; *The Independent Labour Party Volunteers and the Spanish Civil War* (Barcelona, 2009), pp. 21-22.

<sup>46</sup> For details of the I.L.P. delegation of volunteers, see Hall, ‘Not just Orwell’; Andy Durgan, ‘International Volunteers in the POUM Militias’, *Fundación Andreu Nin*, ‘<http://www.fundanon.org/durgan1.htm>’ (29 September 2008); Peter Thwaites, ‘The Independent Labour Party Contingent in the Spanish Civil War’, *Imperial War Museum Review*, 2, (1987), and ‘Fighting Men From Britain’, *The Spanish Revolution*, 2/2, 3 February 1937, Glasgow Caledonian University Archive of the Trotskyist Tradition (G.C.A.T.T.), Miscellaneous Journals Box. For more on the P.O.U.M., see Andy Durgan, ‘Marxism, War and Revolution: Trotsky and the P.O.U.M.’, *Revolutionary History*, 9 2, (2006). On G.C.A.T.T., see Wallace, ‘G.C.A.T.T. and the Archeology of

contingent that was to leave from Britain for the Aragon Front to fight Franco with the P.O.U.M. in early January 1937, just as he had wanted to go and fight Mussolini's army in Ethiopia the year before.<sup>47</sup> However, December 1936 was to be the moment when the tensions between James's Marxist Group and the I.L.P. leadership finally came to a head and James's group departed from the I.L.P. altogether.<sup>48</sup> Now burdened with the additional responsibility of leading an independent political group at a particularly stressful and crucial period, it seems James decided it was necessary to stay in London and raise solidarity for the Spanish Revolution from Britain, as he raised solidarity for the people of Ethiopia during Mussolini's war.<sup>49</sup>

As editor of *Fight*, James made sure the struggle in Spain was prominently featured in all its aspects, while maintaining 'critical support' for the P.O.U.M., which embraced the slogan 'To conquer or die' and declared itself for the Spanish Revolution.<sup>50</sup> James's Marxist Group, following Leon Trotsky's characterisation of the P.O.U.M. as 'Left centrist', were critical of the decision of that party's leader Andreu Nin to enter the Catalan government in October 1936.<sup>51</sup> As *Fight's* Editorial Committee stated in December 1936,

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British Trotskyism'. Many thanks to the archivists of G.C.A.T.T. Philip Wallace and Carole McCallum for their help during my visit in June 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Personal information from Sam Weinstein, 2 February 2008, confirmed by Robert Hill, 3 February 2008. Akiri Nyabongo, the Ugandan prince who had studied at Yale and Oxford, apparently went from Britain to Spain to fight fascism. See Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, p. 176. Presumably James would have gone with the I.L.P. contingent even if he had just left the I.L.P. as even though it did not officially accept married men, it was open to non-members such as George Orwell.

<sup>48</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, p. 257. See also the discussion in Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*.

<sup>49</sup> One future member of James's Marxist Group, the Irishman Paddy Trench, had reported events in Spain as a journalist. See *Revolutionary History*, 6/2-3, (1996), pp. 6-7; Hall, 'Not just Orwell', p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> The P.O.U.M. had grown rapidly in the first few months of the civil war, and by the end of 1936 claimed 30,000 members. It published five daily as well as numerous weekly papers, and controlled radio stations in Barcelona and Madrid. Yet as Durgan notes, 'despite holding a formally revolutionary position, the P.O.U.M. would prove unable to influence significantly the course of events'. Durgan, 'Marxism, War and Revolution', p. 39.

<sup>51</sup> Durgan draws attention to the relative lack of reliable information available to (and accordingly commentary about Spain from) Trotsky himself from late August 1936 when interned in Norway until settled in Mexico in February 1937. Durgan, 'Marxism, War and Revolution', p. 39. This seems to have left Trotskyists in, for example, Britain with room for some autonomy with respect to their analysis of the unfolding struggle. The Marxist Group's fraternal criticism of the P.O.U.M. seems to have distinguished them somewhat from another British Trotskyist group, the Marxist League, who were much less critical and indeed were official agents of the P.O.U.M.'s English bulletin *The Spanish Revolution* alongside the I.L.P. itself.

It is a revolutionary duty to the international working class movement, as well as to the Spanish comrades, to indicate firmly our disagreement with POUM on many aspects of their policy, e.g. entering the Catalonian Government. Yet POUM have issued many correct slogans, and, in opposition to Spanish Socialists and Stalinists, alone in Spain are advocating the socialist revolution. And revolutionaries should and must give POUM support with criticism, or, to use the correct Marxist term, critical support.<sup>52</sup>

This is not the place to detail how seriously the editors of *Fight* undertook this 'revolutionary duty', in keeping with their declaration that 'the Spanish battlefield is the greatest present battlefield in the class struggle, and the only victory for the workers is the victory of international socialism'.<sup>53</sup> *Fight* carried further eyewitness reports from Spain.<sup>54</sup> There were also repeated appeals for material support for the English comrades fighting for the P.O.U.M.<sup>55</sup> This was particularly crucial after December 1936, when Nin was thrown out of the Catalan government after direct pressure from the Soviet government on the Republican authorities amid a rising tide of ferocious Stalinist smears and violent repression against the allegedly 'Trotskyite' P.O.U.M. On 17 December 1936, *Pravda* had noted that 'in Catalonia, the elimination of Trotskyites and Anarcho-Syndicalists has already begun; it will be carried out with the same energy as in the USSR', where Stalinist terror was now in

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<sup>52</sup> 'Towards the New Workers' Party', *Fight*, 1/2, (December, 1936). See also Durgan, 'Marxism, War and Revolution', pp. 43-44, and 'Spain', *Fight*, 1/2, (December, 1936). 'Now the POUM is veering towards the right. [Andreu] Nin, one of its leaders, has entered the Catalonian government of which Companys, a bourgeois, is still a member, and which is attempting that first step of all reaction, the disarming of the workers in the towns, under the pretext that all available arms are needed at the Front'.

<sup>53</sup> 'Spain', *Fight*, 1/2, (December, 1936).

<sup>54</sup> 'Stop Press', *Fight*, 1/5, (April, 1937), and, in September 1937, 'Persecution in Catalonia', 'a letter from one of our comrades in Barcelona, which give a good idea of the social changes which have taken place and the problems which face revolutionaries'. *Fight*, 1/10, (September, 1937).

<sup>55</sup> See for example, 'Aid for Spain: The Fourth International Spanish Committee', *Fight*, 1/3, (January, 1937), which claimed that one John Bryan, 'a militant trade unionist, an active Trotskyist and member of the Chelsea group, has joined the Spanish Government Marine where ... he will be fighting as a torpedo expert, in the international marine force'. See also 'Help POUM', *Fight*, 1/4, (February, 1937), 'They need your help!', *Fight*, 1/6, (May, 1937), and 'Arms for Spain', *Fight*, Second Series, 1/2, (May, 1938), 'Arms for the Spanish workers', *Fight*, Second Series, 1/3, (June, 1938).

full swing.<sup>56</sup> James's Marxist Group now put itself forward as the most ardent defenders of the P.O.U.M. in Britain, and began selling the P.O.U.M.'s English weekly bulletin *The Spanish Revolution* alongside *Fight*.<sup>57</sup> *Fight* in January 1937 noted that 'at this critical period in the revolution, the Communist International shows its counter-revolutionary role', attacking the P.O.U.M. 'with a viciousness that far exceeds the attacks of the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks upon the Bolsheviks in 1917'.<sup>58</sup> The Marxist Group's support was even registered in *The Spanish Revolution* itself on 3 February 1937.

The variety of revolutionary groups rallying around the P.O.U.M. is amazing. As an example, we get an order for 120 copies of each issue from the Marxist Group of Croyden [sic], who say: "We have a committee which is busy collecting money and clothing for the P.O.U.M. Despite our differences with you on the question of the International, we shall support the P.O.U.M. because we regard it as the only party in Spain which stands for the Socialist Revolution."<sup>59</sup>

The co-editor of the English edition of *The Spanish Revolution* was Mary Stanley Low, a young English surrealist poet who had gone to Spain in July 1936, and joined the P.O.U.M. women's militia in Catalonia, working in their English-

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Ervin, *Tomorrow is Ours*, p. 68. See also Durgan, 'Marxism, War and Revolution', p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> In February 1937, *Fight* reprinted an article from *The Spanish Revolution* entitled 'For Workers' Democracy in Spain: For an Assembly of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers'. See 'For Workers' Democracy in Spain', *Fight*, 1/4, (February, 1937).

<sup>58</sup> The P.O.U.M. paper's *La Batalla* was suppressed and the party was denounced by the Spanish Communist Party as 'fascist provocateurs', 'a vanguard of the Fascists in our own camp'. James's Marxist Group now therefore declared their unconditional support for the Spanish organisation, noting that 'against the pogrom attacks of the Spanish Stalinists we stand with the P.O.U.M.' See 'Spain: The Sharpening Struggle', *Fight*, 1/3, (January, 1937). In part such a stance was also an attempt to embarrass the leadership of the I.L.P., who were attempting to maintain a working relationship with the C.P.G.B. and refused to publicly work with Trotskyists and anarchists to raise solidarity with the P.O.U.M. 'We regret the refusal of ILP comrades to cooperate with other Groups in this country for a united campaign in support of POUM ... to give practical assistance to the Spanish Revolution and to defend POUM from the attacks of Stalinism'. 'The Spanish Struggle', *Fight*, 1/6. (May, 1937). On the I.L.P. and Spain, see the discussion in Cohen, *Failure of a Dream*, pp. 176-91.

<sup>59</sup> 'Sell Our Bulletin', *The Spanish Revolution*, 2/2, 3 February 1937. In March 1937, the Marxist Group were included among the list of official agents of *The Spanish Revolution* in Britain. See *The Spanish Revolution*, 3/5, 17 March 1937.

language radio service, 'Radio P.O.U.M'. *The Spanish Revolution*, from its offices on Rambla de los Estudios, Barcelona, reported regularly on the British I.L.P. volunteers fighting with the P.O.U.M., including one George Orwell, 'Comrade Blair'.<sup>60</sup> However, as the persecution against the P.O.U.M. intensified, Mary Low and her partner, another surrealist poet, the Cuban born Trotskyist Juan Breá, who had fought with the P.O.U.M. and twice been arrested by the Stalinists, got out of Spain in February 1937.

There was little more to keep us in Barcelona after January [1937]. The militias were over, with the coming of militarisation. The Generality was done for, as far as we were concerned. There remained the war to be won, certainly, but it was the revolution in which we were interested. For the time being it seemed to have gone into cold storage.<sup>61</sup>

Low and Breá wrote up their inspiring eyewitness account of their travels during 'the first six months of the Revolution and the Civil War' in Spain, and secured a contract with Secker & Warburg, who were in the process of publishing James's pioneering history of 'the rise and fall of the Communist International,'

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<sup>60</sup> 'At the beginning of January [1937], we received a visit in Barcelona from Eric Blair, the well-known British author, whose work is so much appreciated in all English-speaking left circles of thought. Comrade Blair came to Barcelona, and said he wanted to be of some use to the workers' cause. In view of his literary abilities and intellectual attainments, it appeared that the most useful work he could do in Barcelona would be that of a propaganda journalist in constant communication with socialist organs of opinion in Britain. He [instead] said: "I have decided that I can be of most use to the workers as a fighter at the front." He spent exactly seven days in Barcelona, and he is now fighting with the Spanish comrades of the P.O.U.M. on the Aragon front. In a postcard which he sent us, he says: "When I have persuaded them to teach me something about the machine-gun, I hope to be drafted to the front line trenches.'" 'British Author With the Militia', *The Spanish Revolution*, 2/2, 3 February 1937, G.C.A.T.T. Miscellaneous Journals Box. See also 'Fighting Men From Britain', 'At the Front', *The Spanish Revolution*, 2/4, 3 March 1937, and *The Spanish Revolution*, 2/7, 21 April 1937.

<sup>61</sup> Low and Breá, *Red Spanish Notebook*, pp. v, 114, 217, 230. Low and Breá had met in 1933 and then travelled to Cuba and through Europe before going to Spain with their friends, including the French surrealist poet Benjamin Péret. See J.J. Plant, 'Mary Stanley Low (1912-2007)', *Revolutionary History*, 9/4, (2007). Breá had joined the official Trotskyists, the Bolshevik-Leninists, in Spain, and had nearly been killed outside a P.O.U.M. meeting. Low was sympathetic to the Trotskyists and attended meetings in Barcelona. They got married in London in 1937, shortly before the book came out. They later edited *La Verdad Contemporanea* (Havana, 1943), the first full length work of surrealist theory published in the Caribbean. See Franklin Rosemont, 'Pioneers of West Indian Surrealism', *Urgent Tasks: Journal of the Revolutionary Left*, 12, (Summer, 1981).

*World Revolution*, which appeared in April 1937. James had concluded *World Revolution* with ‘the Spanish Revolution’.

Bourgeois democracy is doomed in Spain ... the choice lies between the capitalist Fascist dictatorship, or the Socialist Workers’ State. If the workers are to win against Franco and his German and Italian allies ... the war must be a revolutionary war by workers and peasants organised in Soviets or other workers’ organisations. But the Soviet bureaucracy made the fight for a democratic Spain a condition of assistance; and the bureaucracy and its agents, though active against Franco, are now preventing Spanish workers and peasants from doing the very things that created Soviet Russia.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, James had made a prediction that ‘the day is near when the Stalinists will join reactionary governments in shooting revolutionary workers. They cannot avoid it’.<sup>63</sup> In May 1937, a month after *World Revolution* had come out, James was tragically proved right as the Republican government with Communist support repressed the P.O.U.M. and anarchists in Barcelona by force, imprisoning thousands and murdering dozens.<sup>64</sup> James was therefore one obvious person to be asked to write an introduction for Low and Breá’s *Red Spanish Notebook*, which came out later in 1937, priced 5 shillings. Secker & Warburg marketed it as ‘the only study of the Spanish War written from the P.O.U.M. viewpoint. Not only of political importance, but a brilliant piece of reportage recreating the atmosphere of the first six months.’<sup>65</sup> In his introduction, James praised Low and Breá’s achievement as having provided to the ordinary reader, ‘better than all the spate of books on Spain, some idea of the new society that is struggling so desperately to be born’.

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<sup>62</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 406.

<sup>63</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 389.

<sup>64</sup> Durgan, ‘Marxism, War and Revolution’, p. 51.

<sup>65</sup> See the advertisement in *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937). In mid-1937, like many other intellectuals and writers including George Padmore and Marcus Garvey, James was asked to comment on the Spanish Civil War by Nancy Cunard for *Left Review*. James’s statement was short but succinct. ‘Against Fascism, against Franco, but against bourgeois democracy too. For the independent action of the workers in the struggle for a Soviet Spain; the defence of the USSR, and international Socialism.’ See Nancy Cunard (ed.). *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (June, 1937).

For Breá and Mary Low, despite their eye for picturesque personalities, are proletarian revolutionaries, and their little book shows us the awakening of a people. The boot-black who good-humouredly but firmly refuses a tip, showing his union-cards; the peasant who will not be kept waiting as of old because equality exists now; the hundreds of women stealing away from their men to join the women's militia - and attend Marxist classes, throwing off the degrading subservience of centuries and grasping with both hands at the new life ... for the eager thousands who march through these pages, smashing up the old and tumultuously beginning the new, worker's power emerged half-way from books, became something that they could touch and see, a concrete alternative to the old slavery.<sup>66</sup>

George Orwell, who had just returned wounded from Spain having 'touched and seen' both workers' power and then Stalinist counter-revolutionary terror in Barcelona while fighting in the P.O.U.M. militia, reviewed *Red Spanish Notebook* in *Time and Tide* on 9 October 1937, praising the way in which 'by a series of intimate day-to-day pictures ... it shows you what human beings are like when they are trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine.'<sup>67</sup> Indeed, on returning to London it seems Orwell had picked up a copy of James's *World Revolution*, and on 8 July 1937 had made inquiries as to how many copies it had sold, noting that 'the people who read that book would be the kind likely to read a book on Spain written from the non-Communist standpoint'.<sup>68</sup> According to Cripps, Orwell, presumably while working on what would become his classic *Homage to Catalonia* in the summer of 1937, visited James himself and was a 'serious enquirer' into Trotskyism. 'Since he was so vehemently against Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union, he read and approved the literature we had.'<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in his review of *Red*

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<sup>66</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Introduction', in Mary Low and Juan Breá, *Red Spanish Notebook; The First Six Months of the Revolution and the Civil War* (London, 1937), pp. v-vii. See Appendix G.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, vol. 11 (London, 1998), p. 87.

<sup>68</sup> Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, vol. 11, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> Cripps, *C.L.R. James*, p. 21.

*Spanish Notebook* Orwell had noted that ‘Mr. C.L.R. James, author of that very able book *World Revolution*, contributes an introduction’.<sup>70</sup>

More circumstantial evidence for Orwell meeting James in the summer of 1937 comes from *Fight*, which openly discussed and condemned the Stalinist repression of organisations such as the P.O.U.M. which had been experienced by a number of British I.L.P. volunteers, including of course Orwell himself. In June 1937, Bob Smillie, a young volunteer for the I.L.P. military contingent died in detention by the Spanish Republican Government in very suspicious circumstances.<sup>71</sup> While Smillie’s detention was reported in *Fight*, the I.L.P. leadership, including Fenner Brockway, however refused to make this an public issue back in Britain in order to preserve ‘anti-fascist unity’ with the C.P.G.B.<sup>72</sup> As a writer in *Fight*, probably James, wrote in November 1937, ‘the I.L.P. contingent can tell a tale. It is not told’:

What are the facts about young Smillie [sic]? Does Brockway tell them? Not he. He sits cowering in the New Leader Offices, frightened at the horrible prospect of isolation which faces him if he comes out and denounces in unmistakeable terms the criminal treachery which is being perpetrated in Spain.<sup>73</sup>

However, as 1937 progressed, it was increasingly clear to revolutionary Marxists like James that the P.O.U.M. was now incapable of leading the social revolution to victory in Spain. While it might appear capable of ‘clearly and concretely’ pointing the way forward for the Spanish Revolution on paper, in practice the P.O.U.M. continued in many respects to act like a reformist organisation. Whereas before its leaders made the mistake of joining the Catalonia ‘Popular Front’

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<sup>70</sup> Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, vol. 11, p. 87. The possible influence of James on Orwell is all but neglected in the vast literature on Orwell, though for more on Orwell and ‘literary Trotskyism’, see John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics* (London, 1999).

<sup>71</sup> For more on Smillie, see Tom Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain; War, Loss and Memory* (Brighton, 2007), pp. 98-121. See also Tom Buchanan, ‘The Death of Bob Smillie, the Spanish Civil War, and the Eclipse of the Independent Labour Party’, *The Historical Journal*, 40/2, (1997) and John Newsinger, ‘The Death of Bob Smillie’, *The Historical Journal*, 41/2, (1998).

<sup>72</sup> ‘The Barcelona Rising’, *Fight*, 1/7, (June, 1937).

<sup>73</sup> ‘The Struggle for the Fourth International’, *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937).

government, now James's Marxist Group accused the P.O.U.M. of not subsequently redeeming themselves by attempting to lead an insurrection during the May uprising in Barcelona in 1937, or at the very least not having better prepared for the state repression that now engulfed the organisation. In June 1937, the P.O.U.M. was declared an illegal organisation and its leader Nin arrested as a 'counter-revolutionary' by the Spanish Republican government - later to be kidnapped and executed by Soviet agents. While the Marxist Group wrote letters in protest to the British press and Spanish Embassy, *Fight* was merciless in its criticism of the P.O.U.M. leadership, for failing to have acted independently of those to the right of it at crucial moments. 'Emotionalism, heroism, good intentions, etc., play a big part in revolutionary struggles, but these qualities alone never did, and never shall, guarantee the success of the struggle.'<sup>74</sup>

Instead of being prepared and organised to go underground, many of its leaders were captured by the Government without the slightest difficulty. Many have shed their blood and fought bravely. But when will these sentimentalists learn that a revolution is not a football match, where you greet the vanquished with "Well played, Sir," and everyone goes home happy? The masses in a revolution have always shed their blood without stint and displayed conspicuous bravery. What in history has surpassed the defence of Madrid and the self-sacrifice of the Asturian miners? And yet how very, very far are the Spanish workers today from the socialist revolution! We know the cursed treachery of the Stalinists, we know how hard they have made the task, *but we have to accept that.*<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> 'POUM, the I.L.P. & Spain', *Fight*, 1/8, (July, 1937). For discussion of the May Days, see Durgan, 'Marxism, War and Revolution', pp. 50-54. In August 1937, *Fight* translated from the French and reprinted a statement of the Spanish Trotskyists, 'the Bolshevik-Leninists of Spain', that had been put out in May 1937. 'The Bolshevik-Leninists of Spain demand your aid in the struggle for the social revolution', *Fight*, 1/9, (August, 1937). *Fight* reprinted another leaflet from the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists next month. 'News from Spain: The Programme of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists', *Fight*, 1/10, (September, 1937).

<sup>75</sup> *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937). For a succinct devastating attack on Stalinist policy in Spain by James under the pseudonym 'C.L.Rudder', see 'The Leninist Policy for Spain', *Fight*, 1/5, (April, 1937). James would never forget the total betrayal of Spanish revolutionary struggle by the Stalinist leadership of the Communist International in the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, his view in this passage that revolutionary Marxists 'have to accept' the inevitability of Stalinist betrayal rather than attempting to show the Communists 'the error of their ways' would later be developed by James into a full blown theory. See C.L.R. James, F. Forest and Ria Stone, *The Invading Socialist Society* (Detroit, 1972), and specifically James, *Notes on Dialectics*, p. 215.

James spent the winter of 1937 down in Brighton in order to finish writing up his history of the Haitian Revolution, but in his 1938 preface to *The Black Jacobins* he testified to still feeling ‘the fever and the fret’ of the Spanish Revolution. ‘It was in the stillness of a seaside suburb that could be heard most clearly and insistently the booming of Franco’s heavy artillery, the rattle of Stalin’s firing squads and the fierce shrill turmoil of the revolutionary movement striving for clarity and influence.’<sup>76</sup> The Spanish Revolution together with the wave of mass strikes in France in June 1936 are of central importance in demonstrating Stuart Hall’s point that for James, though ‘his intellectual formation is deeply European’, Europe also fundamentally represented ‘the advanced location of modernity’. As Hall remarked, during the 1930s ‘who could not be interested in Europe, because it was in Europe that history was breaking?’<sup>77</sup>

### **Race, Empire and the Popular Front**

When the ‘Nationalist’ rebels under General Franco launched their military uprising on 17-18 July 1936, it began in Spanish North Africa. Franco commanded the Army of Africa, the colonial army stationed in North Africa made up of some 45,000 men and including Moroccan troops, the Foreign Legion and regular Spanish troops. The Army of Africa were the only combat ready troops of the Spanish army, and from 25-27 July 1936 Hitler and Mussolini decided to send aircraft to help transport them across the Straits of Gibraltar in what Durgan notes was ‘the first great military airlift in history’. The rebels would be helped by far more foreign aid than the Republicans, including not just arms, ammunition and other material but also military training and advice from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while they also had more trained professional officers, for three quarters of the 9,000 serving officers of the Spanish army fought for Franco. Yet recent research suggests that, as Durgan notes, ‘the Army of Africa was so important in the first months of the war that the Nationalists would probably have been defeated without its participation’. The Army

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<sup>76</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>77</sup> Hall, ‘Breaking Bread with History’, p. 24.

of Africa 'were used with devastating effect to spearhead the rebels' drive in the south and west of the peninsula' in a 'colonial style war' that relied on terror and small but highly trained units. In all, 'nearly 80,000 Moroccan troops fought in the war, playing a central role as the Nationalists' shock troops' all over Spain.<sup>78</sup>

What was the response of the Spanish Republican 'Popular Front' government to General Franco's great military mobilisation of Moroccan troops in North Africa? One principled answer might have been to follow the strategy developed during the first four congresses of the Communist International, which had repeatedly warned precisely against the possibility of colonial troops being used by the old ruling classes to crush workers' revolution in Europe.<sup>79</sup> This was the strategy urged by, among others, the tiny international Trotskyist movement and the 'First International Conference for the Fourth International' held in late July 1936 issued an appeal 'To the Workers of Spain and the Workers of the Entire World' which stated 'A people which oppresses another cannot emancipate itself. Free the Moroccan people! You will make of them a formidable ally ...' The conference also issued a call 'To the Enslaved People of Morocco' which noted that 'if the government of the People's Front in Spain had taken immediate measures to help the Moroccan peoples to free themselves, fascism would never have had a base from which to attack the Spanish workers and peasants'.<sup>80</sup>

After the election of the Popular Front coalition, Moroccan nationalists had made desperate pleas for the new government to break with traditional colonial policy

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<sup>78</sup> Durgan, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 32-33, 37-38. One key ally of Franco, General Mola, had made his reputation commanding the Moorish Regulares, and his instruction on the uprising was 'He who is not with us is against us'. Quoted in Richard Seymour, *The Liberal Defence of Murder* (London, 2008), p. 61. The outstanding single volume work on Spanish colonialism in Morocco and subsequent Moroccan troop recruitment for the Spanish Civil War is by Sebastian Balfour. See Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace; Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>79</sup> As Trotsky noted in 1923, 'There is no doubt whatever that the use of coloured troops for imperialist war ... is a well thought out and carefully executed attempt of European capitalism ... to raise armed forces outside of Europe, so that capitalism may have mobilized, armed and disciplined African or Asian troops at its disposal, against the revolutionary masses of Europe. In this way, the question of the use of colonial reserves for imperialist armies is closely related to the question of the European revolution, that is, to the fate of the European working class.' Leon Trotsky, 'A Letter to Comrade [Claude] McKay [1923]', in Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1972), pp. 354-56.

<sup>80</sup> Reisner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International*, pp. 143-45, 148-50. The declaration stressed that as in Ethiopia, 'What was needed was for the oppressed peoples of Africa to rise and fling the imperialist bandits into the sea; what was needed was for the oppressed peoples to consummate a union with the working class of Europe and the other continents.' See also Paul Trehwela, 'George Padmore', *Searchlight South Africa*, 1/1, (September, 1988), p. 46.

and grant them independence.<sup>81</sup> When both the P.O.U.M. and the anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation, the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo* (C.N.T.) made similar demands so as to try and trigger a revolt in Franco's rear, the Republican government under Largo Caballero once again rejected the idea so as not to upset British and French colonial interests in the region.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, as Robin D.G. Kelley notes, 'the Caballero government went so far as to offer territorial concessions to France and Britain in exchange for Western support'.<sup>83</sup>

In general, imperial 'respectability' and 'orthodoxy' in general was the order of the day, in order that the Republican government could try and maintain middle-class support at home and win support from the democracies of Britain and France abroad.<sup>84</sup> As James had put it bluntly in *Fight* in October 1936, 'had the Spanish Popular Front not been a capitalist Government it would have helped the Moors of Spanish Morocco to achieve independence and found allies instead of enemies'.<sup>85</sup> Yet, having rejected the idea that Africans from Morocco could be part of a revolutionary solution to winning the war against Franco, 'General Franco's Moors' inevitably instead became part of the problem for the Popular Front governments of

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<sup>81</sup> Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, p. 265. See also Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* (New York, 1976), p. 110.

<sup>82</sup> Durgan, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 33. For the worries of the British and French about revolutionary unrest in Morocco, see Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (London, 1972), pp. 266-67.

<sup>83</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, "'This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do'", in Danny Duncan Collum (ed.), *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (New York, 1992), p. 33. For more on the Popular Front government's proposed scheme in early 1937 to hand Spanish Morocco over to Britain and France at some point in the future in return for support against Franco, and the British government's flat rejection of that offer, see Maria Rosa de Madariaga, 'The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War: A Reconsideration', *European History Quarterly*, 22, (1992), pp. 90-91.

<sup>84</sup> Durgan, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 34-37. As an advisor to the Popular Front government, Senor Vicens, put it in an interview with *Opportunity* in March 1938, 'The Republicans would have granted autonomy to Morocco readily, long ago, except that France would not permit it. France was fearful of the effect on her adjoining African colonies ... and we were bound to France by a spirit of co-operation'. Quoted in George Padmore, 'Why Moors Help Franco', *New Leader*, 20 May 1938. It would have also broken the terms of the Franco-Spanish treaty of 1912 by which France had agreed to provide part of her Protectorate in Morocco to Spain on condition that Spain would never abandon it or alienate it to any other power without her consent. If the Spanish government had done this, France may have tried to take over the area formerly known as Spanish Morocco for itself, possibly then provoking a confrontation with Britain. See Madariaga, 'The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War', p. 90.

<sup>85</sup> 'Editorial', *Fight*, 1/1, (October, 1936).

France and Spain and their supporters, including the Communists.<sup>86</sup> All the old racial prejudices against Muslims and Africans slowly came once again to the fore.<sup>87</sup> When racist ‘explanations’ of why many Moroccans had sided with Franco were made, they were often not challenged and even accepted by some Communist Parties, including the C.P.G.B.<sup>88</sup> As Tom Buchanan has noted, in the opening phases of the Spanish Civil War, the British left ‘ruthlessly exploited the racial scare associated with General Franco’s use of Moorish soldiers to spearhead his invading army’.<sup>89</sup> In London, George Padmore in his powerful 1937 work *Africa and World Peace* tore into what he called

... the chauvinist attitude which reflects itself in the columns of even some of the so-called revolutionary papers in Britain today, which would disgrace the pages of even the most reactionary journals. Surely we shall not achieve fraternity and international solidarity between the workers of the oppressing nations with the toiling masses of the oppressed nations by calling the latter “black riff-raff”, “scum of the earth” and “mercenaries”, as supporters of the Communist Party now dubbed Franco’s Moors.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> For a useful discussion of this, see Seymour, *The Liberal Defence of Murder*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>87</sup> As Kelley notes, ‘Spanish Loyalists felt utter hatred for the Moroccans fighting on Franco’s side - a hatred whose roots go back at least a millennium ... Moreover, Spanish society had been shaped immeasurably by the transatlantic slave trade, the exploitation of black labour on plantations in the so-called New World, colonialism in Africa, and the recent Rif wars. Race, as well as a thousand years of history, undeniably complicated the way in which Republican Spain viewed Franco’s Army of Africa.’ Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia, But It’ll Do’”, pp. 32-33. There were exceptions to this trend. Kelley notes ‘the Communist Party of Spain, while supporting this policy, tried to improve relations by helping to bring about the Hispano-Moroccan Anti-Fascist Association ... to win North African support for the Republic and to educate Spaniards about racism and colonial oppression, but failed miserably to win large numbers of Moroccans to the Republican side.’

<sup>88</sup> As Brian Pearce once noted, ‘*Challenge*, the organ of the Young Communist League, used to refer to Franco’s soldiers from Morocco as “black troops” and publish “anti-wog” type cartoons about them.’ *The Newsletter*, 15 March 1958. For one such ‘anti-wog’ cartoon from this period, see *Challenge*, 17 June 1937. See also Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 92-93, 241, 334.

<sup>89</sup> Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Padmore, *Africa and World Peace*, p. 267. See also Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, pp. 10-13. The title alone of one column by one leading member of the C.P.G.B., Peter Kerrigan, from the *Daily Worker* of the period is illuminating. See ‘How Britons Beat Moors’, *Daily Worker*, 18 January 1937. The Communist T.A. Jackson, in his fascinating and inspiring 1953 autobiography, clearly still harboured bitterness against the Moroccans who fought for Franco describing them as ‘brutal murdering savages’. See T.A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet: Some Memories of Socialist Agitation and Propaganda* (London, 1953), p. 135.

As a result, though many Pan-Africanists in Britain had been thrilled by the news of the struggle against fascism in Spain, the likes of James Padmore and Nancy Cunard had to spend time explaining the vexing issue of General Franco's Moroccan troops to the British Left.<sup>91</sup> Such reports were vital as the looming victory of General Franco in the Spanish Civil War was not just to be a devastating blow to all those who had hoped that the growing spread of fascism in Europe would at last be resisted.<sup>92</sup> That Franco had won with the assistance of Moroccan troops only served to reinforce the still dominant idea on the European left that Africans among all colonised people were somehow particularly 'backward' and 'primitive'.

In mid-July 1938, Nehru raised the case of 'the Moors in Spanish Morocco' and how 'the forces of reaction misled them and exploited them to their own advantage' at the 'London Conference on Peace and Empire', an event organised by the India League in conjunction with the London Federation of Peace Councils. 'The subject peoples are no longer docile and capable of being used to suit the purposes of imperial powers', Nehru declared to his thousand-strong audience in the Albert Hall.<sup>93</sup> Yet the full profundity of such a lesson was clearly lost on most of those in attendance. Most of the British Left at this time would have tended to agree with the distinction articulated by the British Labour politician and prominent advocate of the Popular Front Sir Stafford Cripps at the 'Peace and Empire' conference, who

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<sup>91</sup> Cunard herself had visited revolutionary Spain in 1936. See for example, Nancy Cunard, "Only a Black", *African Sentinel*, 1/2, (November-December, 1937), and Padmore, 'Why Moors Help Franco'. For more on the experience of Moroccans on the front line, see Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, pp. 278-79. Padmore brought up the issue of Spanish Morocco in his contribution to 'Author's Take Sides on the Spanish War': 'The sympathy of African and other colonial peoples naturally goes out to the toiling masses of Spain in their heroic struggle against Fascist-barbarism, for they have not forgotten Abyssinia. And precisely because of this, it is so regrettable that democratic Spain, by failing to make an anti-imperialist gesture to the Moors, played into the hands of Franco. This should be a reminder to the European workers that "No people who oppress another people can themselves be free."' See Cunard (ed.), *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*.

<sup>92</sup> To his credit, Orwell did explain the issue of 'Franco's Moors' in *Homage to Catalonia*, noting 'the first necessity, to convince the Moors of the Government's good faith, would have been to proclaim Morocco liberated', but instead 'the best strategic opportunity of the war was flung away in the vain hope of placating French and British capitalism.' Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, pp. 212-13. See also Orwell's famous essays 'Marrakesh', and 'Looking back on the Spanish War'.

<sup>93</sup> Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 197, 252. The Peace and Empire Conference was chaired by Viscount Robert Cecil. See also Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*, p. 143.

conceded that while India was strong enough to have freedom now, Africa for some time would have to be governed by 'trusteeship' under some sort of international mandate. Cripps was accordingly heckled from the conference floor by members of the I.A.S.B. and then savaged in the journal *International African Opinion* by James.

It is clear that Sir Stafford Cripps has the typical vice of many European Socialists, even revolutionaries. He conceives Africans as essentially passive recipients of freedom given to them by Europeans. Possibly Sir Stafford thinks that the British working class will gain freedom by the ballot-box and the speeches of Major Attlee and himself. Thinking Africans know that ultimately they will win theirs, arms in hand, or forever remain slaves. The Moors are fighting with Franco for their further enslavement. If the Spanish Loyalist Government had offered them their independence, they would have fought with it. But on one side or the other Africans will have to fight. They will organise themselves, create armies, develop leaders. We have an historic parallel. The half-brutish and degraded slaves in San Domingo in 1791 joined the French Revolution. In six years illiterate slaves were Generals of division and able administrators ... The African slaves will do the same and more at the prospect of a new existence. Without them and the other colonial masses, the British worker can win at most only temporary success. Is it to leaders and people like these who have conquered their liberty in blood and sacrifice that Sir Stafford will offer his "trusteeship"?

On the question of imperialism, Cripps's speech had revealed that it was actually the European working class movement that was 'backward'.

Sir Stafford is also a victim of one of the crudest of bourgeois sophistries ... any sort of "trusteeship" will be needed only by exploitation. The European movement is indeed backward when Sir Stafford can make these proposals without a protest being made ... the surest way to lay up infinite trouble, not only for Africans but for Europeans, is to encourage reactionary ideas like trusteeship for backward peoples. The bureaucratic mentality which displays itself so blatantly in regard to people abroad can be trusted to show itself at home. It must be fought by Africans and European workers alike in their common interests.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Sir Stafford Cripps and "Trusteeship"', *International African Opinion*, 1/3, (September 1938), Appendix I. This article was by-lined 'The Executive Committee' of the I.A.S.B., but since James was the Executive Director of the Editorial Board of *International African Opinion*, and given its content and style, it seems almost certain it was written by James. In terms of the 'backwardness' of the European movement, James, in *The Black Jacobins*, explained it as in part the

Soon after leaving Britain, in an article James wrote in 1939 for the American Trotskyist press, he had reflected of the English Left that while ‘personal relationships between white and coloured revolutionaries are exceptionally good’, the ‘English revolutionary movement is eaten to the marrow with a most dangerous anti-Negro chauvinism’, seeing Africans as ‘the revolutionary white man’s burden’.<sup>95</sup> It was in order to counter such ideas on the British Left that in part explain James’s motivation for concluding his powerful demonstration of the capacities for African self-emancipation in *The Black Jacobins* with his prediction of the coming ‘African Revolution’ rather than say, with the Caribbean labour rebellions which might have been a more obvious reference point after narrating the story of the Haitian Revolution.

If, as James noted in 1938, ‘as Franco’s Moors have once more proved, the revolution in Europe will neglect coloured workers at its peril’, the failure of the French Popular Front government to break with the historic brutality and hypocrisy of past colonial policy also proved an instructive experience.<sup>96</sup> Another keynote speaker at the 1938 ‘Peace and Empire’ conference in London had been Émile Faure of Senegal, President of the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre (L.D.R.N.) and secretary of the Reassemblément Coloniale, an organisation uniting the nationalist movements of Algeria, Tunisia, French West Africa, Madagascar, Pondicherry and Indochina. Lelia Seleau reported his speech for *International African Opinion*:

France, he said, had succeeded in making the whole world believe that she was liberally-minded in matters of colonisation. By an appearance of goodwill towards colonials in Europe, she managed to support her reputation for being without racial hatred in her colonial policy. And examination of the facts would immediately explode this farcical myth.

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result of the fact that ‘the vast majority of Europeans today’ have ‘too many grievances of their own to be concerned by the sufferings of Africans’. James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 47.

<sup>95</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘The Negro Question’, *Socialist Appeal*, 25 August 1939, quoted in James D. Young, *Socialism and the English Working Class* (London, 1989), p. 172.

<sup>96</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 13. In May 1937, *Fight* tore into French colonial policy. ‘In Africa, the troops of the Popular Front are fighting the people. 25 have been killed since February.’ *Fight*, 1.6. (May, 1937).

Faure's detailed account demonstrated how 'never, since the Revolution in 1789 has France given the vote to the colonial populations' as a whole, while the French Popular Front government had re-established forced labour in West Africa, imprisoned journalists in Indochina, and arrested, deported and imprisoned a number of nationalist leaders in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Seleau notes Faure's address 'came as a bombshell to those delegates who had made a vehement demonstration of their loyalty to the Popular Front'.<sup>97</sup>

The relationship between James and Francophone black Pan-Africanists such as Faure during the 1930s seems to have been slight. According to Makonnen, James attended a meeting of the Reassemblément Coloniale held at the agricultural school in Paris's Latin Quarter in 1938 'where a number of British blacks met their French colleagues'.<sup>98</sup> Here James - like Makonnen - seems to have made contact with Aimé Césaire, Léon-Gontran Damas, Lamine Guèye and Félix Houphouët-Boigny, among others.<sup>99</sup> James famously ended *The Black Jacobins* with an implicit acknowledgement of the likes Césaire and Damas together with Léopold Senghor, but refused to imagine that such people, 'the isolated blacks' at French institutions of higher education like the Sorbonne, these 'dabblers in *surréalisme*', might ever lead any sort of revolution against French colonial rule. Rather, 'from the people heaving in action will come the leaders' James insisted.<sup>100</sup> In 1975, when asked about Francophone Pan-Africanists of the 1930s by Alan J. MacKenzie, James picked out one relationship in particular.

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<sup>97</sup> Lelia Seleau, 'The French Colonies under the Popular Front', *International African Opinion*, 1/2, (August, 1938). See also Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* pp. 333-34, Reginald Reynolds, 'Under Which King Bezonian?' *Controversy*, 24, (September, 1938), Seymour, *The Liberal Defence of Murder*, pp. 58-60, and Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (eds.), *French Colonial Empire and the Popular Front: Hope and Disillusion* (London, 1999), pp. 20, 99-102, 163-66.

<sup>98</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>99</sup> MacKenzie, 'British Marxists and the Empire', p. 235, Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, pp. 156, 175-76, Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, pp. 285-86.

<sup>100</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 304. Franklin Rosemont suggested that James's 'aspersion was directed not against surrealism, but against dabblers - an attitude with which the surrealists would heartily concur'. Rosemont, 'Pioneers of West Indian Surrealism'. In late 1938, Trotsky allied with French surrealist André Breton and Diego Rivera to write a *Manifesto* for the freedom of art in late 1938, calling for an International Federation of Revolutionary Writers and Artists to resist totalitarian encroachments on literature and the arts. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p. 431.

I knew one man who was very friendly with Padmore - that was [Tiemoko] Garan Kouyaté. When I went to Paris, Padmore insisted I see him. I discussed the Trotskyist movement with him and he commented that he could agree with me about everything except that one thing would be needed. I asked what that was. "That Trotsky was a black man, that's all." Apart from Kouyaté I had few other contacts and seldom attended any of the nationalist conferences in Paris ... I did not do much with the black movement there.<sup>101</sup>

An ex-Communist born in the French Sudan, Kouyaté's political evolution had some parallels with Padmore (who became a close friend and political ally after their first meeting in 1929). After being expelled from the Communist International at a similar time as Padmore for not dissimilar reasons, the talented Kouyaté combined a belief in independent radical Pan-African organisation with a strategic pragmatism, tactical flexibility and organisational flair that meant he cut a distinctive figure among black radicals in Paris during the 1930s.<sup>102</sup> It seems most likely that James and Kouyaté did not meet until 1938 at the aforementioned conference of Reassemblément Coloniale, where Makonnen remembers the latter was 'conspicuous'.<sup>103</sup> If so, then James's memory of Kouyaté's comments on Trotskyism (the necessity for Trotsky himself to be 'a black man') suggest something of how Mussolini's war and the French Popular Front government's colonial policy must have led to a profound disillusion in what Wilder has called 'the interwar black public sphere' with respect to the 'republican public sphere' by the late 1930s.<sup>104</sup>

Though in *A History of Negro Revolt* James denounced French colonialism in Africa, the work shows his admiration for 'Black Paris' had clearly continued

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<sup>101</sup> M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, pp. 269-70.

<sup>102</sup> On Kouyaté, see Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, chapter 5, and Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, pp. 181-83, 193-95.

<sup>103</sup> Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, pp. 156, 175-76.

<sup>104</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, pp. 194-95. By the outbreak of the Second World War, Kouyaté was to rally around the French imperial nation state in the face of fascism, urging black colonial subjects to fight for France, writing on 21 October 1939: 'Brothers and sisters of French West Africa, you who desire the well-being, the liberty and the fraternity of all peoples under peace, we must tighten our ranks around France and always remain with France and be at her service ...' He seems to have been executed by the Nazis during the occupation of Paris. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, p. 37.

throughout the 1930s.<sup>105</sup> As well as the comparative lack of racial prejudice, ‘a valuable feature of French civilization’ which ‘disposes of many illusions, carefully cultivated in America and Britain, about Negro incapacity and racial incompatibility’, James also outlined the French colonial policy of assimilation, which seemed to contrast positively with the British experience, at least for educated black colonial subjects. ‘In a French colony, a Negro who by education or military service becomes a French citizen, is given all privileges, and is governed by the laws which apply to white men. He can become a high official in the government service, or a general in the French army.’ However, James did not romanticise assimilation, nor ‘French civilisation’ in Africa, as ‘imperialism remains imperialism’.<sup>106</sup> And as James noted in *The Black Jacobins*, it is ‘easier to find decency, gratitude, justice, and humanity in a cage of starving tigers than in the councils of imperialism, whether in the cabinets of Pitt and Bonaparte, of Baldwin, Laval or Blum’.<sup>107</sup>

In late August 1938, with the cricket season all but over, James, together with a Scottish comrade, Willie Tait, visited Paris one last time, for preliminary discussions for the founding conference of the Fourth International, held on 3 September 1938.<sup>108</sup> James subsequently spent several weeks in Paris, translating Souvarine’s *Staline*, penning an article on French politics for the British Trotskyist press, and playing host to visitors from England including Harry Spencer and Eric Williams. While finishing off the translation, James spent time in a country hotel in Normandy, relaxing, it seems, in the company of a young student.

I knew a girl in Rouen who came over every morning at 9,  
helped me in the translation. We had lunch and dinner and walked

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<sup>105</sup> Of course James always remained highly critical of French colonial policy. See for example his 1963 comments on the French West Indies in James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 319.

<sup>106</sup> ‘During the last twenty years the population of French Congo has declined by more than six millions, and the French have as black a record in Africa as any other imperialist nation ... French and Belgians have an evil reputation in the Congo for cold-blooded cruelty.’ James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>107</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 229.

<sup>108</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *War and the International*, pp. 23-24. For James this was a chance to meet old friends like Leon Lesoil, as well as other leading lights such as James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman from the United States, Pierre Naville and Alfred Rosmer from France and Michael Pablo from Greece.

in the woods. I took her to the bus at 9, and went back and read Maupassant until I fell asleep.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> See Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive*, p. 53, C.L.R. James, 'French 40 Hour Week Attacked', *Workers' Fight*, (October, 1938), Grimshaw (ed.), *Special Delivery*, pp. 142-43, and C.L.R. James, 'Eric Williams', unpublished manuscript, p. 5. In a 1944 letter to Constance Webb, James relayed 'how I loved Paris - of having dinner with a friend in a restaurant on the left bank from which we could see Notre Dame - the wonderful food, the quiet - the overshadowing cathedral.' While James regarded Versailles as 'the most wonderful place in the world I think', he wrote 'I hope to God they do not destroy Paris - Bastille Square, the Tuileries, the Louvre, the Luxembourg, Champs Elysees, the Arc de Triomphe, Montmartre, Place Blanche, Place de l'Opera, the sense of history in every inch, the wonderful food, the social grace of the French people, their pride in their famous capital, bookshops (they say more in Paris than in the whole of England), the open-book shops on the Seine - a great capital throbbing above'.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **‘The Humbler Type of Cricket Scribe’: C.L.R. James on Sport, Culture and Society**

For five of the seven summers C.L.R. James spent in Britain during the 1930s, he worked as a cricket reporter, indeed possibly the first black professional sports reporter in British history. Yet aside from one superb recent article by Andrew Smith, his early cricket writing has oddly failed to attract much scholarly attention, despite James’s reputation as one of the outstanding theorists of the game.<sup>1</sup> John Arlott thought James’s *Beyond a Boundary* ‘arguably the best book ever written about cricket ... it is not only a warm and human book, but the most profound and searching discussion ever propounded on the game, if only for the reason that the writer was the most erudite, intellectual and also humanly perceptive person who ever devoted himself to its study’.<sup>2</sup> As Stefan Collini noted, *Beyond a Boundary* was a ‘minor classic’.

That unclassifiable work - part autobiography, part cricket history, part cultural meditation, part nationalist polemic - was remarkable for its strong sense of form, despite the apparent heterogeneity of its subject-matter. A discussion of the ethical teaching of Dr Arnold, the Victorian headmaster, seemed to lead ineluctably into an argument for making Frank Worrell the first black man to captain the West Indian cricket team. It was a book by someone who was passionate about cricket, but who never lost sight of the truth that there were far more important things to be passionate about.<sup>3</sup>

In 1986, a dozen of some of James’s finest articles for first the *Manchester Guardian* (1933-35), working with Neville Cardus, and then the *Glasgow Herald* (1937-38) were republished as part of a wider collection of his writing on his beloved

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Smith, ‘“A Conception of the Beautiful”: C.L.R. James’ *Glasgow Herald* Cricket Articles, 1937-1938’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23/1, (2006).

<sup>2</sup> John Arlott, ‘C.L.R. James; Behind the Marxist Crease’, *Guardian*, 1 June 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Collini, ‘Radical on the boundary’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 September 1987.

game, entitled simply *Cricket*.<sup>4</sup> However, for Collini, though the author of *Beyond a Boundary* had ‘certainly earned his right’ to such a volume, republishing James’s early journalism did ‘little justice to the author of that deeply pondered, carefully crafted work’.

In general, if such ephemera are to bear reprinting so long after the events they describe, the author must either be a distinguished stylist in his own right or else rise to a level of analysis that transcends the local detail. James’s early *Guardian* pieces meet neither of these criteria. Perhaps he consciously disciplined himself to write in a manner he thought appropriate to the stiffer social world of English cricket, perhaps his role as Cardus’s understrapper did not permit much adventurousness, either practically or psychologically. Certainly, some of the writing has a slightly dated, *Boy’s Own* ring to it now: reporting a run-out, for example, he wrote “Leyland could not get back in time and had to go: it was a grave loss to the English eleven”.<sup>5</sup>

Yet it is possible that the dozen selected essays in *Cricket* do not do James’s early cricket journalism full justice. James after all wrote nearly 140 brief reports for the *Manchester Guardian* over three seasons, and fifty lengthier columns for the *Glasgow Herald* over two seasons. Though James modestly described himself in this period as ‘the humbler type of cricket scribe’, contemporaries certainly commended his pieces highly enough. Fredric Warburg, for example, found them ‘splendid’.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will draw from across almost the full range of James’s cricket journalism during the 1930s for the first time in order to affirm the importance of this relatively neglected sphere of his existence to our understanding of his work in this period.<sup>7</sup> The fact that so much of this writing remains to be republished necessitates and warrants at times lengthy quotation from James, but, as always, his own words repay re-reading. In this process of going ‘beyond *Beyond a Boundary*’ we will also reinforce

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<sup>4</sup> See James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, pp. 4-68. The collection *Cricket* has since been republished. See C.L.R. James, *A Majestic Innings; Writings on Cricket* (London, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Collini, ‘Radical on the boundary.’ The quote about Maurice Leyland was from the *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1934, reprinted in James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 27 April 1938. Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> This chapter will mainly use articles from the *Glasgow Herald*, but there are still many of James’s articles from the *Manchester Guardian* that remain unexcavated by scholars.

the findings of Andrew Smith which demonstrate the extent to which James's later profoundly insightful and influential ideas on the aesthetics of cricket were already being formed and formulated in this early period. As Smith notes, 'the basis of *Beyond a Boundary* had been worked out some quarter of a century before the book was published'.<sup>8</sup>

The origins of *Beyond a Boundary* of course lie back in James's experiences of watching and then reporting cricket matches part-time while in colonial Trinidad.

I had always seen cricket in a manner beyond the ordinary. Chiefly in the writings of C.B. Fry, who to this day I know as one of the finest of writers - non-intellectual writers of the twentieth century. He analysed cricket with an insight and a severity and yet with a breadth of view that you don't find normally. I had been trained on him. I had been brought up on his books.<sup>9</sup>

In *Beyond a Boundary*, James recalled his time as a cricket reporter during the 1930s as 'happy days', noting that 'if I were writing the usual type of cricket reminiscences I would have plenty to say'.<sup>10</sup> He covered all levels of games, from following Lancashire around the country doing battle over the course of three days against other county sides, to national celebration matches like 'Gentlemen' vs. 'Players', 'England' vs. 'the Rest' and 'North' vs. 'South' to the thrilling heights of the 1938 Test series between England and Australia. Relentless practice allowed James to hone his technique, and he recalled that he was soon in 'good form'. 'When I went round English cricket grounds reporting the matches of the Lancashire team, or when I watched all the Test matches through the season of 1938, these were times when I could sense the course of an over from the way the batsman stood waiting between balls.'<sup>11</sup> As James wrote in 1937, 'you can usually tell a great batsman even

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Smith, 'Beyond a Boundary' (of a 'Field of Cultural Production'); Reading C.L.R. James with Bourdieu', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23/4, (2006), p. 95. This is of course not to say that *Beyond a Boundary* was not profoundly shaped by James's sojourn in America, as Smith himself demonstrates. On this last point, see also Schwarz, 'C.L.R. James's *American Civilization*'.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James', p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 149. In May 1938 James would move from central London to 59 Boundary Road in North West London, close to Lords, dubbed 'the Mecca of cricket' by Cardus. TNA: KV/2/1824/3-4a. Neville Cardus, *English cricket* (London, 1945), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 44.

when he makes only ten runs, though few of us can reach that height of perspicacity which enabled the late Sydney Parson, after watching Victor Trumper make 1 and 0 against Essex in 1899, declare that he was the finest batsman which had ever come from Australia'.<sup>12</sup>

From about the 1880s, as Matthew Engel notes, 'Lancashire cricket began to occupy, if not quite a central position, then at least an honoured corner of the pages of *The [Manchester] Guardian*'. A tradition was born, 'and the great certainties of late Victorian and Edwardian England ran through *The [Manchester] Guardian's* cricket reports, which were often splendidly Lancashire chauvinist'.

If there was a golden age as far as the *M.G.* was concerned, it began after the war when a young man who had been serving as a reporter, drama critic and [C.P.] Scott's personal assistant fell ill with a pulmonary condition and, by way of convalescence, went at the news editor's suggestion for a few days in the sun at Old Trafford. And Neville Cardus, "Cricketer" as he was bylined after 1920, began to give the discerning readers of Manchester the best and most enjoyable cricket reports the world has ever seen ... The "Cricketer" era exactly spanned the inter-war period; in 1940, feeling redundant in Manchester shorn by war of both good cricket and good concerts, Cardus sailed to Australia and did a stint as music critic of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He wrote about cricket on and off for *The Guardian* until his death in 1975, aged eighty-five.<sup>13</sup>

As Ramachandra Guha has noted, 'modern cricket writing was founded, more or less, by Neville Cardus ... in his writing, the portrayal of character and the evocation of context take precedence over the analysis of technique'. Guha argues that many of the best English cricket writers who followed 'were all writers first and cricket writers second. It was Cardus who showed them that cricket could be a vehicle for literature. Without him, they might instead have made a career writing poetry or plays.'

Though Guha doesn't explicitly suggest the same was true of James, who had been a sports journalist in Trinidad and had grown up on the Victorian tradition of cricket literature epitomised by Ranjitsinhji's *The Jubilee Book of Cricket*, he does

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<sup>12</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 19 May 1937.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Engel (ed.), *The Guardian Book of Cricket: An anthology of the best from a hundred years of cricket reporting* (London, 1986), pp. 11, 13.

rightly note that Cardus was ‘read, but not copied or avoided, by the Trinidadian historian and revolutionary’.<sup>14</sup> As James later wrote of Cardus, ‘his vivid darting style’ ensured that ‘the *Manchester Guardian* held a unique position in the journalism of cricket’.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the very tradition of ‘cricket literature’ that James consciously embraced complicates his own later suggestion that in Britain, ‘fiction-writing drained out of me and was replaced by politics’.<sup>16</sup>

If during the 1930s James tended to be a cricket reporter somewhat in the shadow of Cardus during the ‘golden age’ of the *Manchester Guardian*, this chapter will argue that his writing offers us a different and quite unique take on the game during this critically important decade. As Mike Cronin and Richard Holt note of the inter-war period,

... cricket became entrenched as one of the cornerstones of Englishness and the accompanying centrality of the Empire within such a vision. Cricket, the test matches that were played between England and her colonial nations, and the values of fair play that were enshrined in the game, all combined to make the sport a powerful symbol of empire.<sup>17</sup>

As one English cricket correspondent noted during the 1930s,

... today cricket has developed far beyond the imagination of its early players ... the fortunes of a few flannelled men upon a green field are responsible for the state of mind of thousands of people in different quarters of the earth. The game has become a business, a means of livelihood to hundreds, and the principal item of news in the daily journals of the British Empire.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ramachandra Guha (ed.), *The Picador Book of Cricket* (London, 2006), pp. xiii-xiv. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 123, 179.

<sup>16</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Cronin and Richard Holt, ‘The imperial game in crisis: English cricket and decolonisation’, in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British culture and the end of empire* (Manchester, 2001), p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> J.M. Kilburn, *In Search of Cricket* (London, 1990), p. 108. Jim Kilburn was the cricket correspondent of the *Yorkshire Post* from 1934 to 1976, and his book was first published in 1937.

For James, a black colonial subject coming from one of the far-flung corners of that Empire, to be employed in such a prestigious post as a journalist on two leading daily journals of imperial Britain was not just a tremendous personal achievement. More crucially it allowed him an opportunity to cast his gaze over a custom and practice that was not just arguably the ‘national game’ in the imperial metropolis itself but since its ‘golden age’ had become the game of English-speaking peoples across the Empire. If, as Keith Sandiford has suggested, ‘the story of imperial cricket is really about the colonial quest for identity in the face of the colonisers’ search for authority’, then James’s cricket journalism may come to be seen not only as distinctive in its own right but also as a crucial first draft for a new writing of the history of the game in the 1930s.<sup>19</sup>

### **The 1933 West Indies Cricket Tour**

In April 1933, James started as a cricket correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*, which initially involved covering the early preparations for the West Indies tour of 1933. His ‘work’ initially involved watching the visitors, many of them old friends, practicing in nets, though he did cover one early match in May where the West Indies took on Northamptonshire.<sup>20</sup> The 1933 tour was only the second time that the West Indies had officially played a Test Match in England and James wrote about their team for not just the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Port of Spain Gazette*, but also *The Cricketer* and *The Keys*. The series he wrote on ‘West Indian cricket’ from 6 May to 24 June 1933 in *The Cricketer* is particularly noteworthy, as he introduced English readers to the Caribbean, noting cricket there was organised in a more amateur fashion than in England.

The league cricketer in the North of England today with his good ground, his highly organised system of matches, his experienced professional and his enthusiastic (and generous) crowds enjoys advantages which not one in twenty of international West Indian cricketers enjoy. Yet if West Indians lack artificial aids

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<sup>19</sup> Stoddart and Sandiford (eds.), *The imperial game*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19 April 1933, 8-10 May 1933. Northamptonshire won.

Nature is on their side. We can play and often do play right through the year.<sup>21</sup>

Yet it was a quite different ‘natural’ advantage that many English commentators now feared the visitors may look to exploit. The English side had just returned from defeating Australia in what became known as the infamous ‘Bodyline’ Test series of 1932-33, when Douglas Jardine, the public school and Oxford educated M.C.C. captain, instructed fast bowlers Harold Larwood and Bill Voce, both former Nottinghamshire coal miners, to bowl at the ‘body’ of Australian batsmen, or so Australians claimed. This tactic of ‘fast leg theory’, as the English cricket establishment euphemistically dubbed it, forced batsmen to either take evasive action from balls aimed less at their leg than at their body and head, or attempt to fend the ball away with the bat, possibly giving catching chances to the fielders deliberately massed close to the batsman on his leg side. As Jack Fingleton, one of the Australian team later put it, ‘bodyline’ amounted to nothing less than ‘a revolution against [Donald] Bradman’, designed to intimidate Australia’s outstanding batsman, whose astonishingly high run rate had been central to Australia’s away victory over England when they had previously met in 1930. As a tactic, Bodyline however ‘succeeded’, as England regained the Ashes with a 4-1 margin, but it was also widely condemned by the Australians as a ‘revolution against cricket’, or at least the spirit of fair play, and the storm cloud of controversy it blew up is still remembered today.<sup>22</sup>

In the run up to the First Test in late June 1933 many English commentators fell into hypocritical hysteria about how dangerous the West Indian fast bowlers Learie Constantine and E. ‘Manny’ Martindale might be on a fast pitch. James was quick to defend his compatriots, noting that what they bowled ‘was not body-line because there was only one man forward short leg on the on side,’ and so thus not intimidating. However, James feared that West Indies cricket officialdom might change their bowling line out of deference.

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<sup>21</sup> James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Jack Fingleton, *Cricket Crisis; Bodyline and other lines* (London, 1985), p. x. Christopher Gair has described in some detail how Bodyline was used by the English against Australia in the Third Test in Australia in January 1933, described by *Wisden* as ‘probably the most unpleasant [Test match] ever played’ and a ‘disgrace to cricket’. See Christopher Gair, ‘Cricket, Herman Melville, and C.L.R. James’s Cold War’, in Christopher Gair, (ed.). *Beyond Boundaries; C.L.R. James and postnational studies* (London, 2006).

Whether [Jack] Grant [the West Indies captain] will allow himself to be frightened by these English critics is an important question. If he breaks the morale of his fast bowlers by expressing doubts as to whether the tactics of Constantine and Martindale are fair, the West Indies should flay him alive. The English had no mercy on the Australians. Now that the tour is over and the Ashes won, nearly every English writer and cricketer with the most bare-faced effrontery condemns body-line bowling, but when the Australians protested they shrieked to high heaven that there was nothing in it and the Australians were merely squealing. This is our chance and if weakness and a lack of sense of realism in the high command makes us lose it, then our blood be upon our own head.<sup>23</sup>

James's concerns that the 'high command' may let the side down echoed Constantine's critique in *Cricket and I*:

Of all Test playing combinations the West Indies team alone is composed of men of different race. And there lies a difficulty which I believe few of the West Indian selectors themselves realise ... Test Match cricket today is no sort of game. It is a battle. And to win you need not only the strenuous efforts of individual players: the work of each player must be backed by a sense of solidarity, of all the others supporting him, not only actually but so to speak in the spirit. The lack of this is the chief weakness of the West Indies team in big cricket ... Until all members of a West Indies side realise that every consideration must give way before the necessity of uniting in spirit and in truth to win through a series of Test Matches the West Indians will not play the cricket that I know they can play. Much depends on the players, much more depends on the leadership, which must itself be above pettiness, sympathetic, and yet be strong, and command respect from all in the team.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, p. 34. This article, 'Chances of West Indies in First Test' was published in the *Port of Spain Gazette* on 15 June 1933. It is worth remembering that Constantine and Martindale were both black and Grant, the captain, was white. Martindale was later the first West Indian to make Lancashire his permanent home, after playing in the Lancashire League for Burnley in 1936.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Hilary McD. Beckles, 'The political ideology of West Indies cricket culture', in Hilary McD. Beckles and Brian Stoddart (eds.), *Liberation Cricket; West Indies Cricket Culture* (Manchester, 1995), p. 152. In his notes made when working on what became *Beyond a Boundary*, James noted that *Cricket and I* 'was almost finished when the body-line controversy began'. See 'Body-line', handwritten notes in James, '*Beyond a Boundary* Papers'.

The problem, as Hilary McD. Beckles explains, was that it was ‘the ideological position of white cricketers and administrators that contest with England was essentially a non-political event in which “cousins” exchanged mutual admiration’.<sup>25</sup> In 1923, for example, H.B.G. Austin, the white captain of the West Indies side touring Britain said that he hoped his team ‘were worthy to belong to the Mother Country’, declaring there was ‘no more patriotic part of the Empire than the British West Indies, and ... they wanted, they demanded to be left with the Flag under which they bred’.<sup>26</sup> A decade on, and little had changed. The 1933 team contained any number of black players who could have captained the side, including Constantine himself, Martindale, Ben Sealey and George Headley, but it was captained by G.C. ‘Jack’ Grant, a Cambridge Blue. Beckles notes that Grant ‘supported the view that England was the motherland that deserved loyalty and respect from all its colonies in all areas of life’, a view many black players in the side did not share, and ‘this divided and weakened West Indies cricket. The division was political, and had to be removed by political means.’<sup>27</sup>

However, in general, James was hopeful about the West Indies prospects, reassuring readers of the *Port of Spain Gazette*:

For let every good West Indian know that, after watching cricket here and carefully weighing my words, I have no hesitation in saying that in cricket, as in many other things, West Indians are among the most highly gifted people one can find anywhere. The English have money, thirty times our population, vast organisation, every conceivable advantage. Yet with all that, we could hold our own. Our trouble is that we have not yet learned to subordinate everything to winning. Under modern conditions to win you have got to make up your mind to win. The day West Indians White, Brown and Black learn to be West Indians, to see nothing in front to right or left but West Indian success and the means to it, that day

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<sup>25</sup> Beckles, ‘The political ideology of West Indies cricket culture’, p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Cricket and Race*, p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> Beckles, ‘The political ideology of West Indies cricket culture’, p. 152. Neither James nor Constantine blamed Grant personally. As James noted, ‘the spirit of the team is pretty good. Jack Grant is doing very well. If there is any trouble it is likely to come over the question of the vice-captaincy. The Board knew, I suppose, why it did not appoint one. If anything happens to Grant and there is any monkeying about, there are the prospects of a fine row.’ See James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, p. 34.

they begin to be grown up. Along with that it will be necessary to cultivate any number of fine speeches, noble sentiments and unimpeachable principles. But these you must indulge in before the struggle, cricket or whatever else it may be, and also after the struggle is over.<sup>28</sup>

In June 1933, the publication of Learie Constantine's autobiography, *Cricket and I*, represented a timely aid to this 'struggle'. As James later noted, 'to the West Indians it was the first book ever published in England by a world-famous West Indian writing as a West Indian about people and events in the West Indies'.<sup>29</sup> In his preface to the work, Cardus noted that 'Constantine is a representative man: he is West Indian cricket, just as W.G. Grace was English cricket'.<sup>30</sup> The influence of James, who had ghostwritten the work, could be seen in some of the 'noble sentiments and unimpeachable principles' that ran through the work. The work noted that 'Trinidad is a Crown Colony, that is to say it is governed by the Colonial Office officials in England, and a movement for throwing off this yoke is gathering strength'. Indeed, Constantine's autobiography also made note of the 'political upheavals' at the time of the French Revolution 'not only in France but in the West Indian island of Hayti which belonged to the French'.<sup>31</sup>

The 1933 Test Series allowed James to study up close 'the other West Indian master of the period' aside from Constantine, the naturally outstanding young Jamaican batsman George Headley, who had been born in 1909. James had already seen Headley in action back in 1930, and now 'I watched the West Indies in the nets at Lord's in 1933 before the tour began. George never to my knowledge practised seriously. He fooled around playing the ball here and there. It was his first visit to England, but he was as sure of himself as if he were in Jamaica.'<sup>32</sup> James noted Headley was 'as great a master of style as he is of runs ... at the wicket no one can miss his mastery. He is of that type which uses a bat as if it is an extension of the

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<sup>28</sup> James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 124. See the review, 'Constantine and Cricket', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 November 1933.

<sup>30</sup> Constantine, *Cricket and I*, p. xi.

<sup>31</sup> Constantine, *Cricket and I*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 139, 145-46. On Headley, see also James's 1967 essay on Headley in James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, pp. 190-202.

arm. Ease, poise, balance, he has them all.<sup>33</sup> However, while James doubtless regularly met with the West Indies team socially, he did not get to cover the full tour itself, as most of his cricket reporting for the *Manchester Guardian* instead involved covering the county matches of Lancashire.<sup>34</sup> In late June 1933, for example, rather than being able to follow the first Test between England and the West Indies at Lords, James found himself up in Manchester, watching ‘dull cricket’ and ‘Warwickshire’s stolid batting’ at Old Trafford.<sup>35</sup> However, James’s job meant he did get to see more of Britain than just London and Lancashire, and that summer he visited the cricket grounds of among other places Birmingham, Northampton, Harrogate and Scarborough.<sup>36</sup>

England won the first Test by an innings and 27 runs, and the second Test began at Old Trafford on 22 July 1933. Once again, James was forced to miss out, having to cover ‘Lancashire at the Oval’ in London instead.<sup>37</sup> The West Indies batted first, making 375 all out, thanks to a spectacular 169 from Headley. Now as England came out to bat, Grant, the West Indies captain, ordered Martindale and Constantine to try bodyline. Whilst the Old Trafford pitch was not as suited to bodyline as the hard Australian wickets, facing such tactics for the first time, England first suffered, falling to 134 for 4. However, an inspired 127 from Jardine, his greatest innings and only Test century, rallied England to a total of 374. In the second West Indian innings, Clark bowled bodyline back to the West Indians, and though the match ended in a draw, it had been the highest-profile game in which bodyline was bowled in England. In mid-August, England took their revenge in the third and final Test at the Oval, winning by an innings and 17 runs, and so taking the series by 2-0. James once again was elsewhere, watching Lancashire play Hampshire.<sup>38</sup> Later, he remembered how ‘the body-line upheaval shocked everyone

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<sup>33</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 18 April 1933, reprinted in James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>34</sup> The L.C.P. held a reception for the team at the Waldorf Hotel on 23 June, and a ‘dance to the cricketers’ on 13 September. See *The Keys*, 1/1, (July 1933), p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1933.

<sup>36</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 8 May 1933, 22 May 1933, 7 July 1933, 11 September 1933.

<sup>37</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1933.

<sup>38</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14-16 August 1933.

and made the cricket world pull itself up and tread carefully ... Jardine soon went, never to return'.<sup>39</sup>

### **What should they know of cricket who only cricket know?**

If bodyline was 'not cricket', then what *was* cricket? For James, it was first and foremost 'a spectacle, an exhilarating competition, demanding physical fitness, skill, and judgment, pleasing alike to players and watchers'.<sup>40</sup> Yet it was also to be distinguished from what he called 'a multitude of ruder sports'.<sup>41</sup> As Smith notes, 'cricket has had a certain superficial "literary" association ever since it was wrenched from its Georgian and pre-Georgian origins and reconstituted as part of a distinctly bourgeois project of self-definition and pedagogical reproduction in the British public schools'.<sup>42</sup> As a life-long avid reader of English 'cricket literature' and of course a product of a 'British public school' himself, it is perhaps not surprising that James followed the tradition represented by Cardus in seeing cricket as an art, like drama or opera. James would, for example, regularly make references in his writing to Shakespeare, whether for example describing the dismal weather - 'all the morning, a heavy, gloomy mist, such as one would associate with Macbeth's blasted heath, hung over the ground' - or the activity of the players themselves - 'like Bottom, they were transformed - but into Lions'.<sup>43</sup> As Smith notes, 'in many respects, James's willingness to treat cricket with the kind of interpretative parameters usually reserved for "higher" forms of culture, i.e., for practices whose intellectual status is precisely opposed to such "bodily" pursuits as sports, would have been no great surprise to his readers'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 187., 189. Jardine was widely condemned for using bodyline against India, an emerging team without a Bradman, and lost the captaincy, becoming something of a pariah in the cricket world. See Gair, 'Cricket, Herman Melville, and C.L.R. James's Cold War', p. 96.

<sup>40</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 2 June 1937.

<sup>41</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 25 August 1937.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, "'A Conception of the Beautiful'", p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 25 and 28 July 1938.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, "'A Conception of the Beautiful'", p. 49.

One hot day in August 1934, James found himself sat watching Lancashire play Kent down at Dover, amid

... the sun and gaiety, the tents, summer dresses and music of the Dover festival ... what a wonderful day and setting for cricket it was! The Dover ground is one of the most beautiful in England and was at its best: flag-topped tents to either side of the sleek, green turf, a belt of trees and rows of houses shading into the rolling downs and surrounding the pavilion, high-rising terrace after terrace dotted with people looking lazily on.

While the match itself was sadly 'limpid', James took the opportunity to philosophise.

The ancient Athenians had terraced seats in the open air, and if they looked on at Aeschylus and Sophocles, they had their Olympic Games too. What would an Athenian have thought of the day's play? Probably that the white-flannelled actors moving so sedately from place to place were performing the funeral rites over the corpse of a hero buried between the wickets. Watson and Iddon, from their garb and movements, he would have supposed to be the priests waving the sacrificial wands with solemn dignity.<sup>45</sup>

Players moving 'sedately' and batsmen batting with 'solemn dignity' did not however make for a dramatic spectacle. As James would put it a few years later,

... for successful cricket you want a great batsman ... fast bowlers who will send wickets flying ... exceptionally neat and clean wicket-keeping which makes the spectator wonder how on earth he manages to do it ... fine fielding ... And, finally, you want that touch of the unexpected - the uncertain fellow, whom you are hoping will come off today and do the impossible.<sup>46</sup>

If none or even just some of these elements are present, it is manifestly the case that cricket can for long periods resemble some sort of funeral. Even if one is

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<sup>45</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1934. Reprinted in James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, pp. 39-41. For a similar passage, see James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 2 June 1937.

watching a great batsman, like Don Bradman, demolishing all who stand in his way. the game can still sometimes feel flat, as James noted when the Australians played H.D.G. Leveson-Gower's XI at Scarborough in September 1934.

After the first excitement, this sort of thing becomes slightly monotonous. A bowler bowls, Bradman makes a stroke, not a single fieldsman moves, and the ball is returned from the boundary. The essence of any game is conflict, and there was no conflict here; the superiority on one side was too overwhelming ... [the match] threatened to degenerate into boredom, if not misery.<sup>47</sup>

Ideally in a cricket match, James wrote, 'a dual process is going on. As the batsmen master the bowling, bowlers are finding out their weaknesses.'<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, when Bradman returned to England for the 1938 Ashes Test series, things were set for an intriguing clash between two more or less equal sides.

The eagerly awaited cricket season of 1938 is with us at last, and on the news Don Bradman takes only second place to the arbiters of Europe's destiny. Some fortunate youth, having hit Bradman's wicket with a ball, becomes as important as if he had hit a statesman's head with a bomb ... England v Australia is an event. He is a poor creature who knows anything about the game and does not feel a slight shiver of joyful anticipation as he speculates on the surprises, the great innings, the dramatic catches, and the inspired spells of bowling which this season will bring forth.

Cricket then was a game, but also *more than a game*. Of course, 'England v Australia is neither a war nor a revolution', the Marxist historian of the Communist International reminded his readers. 'Cricket was and remains a game - a wonderful game - the practice, history and very jargon of which enshrine in a truly extraordinary manner the spirit and tempers of the English people.'<sup>49</sup> One wonders what some of the Scottish readers of the *Glasgow Herald* might have made of this formulation, but James's view that 'the spirits and tempers of the English people' were enshrined in a

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<sup>47</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 10-11 September 1934.

<sup>48</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 22 June 1938. As Smith notes, 'there is, one senses, something appealingly dialectical about this from James's point of view'. Smith, "'A Conception of the Beautiful'", p. 52.

<sup>49</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 27 April 1938.

sport, the game of cricket, was also an explicit challenge to those for whom cricket was nothing more than a game. The imperial poet Rudyard Kipling in 1904 in *The Islanders*, for example, after observing the mess the British had made fighting the Boers, had railed against ‘flannelled fools at the wicket and muddied oafs in goal’, urging public schools to teach boys not cricket or football but how to ride and shoot so they were better prepared in future for the real ‘game’ of colonial warfare.<sup>50</sup> In the 1950s, amidst decolonisation, James would later be inspired by Kipling’s question ‘What should they know of England who only England know?’ in order to imagine a future post-colonial English society. In a pertinent challenge to Kipling’s talk of ‘flannelled fools’ James would ask in *Beyond a Boundary*, ‘What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?’<sup>51</sup>

### **The ‘Englishness’ of Cricket**

Yet James’s formulation that ‘the practice, history and very jargon’ of cricket ‘enshrine in a truly extraordinary manner the spirit and tempers of the English people’ was in an important sense rather traditional a stance. Leaving Kipling aside, as Anthony Bateman has argued, during the era of Victorian colonial expansion, ‘both cricket and English Studies were crucial institutional manifestations of an attempt to create a new collectivist idea of Englishness’.<sup>52</sup> By the time James arrived in Britain, the connection between Englishness and cricket was all but hegemonic, and the game had become a social mainstay of rural life in particular. As Ross McKibbin notes, ‘in

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<sup>50</sup> A. P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies; A Study in British Power* (London, 1959), p. 91. Shortly after Kipling had made this statement in 1904, ‘Plum’ Warner, the famous cricketer, had met Kipling in Cape Town and heard Kipling defend himself against the idea that he had been too hard on cricketers and footballers. ‘Possibly, but if you don’t exaggerate no one will take any notice ... You have to hit an Englishman more than once on the jaw before he will take a thing seriously. Look at the Boer War, for instance, with its “We shall be in Pretoria by Xmas.”’ Michael Davie and Simon Davie (eds.), *The Faber Book of Cricket* (London, 1987), p. 312.

<sup>51</sup> The Kipling quote comes from his poem ‘The English Flag’ (1891). *Beyond a Boundary* had the working title *Who Only Cricket Know*. See James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, p. 70. For my take on James’s writing of *Beyond a Boundary* amidst decolonisation, see Christian Høgsbjerg, ‘Facing post-colonial reality? C.L.R. James, the black Atlantic and 1956’, in Keith Flett (ed.), *1956 and All That* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Bateman, ‘“More Mighty than the Bat, the Pen...”; Culture, Hegemony and the Literaturisation of Cricket,’ *Sport in History*, 23/1, (2003), quoted in Smith, ‘“A Conception of the Beautiful”’, p. 49.

so far as cricket was played and followed throughout the country by all social classes and by both men and women, it was the most “national” of all sports’.<sup>53</sup> For all his West Indian nationalism and Marxist internationalism, James seems to have had no qualms about immersing himself in the intricacies of the composition and performances of the English team in order to write his columns on ‘English cricket’ for the rather ‘pro-Establishment’ and Unionist *Glasgow Herald*. So we learn that James thinks that Walter Hammond was ‘a master in his prime, and he will make centuries for England yet’ while ‘all who have seen [Denis] Compton agree that he has the makings of a great player’.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, Jim Smith is ‘an admirable bowler and wise’ but the ‘village whirlings of his bat have never been looked upon as serious’.<sup>55</sup> Yet occasionally these discussions seem to move beyond the objective and balanced, as though James was consciously playing up to the anticipated sympathies of his Scottish readers towards the English team, itself perhaps indicative of the entangled nature of Britishness. So in May 1937, James praised Charlie Barnett, England’s opening batsman. ‘We ought to have henceforth and for years to come a No. 1 of the old-fashioned type. He hit Hampshire for a terrific century last week. It is good to see an England opening batsman scoring a century in an hour.’<sup>56</sup> The ‘we’ in the passage is quite remarkable, and indeed other articles by James in the *Glasgow Herald* were headed as if he could be counted on as a firm stalwart of England, whether it be ‘Farnes is back in our team’ or ‘Our bowling and fielding the best in years’.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, in another sense, the position James found himself in was quite remarkable. In June 1937, with the Test Series against New Zealand looming, James noted that ‘the England team will be chosen in a few days, and I propose here to select 13 players who might be in attendance on Saturday week’.<sup>58</sup> Selecting their dream England team was hardly usual behaviour for a black Trinidadian, and nor did

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<sup>53</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 332-33.

<sup>54</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 2 June 1937.

<sup>55</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1 June 1938.

<sup>56</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 May 1937. Republished in James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>57</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 20 and 25 July 1938. It is of course possible that these headings were inserted by a sub-editor.

<sup>58</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 16 June 1937.

James think it appropriate as a colonial subject to cower before the 'mighty' England selectors. When they picked a different England line-up to the one he had suggested, James commented that 'the Selection Committee have said no to all the insidious wooing of the lovers of adventure and speculation ... orthodoxy is the order of the day'.<sup>59</sup>

### **Anyone but England?**

James's apparent 'unconditional but critical' support for England did not mean that he was now any sort of enemy of the 'underdog'. Early on in the 1937 season, James predicted that Yorkshire, 'an extraordinarily fine side' from 'the rain-sodden North', will be champions come the end of the season, but commented that if anyone beats them 'it will be welcomed nowhere so much as in this column. The more often champions are beaten the better for everybody.' Other possible champions were Gloucestershire and Middlesex.

But probable or possible champions are not by any means the most interesting counties. They are what I call the sharp-shooters, who go around playing good cricket (more or less) and seizing their chance every now and then to bring down the mighty from their seat.

The sharp-shooters James had in mind were county sides like Essex, Somerset and Kent, and he recalled the 'glorious licking' Essex gave to Yorkshire in August 1935, 'bowling them out first innings for 31 and winning in two days by an innings and over 200 runs'.<sup>60</sup>

So when New Zealand did better than expected in the 1937 Test series, James was quick to historically situate England's disappointing performance.

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<sup>59</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 24 June 1937.

<sup>60</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 5 May 1937. J.M. Kilburn explained this 'catastrophe' for readers of the *Yorkshire Post*, noting 'the plain truth is that good fast bowling on a fast bowler's wicket where the ball bounced high instead of drifting sullenly was far too much for batsmen quite unused to such happenings', something Essex exploited fully while correspondingly, there was 'the complete inability of the Yorkshire bowlers to find virtue in the same piece of turf'. Kilburn, *In Search of Cricket*, pp. 167, 173.

There is gloom in the council chambers and in the offices of the scribes, and wherever the wise ones congregate. All credit to New Zealand. Cowrie is a very fine bowler, and their batsmen hit the ball. But of John Stuart Mill it was said that his eminence was due to the flatness of the surrounding company. Surely New Zealand did so well because England did so badly. The curious thing is that this disappointing form is not new ... during the last 10 years - since 1926, in fact - the England team has never played up to form, and has been subject to catastrophic collapses. They collapsed against India at Lord's. At Manchester the Indians in the second innings showed a complete mastery of the England bowling. The West Indian bowlers seemed able to get right in among the early England batsmen, and often the recovery was made after six wickets had fallen. These were teams that should never have been anything else but thoroughly beaten from lunchtime on the first day. Some of their men would show good form, but that these teams should be challenging the England team as they did in a reasonable number of games was, and remains, inexplicable to anyone who considered the merits of the various players without prejudice.

What is the explanation? There is none that I can think of. It most certainly is not a question of sheer cricketing ability. These touring sides are properly trounced by one or two of the best counties and often have to fight for their lives against counties which are merely good ... That it is the sheer merit of West Indian, Indian, or New Zealand bowlers is not true. For, if it were, county batsmen could not make so many runs against them as they do.<sup>61</sup>

That such a fervent anti-imperialist could be apparently 'stuck' for even one possible reason as to why Indian and West Indian cricketers performed better than expected against the England team is perhaps a little puzzling. As Smith notes, 'it is hard at this point, and elsewhere in these articles, not to be somewhat thrown by James's apparently wholesale mimicry of the alternate churlishness and arrogance of English imperial opinion'.<sup>62</sup> The *Glasgow Herald* was far from a radical paper, and perhaps James feared losing his job through offending some of his more conservative readers if he went too far in his cricket columns. Yet it is perhaps worth noting that after filing that report on Tuesday 4 August 1937, James spent the rest of that week putting together a 'Special West Indian Edition' of the I.A.S.B. newsletter *Africa and the World*, in solidarity with the heroic arc of labour rebellions sweeping across the British Caribbean. That Saturday, 8 August, James had heckled a meeting held by

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<sup>61</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 4 August 1937.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, "'A Conception of the Beautiful'", p. 62.

Marcus Garvey in Hyde Park, demanding to know his position on the Caribbean labour revolts.<sup>63</sup> That Sunday, James spoke alongside Padmore, Kenyatta, Braithewaite and Wallace-Johnson at a mass rally to launch a 'Trinidad Defence Committee' in Trafalgar Square.<sup>64</sup> When James came to write his next column on Tuesday 11 August, he was certain to find space to praise the 'sublime impudence' so often displayed by those playing England at international cricket.

Let me draw a far-fetched comparison. Did any military expert in his senses believe that the new untrained levies of the French Revolution could have defeated the professional armies that were moving on France in the autumn of 1792? And now, to bring the analogy nearer home, I believe that New Zealand, the West Indies, and India do so well against men better than themselves because they have the dash and fire of young men, on tour, with their reputations to make and not very much to lose. With an impudence that is almost sublime these raw teams attack the England side and play over their normal form. I believe there is a lesson to be learnt.<sup>65</sup>

### **Seeing Cricket Historically**

As a Marxist closely engaged in studying the Great French Revolution in order to write *The Black Jacobins*, it therefore seems more likely that James is not displaying English nationalism as such, but rather a kind of historical awareness and consciousness. For example, on the August Bank Holiday of 1938, James visited The Oval to watch Nottinghamshire play Surrey alongside 14,000 other 'Ovalites'. 'Perhaps there might have been more' but 'one could not keep from seeing it for the historic game that it was, one of the strongest strands in the English cricket tradition'.

Notts v Surrey at the Oval on August Bank Holiday. He would be a poor historian of English social life who, having a large canvas, failed to find a space for some reference to this fixture. W.

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<sup>63</sup> Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, p. 269.

<sup>64</sup> *Africa and the World*, 1/4, 1 September 1937.

<sup>65</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 11 August 1937.

G. Grace was in his day the best known of all Englishmen, and as such has his place in the annals of the country.<sup>66</sup>

Pelham Warner related in his account of his cricketing life how Arnold, of Rugby, astonished them by talking one day of [Arthur] Shrewsbury and [William] Gunn. It was the arrogance of youth to be astonished. What would have been astonishing was if Arnold had known nothing about them. Imagine a man today who would say he knew nothing of Don Bradman, or even [Jack] Hobbs and [Herbert] Sutcliffe. Such a man would be in important respects defective. He might know very little about them, he might detest them, taking them as symbols of flannelled folly. But he should know that they existed, and should be clear that Hobbs and Sutcliffe were not a kind of sauce, nor Bradman something for tired feet. England in the nineties knew Shrewsbury and Gunn. Hundreds of thousands must have seen them at the Oval on Bank Holiday during the last 20 years of the last century ... There has been an almost unbroken tradition of the some of the greatest batsmen in England playing on August Bank Holiday before a London crowd. It is said that many who never saw another cricket match throughout the year found their way to the Oval that day, met old friends, and at the end of the day's play parted until the next Bank Holiday and the visit of the Notts team. When one thinks of Notts cricket one thinks not of Trent Bridge but of the mining villages which have produced so many of the most famous players. To think of Surrey cricket, however, is to think of the Oval.

James then treated his readers to a brief history of the ground from its founding in 1845 at the place of an 'oval-shaped market garden' to become 'one of the permanent homes of English cricket'.

It has more of London in it than Lord's. The huge gasworks are a perpetual reminder of the industrial civilisation in which this small patch of green grass represents the obstinate determination of modern man to prescribe some of the old physical vitality and friendly conflict in the very midst of grime and macadamised roads, crowded flats, and the clang of machinery. Far from giving way before the pace of industrial life, cricket gains ground. The name of Gunn on the scorecard on Monday seemed the beginning of a road

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<sup>66</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 3 August 1938. In *Beyond a Boundary* James famously developed upon this theme, pondering the fact that the 'famous Liberal historian' G.M. Trevelyan and 'two famous Socialists', Raymond Postgate and G.D.H. Cole wrote 'what they declared to be the history of the common people in England, and between them never once mention the man who was the best-known Englishman of his time', W.G. Grace. See James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 157. Incidentally, there was no mention of W.G. Grace either in the Communist historian A.L. Morton's *A People's History of England*, which, like Postgate and Cole's *The Common People*, was first published in 1938.

on which one could travel for a hundred years. And yet, curious circumstance, few of the great English poets, painters and writers have dealt with this creation and possession of the English people ... No one has ever written a sonnet on *Notts v Surrey August Bank Holiday at The Oval*. Why not?<sup>67</sup>

Such passages also suggest that there was an element of Romanticism to James's appreciation of the game. Indeed, for James, the joy of cricket lay not in any form of rational accounting of statistics or utilitarianism. "Statistics prove" began a speaker on the wireless the other night, and I turned him off at once', James noted in 1933.<sup>68</sup> On the eve of the First Test between Australia and England in June 1938, James returned to 'the problem of Bradman' - how could this outstanding batsman be got out? 'How it will be solved, what attempts will be made to solve it, provide the nicest problem that has faced cricketers for many years, and will make these matches of singular interest for the spectator who has advanced a little beyond the stage of judging a day's play by the boundaries made or the wickets taken.'<sup>69</sup>

James of course naturally had his own ideas on 'the Bradman problem', and after watching the great man in 1934, had asserted that 'despite all theories of wicket and modern batting, good length and really fast bowling to slips who can catch will deal satisfactorily with most batsmen and, more than anything else, are likely to dismiss Bradman in the vulnerable first five minutes'.<sup>70</sup> Now in 1938 James reiterated that Bradman's batting style was liable to give an early chance to the slips, and this constituted 'the heel of Achilles, a very small heel, I fear, but yet palpable'.<sup>71</sup> Covering the tremendous First Test at Trent Bridge, James commended the Yorkshire and England bowler, Hedley Verity, for at least holding Bradman for a period through a sheer exertion of the will.

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<sup>67</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 3 August 1938. For the history of Oval, James drew upon H.S. Altham's 'admirable' *The History of Cricket*, noting that 'to read this book brings the great history of the game moving once more before our eyes'.

<sup>68</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 18 April 1933. Reprinted in James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 8 June 1938.

<sup>70</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1934.

<sup>71</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 11 May 1938.

Verity returned to his best form and did a noble piece of bowling. When the ball landed in the spot it beat everything, bat, wicket-keeper, and sometimes slip. It was treated as the spot on the cheek of a beautiful woman. The batsmen patted it tenderly, Brown went behind the wicket, bent down, and had a long squint at it to see exactly where it was in relation to the stumps, while Verity searched perseveringly for it through some long and accurate spells. It held Bradman watchful as a mouse for hours. Once he jumped into Verity like a tiger, and drove fiercely with the obvious intention of distracting him from his aim. But the stroke did not come off, and Bradman retired into the cat and mouse game.<sup>72</sup>

However, the real heroes of the drawn Trent Bridge Test, ‘one of the great matches in the history of the game’, were the Australian batsmen, in particular Stan McCabe, who made 232 runs in 235 minutes, one of the fastest double-centuries in Test history. ‘Australia escaped defeat, and once again Bradman saved his side ... McCabe’s innings has been lauded in prose and will doubtless be celebrated in verse. All the circumstances taken into consideration, it is the greatest piece of cricket I have ever seen or heard of, nor do I expect to see anything comparable for many years to come.’<sup>73</sup>

### **The Role of the Individual**

Bradman and McCabe’s heroics may have been enough to save a draw in that Test match, and help Australia secure the Ashes overall, but as some compensation England managed to win the final clash at the Oval in August 1938.

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<sup>72</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 16 June 1938.

<sup>73</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 16 June 1938. Bradman congratulated McCabe when he returned to the pavilion with ‘If I could play an innings like that I would be a proud man, Stan’. Two former England captains, A.E.R. Gilligan and R.E.S. Wyatt agreed it was the best Test innings they had seen, as did the legendary veteran bowler Sydney Barnes, who had the following dialogue with Neville Cardus. ‘Barnes: “The finest innings I have seen,” Cardus: “Think again; you saw Trumper,” Barnes: “I can only repeat it is the greatest I ever saw.” Cardus: “I’d have liked to see you out there bowling to McCabe.” Barnes (after a moment’s thought): “I don’t think I could have kept him quiet.”’ See John Bright-Holmes (ed.), *The Joy of Cricket* (London, 1985), p. 72.

This last test has been a mixture of epic play, tragedy and farce, and like all structures which do not follow a definitive pattern it leaves behind a feeling of dissatisfaction ... what really ruined the match as a match was Bradman's injury ... Australia, on a wicket still good, expired without almost a kick. The groundlings shrieked with joy, but does anyone really like to see Caesar on his knees?<sup>74</sup>

James for one did not. As he put it his very first article for the *Glasgow Herald* on 28 April 1937,

... we must recognise that exciting cricket depends upon exciting personalities and exciting teams. And exciting personalities are, I think, accidents. Not altogether, perhaps. We live in a standardized age, means of communication multiply, we hear and see the same things, and therefore think and act far more alike than our parents did. The result is a mastery of elementary technique by an increasingly greater number, a general raising of the standard. But the striking personality is perhaps more rare as a result. How many competent novelists are there today! But Dickens do not abound.

One accidental 'Dickens' of the cricket field during this period, one 'accidental' great personality, was, of course, Bradman. Invoking William Blake, James asked 'What immortal hand or eye shaped the fearful symmetry of Bradman exactly in 1929?' James asked. 'We do not know and cannot know.'<sup>75</sup>

In May 1938, in the run up to the looming 1938 Ashes clash, James once again marvelled at the apparent mystery of Bradman after watching him in action.

The thing is stupendous. Bradman's 258 at Worcester is one of those feats the magnificence of which twiddles fingers at the laws of probability. It saddens us at this unchallengeable demonstration of human inequality. Then it raises us to exaltation that we live in an age when such things are done. It encourages the illusion that progress is automatic - the inevitable consequence of the years. It is, in my opinion, one of the finest things this noble cricketer has ever done ... At Worcester he has played twice and scored double

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<sup>74</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 26 August 1938.

<sup>75</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 28 April 1937. Reprinted in James and Grimshaw, *Cricket*, pp. 53-55.

centuries each time. As Arnold Bennett said of Mr. Lloyd George -  
“He can rise no higher, he can only fall”.<sup>76</sup>

Later that month, after another magnificent display from Bradman, James again paid homage to the master batsman.

I have tried to avoid writing about Bradman’s innings, and have purposefully left myself little space for it. Saturday, however, set the seal on it. It is the limit of batting. Perhaps he did not drive as much as he might. But the leg-glancing, the cuts, the back-strokes through the covers, the forcing strokes to the on-side, the diversity and the mastery, whole and complete. How could anyone do better except his own marvellous self? William Tell shot the apple off his son’s head, but the poor man would have gone to the stake if he had had to hit Bradman’s wicket. There may have been greater batsmen. May they sleep in peace. I am no longer interested and discard my former regrets. As Saturday progressed I understood better many things in connection with cricket: for instance, what it meant to be on the same side as Bonaparte, Nelson, or Lenin.<sup>77</sup>

As Smith notes, ‘it is hard, and probably impossible, to bring to mind another writer of the twentieth century who could have compared, in this way, Don Bradman and Lenin’ other than James.<sup>78</sup> Whether Bradman appreciated such a comparison is not known, but for James, this really was of course the ultimate tribute, as shown by the respect he would pay in *The Black Jacobins* to Toussaint Louverture, who he also saw fit to place in such illustrious company as Bonaparte, Nelson and Lenin.

James’s stress on the importance of great personalities to great cricket comes through well in his discussion of another Australian cricketer, the bowler W.J. ‘Tiger’ O’Reilly. ‘He is what is rare today in cricket, a truly great bowler; and also what is still rarer, a man of authentic personality. Almost you could say he was a character. But unlike the poet, the great bowler is both born and made.’

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<sup>76</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 4 May 1938.

<sup>77</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 18 May 1938.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, “‘A Conception of the Beautiful’”, p. 60. Smith’s article, among other things, carefully explores in detail the problematic nature of and other ambiguities with James’s discussion of ‘great personalities’ on the cricket pitch.

[O'Reilly was] a man of finesse and finger-spin, of individualism and idiosyncrasy, of storms and calms and quick reactions; but this artist's temperament is disciplined and controlled and never runs into extravagance, being rooted in the solid basis of a good, never otherwise than good, an immaculate length. Is he as good as he was? I doubt it myself. Have you ever listened to Chaliapine's gramophone records, those made before the war and those made 10 or 15 years later - the same arias? In dramatic contrast, in portrayal of character, in capacity to put it over, 1930 is beyond all comparison with 1910. But something elemental has gone from his voice. The vibrating timbre, the sheer physical wonder of it, are no more. So it seems to me with O'Reilly.<sup>79</sup>

And yet despite such outstanding players as Bradman, McCabe and O'Reilly among the Australian side, James spent time discussing England's 'meritorious foundation of superior play'.<sup>80</sup> As he explained, one can examine in turn the strengths and weaknesses of individual players on each team, weigh them up, and come to some tentative predictions before a match begins. 'That is what we can say about material things, such as we can touch and see and reasonably calculate upon. But what about the new spirit which moved through an England team for the first time in so many years and had the Australians on the defensive from the start?'<sup>81</sup> The question of 'team spirit' and morale - the relationship of the individual to the collective - was a critical one. It was with this in mind that James insisted on the importance of ensuring that four Yorkshiremen - Wood, Verity, [Bill] Bowes and Yardley - played in the Fourth Test at the Leeds ground, Headingley, recruiting Edmund Burke for good measure to reinforce his argument.

With those four Yorkshiremen playing together on their home ground the England team would be immensely strengthened morally. These things count in cricket. In fact, if [Len] Hutton and [Maurice] Leyland, two other Yorkshiremen, and [E] Paynter, their Lancashire neighbour, were playing, England would be as strong as never before in this series. There are bonds light as air but stronger than links of iron, Burke says. And these intangible things can

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<sup>79</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 31 August 1938.

<sup>80</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 23 August 1938.

<sup>81</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 22 June 1938.

make, and often have made, the difference between victory and defeat.<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, if the young Len Hutton flourished as a player, it was in part because he had been shaped and disciplined by his experience playing for such an impressive county team as Yorkshire. As James wrote of Hutton, ‘the youth’, ‘the real tough, fighting Yorkshire spirit is there - I can imagine the united will-power of that broad county sharpening Hutton’s eyes, guiding his feet, giving power to his elbow, so that he might endure and achieve’.<sup>83</sup> As James described Hutton’s subsequent batting for England, ‘an iron will drove him on, and it is of such stuff that really great cricketers are made’.<sup>84</sup> If England, aside from Denis Compton, had few other outstanding young players coming through, one reason was because they were unfortunate enough to not be playing for a ‘powerful county’ like Yorkshire, noting that playing for a weak county team often stifled their brilliance.<sup>85</sup> There was a dialectical interaction between the individual and the collective, but a team spirit united by bonds light as air would always be ultimately stronger than the iron-will of any individual.<sup>86</sup>

### **Modernity and Tradition**

During the summer of 1938, James took time away from covering England vs. Australia, to watch another rather different ‘match of traditions’, Oxford vs. Cambridge. ‘People who have never seen either University or one player still take sides though the spectators do not attire themselves with the glory of yore.’ James used the occasion to address the question of the decline in cricket at Oxbridge compared to the ‘golden age’ of the 1880s when promising young players such as

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<sup>82</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 20 July 1938.

<sup>83</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 24 June 1937.

<sup>84</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 26 August 1938.

<sup>85</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 14 July 1937.

<sup>86</sup> As Constantine had noted in *Cricket and I*, ‘if even the professional is the essence of selfishness, and thinks only of doing well for himself, it will pay him in the end to study and help his side as much as possible; for it is with them that he has to play and no man can consistently beat eleven others at cricket’. Quoted in Renton, *C.L.R. James*, p. 49.

Ranjitsinhji, C.B. Fry, F.S. Jackson and R.E. Foster - 'the great amateurs of their time' - progressed as a matter of course into the England team. Yet in 1938, 'scarcely anybody is looking at this match with a view to finding England players'. There was no superficial explanation possible for this change given that 'young men develop in much the same way'.

But the type of cricket has changed, has been steadily changing, and I believe that there is the root of the trouble. A Test in England today is of four day's duration, a significant indication. Such a match is a battle. County games also are more dour. The young amateur goes into an atmosphere far more removed from his ordinary experiences than he did 25 years ago. Hobbs has commented on the sternness of post war games. That and the economic difficulties which prevent young amateurs devoting themselves entirely to cricket are sufficient to account for the change.<sup>87</sup>

In *Beyond a Boundary*, in a chapter entitled 'Decline of the West', James would develop this theme about the 'sternness' and confrontational nature of post war cricket, insisting that body-line 'was not an incident, it was not an accident, it was not a temporary aberration'.

It was the violence and ferocity of our age expressing itself in cricket. The time was the early thirties, the period in which the contemporary rejection of tradition, the contemporary disregard of means, the contemporary callousness, were taking shape. The totalitarian dictators cultivated brutality of set purpose ... It began in World War I. Exhaustion and a fictitious prosperity in the late twenties delayed its maturity. It came into its own in 1929. Cricket could no more resist than the other organisations and values of the nineteenth century were able to resist. That big cricket survived the initial shock at all is a testimony to its inherent decency and the deep roots it had sunk.<sup>88</sup>

It was perhaps for this reason that James cherished the moments he had with veterans of the game in England, who offered a glimpse of what he called in 1937 'an

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<sup>87</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 7 July 1938.

<sup>88</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 186.

older and freer style of cricket' as opposed to 'these wretched times we are in'.<sup>89</sup> On 8 September 1937, James told readers of the *Glasgow Herald* about an incident that at happened to him at the weekend.

I happened to be playing in a village match last Saturday against a scratch team. Their captain told me that he had on his side a man who used to play for Middlesex 40 years ago. He was certain that I didn't know him or hadn't heard of him, one of the brothers Douglas, J and R.N. Of course I had heard of them. They used to come into the Middlesex team in August with another good player, C.M. Wells. J. Douglas, I learnt, was 64, but loved the game and still played well enough. Naturally I was anxious to see him, and saw enough of him to see many things.

'I could see another generation at work', James declared, regretting the fact that his lack of luck with the bat meant he did not actually get to face up to Douglas himself. Indeed, 'my span of life, alas, did not allow much sampling of the other sides bowling'. But might not modern technology be used to preserve such glimpses of the past?

Whether the cinema people ever take anything except those snippets that we see in the newsreels, I don't know. The M.C.C. might do worse than have newsreels of selected periods during the coming tests taken, and put aside for reference. It would cost very little and, without particularising, I am certain that, any things now being stored in more serious spheres are likely to be of less interest in 30 years time. I would cheerfully spend a few hours watching a county match, or a Test match for that matter, between two teams of, say, 1899. How high exactly did [Hugh] Trumble toss the ball? Tom Richardson's off break. What did Clem Hill, the left-hander, do with it? Did those batsmen consistently drive the half-volley, whoever bowled it? Always fascinating questions for all cricketers, they suddenly become doubly so by the glimpse of the vigorous and courageous man shaping as he did 40 years ago, defying time.<sup>90</sup>

Yet James was of course far from a nostalgic conservative reactionary. 'People who grumble about "the spirit of the players in the good old days" are senile

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<sup>89</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 12 May 1937.

<sup>90</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 8 September 1937.

or short-sighted.’<sup>91</sup> As he reminded his readers, ‘you cannot turn the clock of history backwards, even if it were desirable to do so’.<sup>92</sup> Instead, throughout his writing there is a careful critical examination of the changes that had transformed and were transforming classic cricket into the modern game, offering encouragement and warnings in equal measure. Of course, aside from Bradman and Headley, ‘we admit freely that the standard is not what it was’ compared to the ‘golden age’, but ‘we must remember that the level of a game cannot be stationary’. James praised the smaller English county sides like Northamptonshire and Essex, ‘the smaller fry ... who under so many difficulties keep the game going’. Overall, ‘the financial question remains,’ but the game of cricket was in a generally healthy, even ‘a flourishing condition’ in England at least.<sup>93</sup>

James detested aspects of the modern game, in particular the fashion for batsmen to play safe with the forward defensive in the face of spin or whenever in any doubt, ‘that long defensive questing forward stroke which is the ugliest stroke in cricket’.<sup>94</sup> Yet he also declared ‘one of the great strokes of the modern age, due ultimately, I expect to the prevalence of bowling that swings late, is to get back on his wicket and play the pitched-up ball through the covers as it rises off the pitch. It is safer than the old-fashioned, grandiloquent, left foot forward and full-blooded swing. It is in its own way quite as beautiful.’<sup>95</sup> During the Second Ashes Test at Lord’s in 1938, James observed that

... Bradman is a genius, and therefore a law unto himself. Hammond is a classic batsman who has adapted the classic game to modern conditions. Brown is a modern batsman - post war to his bootlaces; back on the wicket first and watching the ball from there, very strong at pushing and glancing all the way from wide mid-on to fine leg, a master of the slicing stroke off a fast bowler behind point.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 2 June 1937.

<sup>92</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 14 July 1938.

<sup>93</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 2 June 1937.

<sup>94</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1 September 1937.

<sup>95</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 14 July 1937.

<sup>96</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 27 June 1938.

James's approach to modernism within cricket was encapsulated in his discussion of *Wisden's Almanack*, the cricket fanatic's bible, in 1938.

This year's issue is symptomatic of the determination of those connected with the game in any shape or form not to let things go on in the old way. *Wisden's* is transformed, and the transformation is admirably done. It retains its dignity, yet is much more handy for reference, running straight from page 1 to the end with a new index that facilitates easy reference. Births and deaths and obituaries are placed at the end instead of at the beginning; there is more co-ordination in the arrangement of facts. In the actual matter provided there are more articles than usual of general interest, such as [A.P.] Freeman on bowling and G. O. Allen on wickets. This is indeed welcome, for an integral part of the chronicles of the time is what the players of the day think of their technical problems ... In arrangement, production, and matter, *Wisden's* is definitely an improvement. But one tribute may be paid to the old *Wisden's* under the editorship of Mr. Sidney Pardon - that beautiful prose style he wrote is gone. Its greatest distinction was that he never over-wrote, never sought to dazzle, but achieved elegance by a strenuous simplicity in which scholarship and a fine mind were not so much obvious as implicit. The new *Wisden's* is a sign of the times: so, alas! is the absence of style.<sup>97</sup>

Accordingly, as the 1938 season began, James disapproved of the widespread media 'hype' being created around the looming Ashes clash, particularly given the way in which European fascist regimes had recently tried to use sporting occasions for political aims and to further racist ideological aims.

Too much "ballyhoo" will affect the game. 1938, we agree, is not 1888. But yet it looks as if these Test matches are going to be played in an atmosphere of publicity and artificial tension which will sensibly affect players and spectators. Selection and rejection, successes and failures, may achieve a significance out of all proportion to their importance, and prejudice a balanced view. Luckily, none of the great nations of Europe as yet produce Test teams; else there would be fierce disputes as to whether the matches should be played under the auspices of the League or not. It is good that these games should awaken public interest - they deserve it. But

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<sup>97</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 4 May 1938. See W.H. Brookes (ed.), *Wisden's Cricketers' Almanack* (London, 1938).

there can be too much of a good thing, and unfortunately, too much of a bad thing. What is to be done? Nothing drastic, and certainly no Society for ye Preservation of ye Ancient Spirit of ye game of Cricket. But cricketers, from the highest to the lowest, regular spectators, and other minor satellites, such as the humbler type of cricket scribe, can cheerfully refuse to play up to the highest notes. By passive sabotage and stolid debunking a surprising deal of good can be done.

‘Let all lovers of the game bear in mind what has happened to the Olympic Games’, James warned, reminding his readers of how the Nazis had successfully used them in Berlin in 1936 for propaganda purposes. Yet as a revolutionary socialist James remained optimistic about the future of cricket.

That cloud of doubt being duly noted and charted, 1938, we can see, is likely to be a memorable year in the history of the game. Last year was one of the best seasons we have known for years, and this year the possibility of excitement and pleasure are enormous. We have all the elements of a great season. But the greatest of these is - weather permitting. May it permit!<sup>98</sup>

### **Beyond the Boundary**

A key reason why James was optimistic about cricket’s ‘inherent decency’ in the face of totalitarianism was because he saw the audience, the spectators of the matches, not as passive objective onlookers but as civilising subjects in their own right. James was invariably tolerant at those rare moments when the boundary between the spectators and the players was crossed. In 1934, covering Lancashire playing Kent, James commented that ‘the game of cricket flourishes in Kent’.

Here again, as in Southend, the little boys were playing all over the field during the interval, and the Kent team were in their places and Hopwood was taking guard while the field was still dotted with people going back to their places. Does this lighthearted attitude make for a lower standard of cricket? Kent can point to

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<sup>98</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 27 April 1938. The Third Ashes Test at Old Trafford in July 1938 had to be abandoned due to rain.

Woolley, Freeman, Ames, Chapman, Valentine, Levett, Marriott.  
How many counties today can show such a list?<sup>99</sup>

In early August 1938, on a day off from covering the Test Matches, James relayed how he ‘strolled into The Oval yesterday to see some of Surrey and Middlesex, these old London rivals ... there was a fair crowd, but how peacefully the match proceeded! I sat in the crowd on the stone tiers, and a wireless set in a flat played as loudly as a brass band in the square.’ Another mild distraction was ‘a man’, ‘the kind of man who knows, who sat behind and aired his opinions in a sharp voice’. ‘Spectators wandered in steadily, men on a weeks holiday, and their wives, out for a day in the sun.’ Then the monotony was suddenly broken.

[An] unemployed-looking man next to me got into conversation, and asked me if I had seen the tests. I told him all, whereat he was enormously impressed, as I knew he would be, but he soon floored me completely by telling me that he had been a professional cricketer for 20 years until muscular rheumatism put an end to his career. That was the most exciting piece of play I experienced between the start and the lunch. My friend left and so did I.<sup>100</sup>

For James, as he explained to his readers in 1938, ‘the crowd’ was ‘an integral part of any cricket match’. This was particularly apparent in some places, for example at Yorkshire’s home ground, Headingley, where the crowd was rarely passive. ‘They are certainly keen in Yorkshire’, James noted, ‘the Leeds crowd is unique’. ‘How it appealed!’ ‘Cricket at Lord’s is one thing and at Leeds it is another, and long may the Leeds crowd flourish.’<sup>101</sup> While covering the Fourth Ashes Test at Headingley in July 1938, which Australia won by five wickets, James noted with just a tinge of regret about England’s batting collapse during their second innings that ‘the last five English wickets went down without one batsman playing for death or glory’.

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<sup>99</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21 August 1934.

<sup>100</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 10 August 1938.

<sup>101</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 25 July 1938. At that Fourth Test in Headingley, James had the fortune to meet three Trinidadians who had come to England on holiday to watch the Test match. See *Glasgow Herald*, 28 July 1938. Cricket was probably more popular in Yorkshire than any other county, with Lancashire not far behind. See McKibbin, *Classes and Culture*, p. 333.

Perhaps this was the best that could be done. But if one were to ask the thousands of Yorkshiremen who thronged the ground - How do you prefer your Bill Bowes? Playing back elegantly to O'Reilly or swinging his bat at him? The shout would be unanimous - "Swinging the bat, of course." And I think they would be right.<sup>102</sup>

However, it was to be the first Ashes Test in mid-June 1938, which was marked by heavy barracking by Nottingham's Trent Bridge crowd of Australian opening batsmen Jack Fingleton and Brown, that prompted James to his greatest elucidation on what he called 'the crowd militant'.

The crowd refused to practise non-intervention, and those who study mass psychology should have been present at Trent Bridge. On Friday and Saturday when England battered the Australians and then got them out the crowd went from delirium to delirium. It saw a catch in every bumped ball from an Australian bat and an lbw [leg before wicket] every time the ball touched an Australian pad. It heaved deep sides of regret when these baseless expectations bore no fruit. It punctuated with howls of glee the quick dismissal of the Australians on Monday. The superb stroke play and courage of McCabe giving a relish to the feast. But as McCabe manoeuvred Fleetwood-Smith from harm's way and smote his gallant way to the second century the crowd entered into the spirit of the thing and cheered each successful evasion almost, but not quite, as if England were saving the game.

It barracked when Fingleton and Brown were playing slowly, and there is no valid reason why a crowd should not barrack when it wants to. You cannot treat 30,000 people at a match as if they are children in a kindergarten. The barracking *was* unintelligent. But Fingleton and Brown made an appeal against the light at half-past five, reason for which was invisible to mortal eyes except theirs. When Chester approached Emmott Robinson to consult him, that sturdy Yorkshireman signified his negative when still a yard from Chester. He refused, so to speak, to discuss the matter, and the crowd was quick to see it. When it barracked as the bowler was going up to bowl it was interfering with the game, and Fingleton was quite within his rights to refuse to go on until the interruption had stopped.

But the crowd reasserted itself before the end of the day, and carried off all the honours. The occasion for this splendour was the dismissal of Fingleton. The greatest catch in the game. a long stretching left-handed effort at first slip sent back Fingleton, and the

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<sup>102</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 28 July 1938.

time was a quarter past six. Would Bradman come? He means everything to the Australian side, and I would wager that more than one of his men must have offered to go instead. “He would be a fool to come”, whispered a wise and experienced critic at my side. And then in the gathering darkness came the Australian captain, striding down the pavilion steps as jauntily as ever, and never so much the “Don” as in this brave gesture.

Practically the whole ground stood up and greeted him with roars and roars of applause that lasted almost all the way. The barrackers appreciated his courage, and wanted him to let him know also that the little unpleasantness with Fingleton was merely an interlude. It was the biggest moment of a game which had many, and if only a crowd could be as unintelligent as to barrack Fingleton and Brown when they were saving the game, what else but a crowd could so spontaneously and generously lift up all hearts and justify humanity?<sup>103</sup>

It is here that we arguably finally see the real meaning behind James’s formulation that ‘the practice, history and very jargon’ of cricket ‘enshrine in a truly extraordinary manner the spirit and tempers of the English people’. There is more to James’s formulation than an intervention into an existing discourse about ‘Englishness’, for the key word is not English but *people*. As Smith notes, what distinguished James when it came to understanding cricket was ‘the fact that he understands it to be serious and significant *because of*, and not despite, its status as a popular activity’. In the spontaneous generosity of the Trent Bridge crowd towards the Australian captain we see, as Smith notes, ‘a glimpse of the universal’.<sup>104</sup>

## Marxism and Cricket

For James, it is clear that his work as a cricket journalist traveling around the length and breadth of England covering matches at every level meant, as he put it (albeit in a different context) in *Beyond a Boundary*, ‘I expanded my knowledge of cricket and, as always with cricket, of life in general’.<sup>105</sup> It would be mistaken to suggest that already by the 1930s James could stake a claim alongside Antonio

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<sup>103</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 16 June 1938.

<sup>104</sup> Smith, “‘A Conception of the Beautiful’”, pp. 49, 64.

<sup>105</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 248.

Gramsci, Georg Lukács and Leon Trotsky as an outstanding cultural theorist of the classical Marxist tradition.<sup>106</sup> But as McKibbin notes, ‘sport was one of the most powerful of England’s civil cultures’, and the articles James wrote on cricket in this period arguably go as profoundly to the heart of the question of ‘national culture’ in England as anything else written by a Marxist in this period.<sup>107</sup> Of course, James did not go out of his way to flag this aspect of his writings up. As Smith notes, ‘while it is thus certainly true that his reading of cricket is irreducibly historical it operates only on the basis of a careful reading of the forms of cricket itself ... he insisted that anyone seeking to understand the game in social terms had first to understand the game in its own terms’.<sup>108</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that many of James’s comrades in the Trotskyist movement never seemed to show much appreciation for his cricket journalism, so much of which was apparently obsessed with the particular styles and favourite stokes of individual players on the England team and so on, without understanding how after attending to the specific intricacies James was then able to rise from the concrete to the general.

In 1925, in *Where is Britain going?* Trotsky had suggested that any future ‘British Revolution’ will ‘inevitably awaken in the English working class the most unusual passions, which have hitherto been so artificially held down and turned aside, with the aid of social training, the Church, and the press, in the artificial channels of boxing, football, racing, and other sports’.<sup>109</sup> Such an analysis of sport was of course far more sophisticated than the position the official Communist movement were to

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<sup>106</sup> Neil Lazarus has argued that ‘in his writings about cricket, James reveals himself to be one of the truly decisive Marxist cultural theorists of our century’, comparing him to Lukács. Neil Lazarus, ‘Cricket and National Culture in the Writings of C.L.R. James’, in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.), *C.L.R. James’s Caribbean* (London, 1992), p. 93.

<sup>107</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 332.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, “‘A Conception of the Beautiful’”, p. 52.

<sup>109</sup> Trotsky, *On Britain*, p. 148. A decade later, in 1935, writing on the French Left, Trotsky lambasted the futility of socialist and trade unions counter-posing worker’s youth organizations in the recreational sphere to providing clear political leadership in the class struggle. ‘In the sphere of *philanthropy, amusements, and sports*, the bourgeoisie and the Church are incomparably stronger than we are. We cannot tear the working class youth away from them [i.e. away from the bourgeoisie and the Church] except by means of the socialist program and revolutionary action.’ See Leon Trotsky, *On France* (New York, 1979), p. 114. However, the ‘International Conference of the Youth of the Fourth International’ held in Lausanne on 11 September 1938, declared ‘we demand our right to happiness!’ ‘The duty of the working class is to help create a youth that is strong and capable of throwing all its physical and mental strength into the fight against capitalism’ and so ‘the Bolsheviks-Leninists demand’ among other things ‘free access to all sports fields’ and ‘stadiums’. Reisner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International*, p. 282.

take subsequently, which went from a crude denunciation of sport as ‘bourgeois’ during the ‘class against class’ Third Period ‘line’ during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and then embracing sport in an uncritical manner during the Popular Front period and thereafter.<sup>110</sup> James would of course famously later take issue with Trotsky’s argument that the popularity of a sport like football or cricket was ultimately an expression of alienation under capitalism, an ‘artificial channel’ into which the ‘unusual passions’ of the British working class were ‘turned aside’. For James, as we have seen, cricket in Trinidad with all its racial injustice and divisions had illuminated the question of politics though exposing some of the hypocrisy of British colonial rule, and his lifelong study of the game revealed that in both the metropole of imperial Britain and in a colony like Trinidad cricket represented not merely a diverting dramatic spectacle but part of the popular culture of society. Apparently James and Trotsky discussed cricket when they met in 1939, and in *Beyond a Boundary*, James made his disagreement with Trotsky on this question explicit. ‘Trotsky had said that the workers were deflected from politics by sports. With my past I simply could not accept that. I was British ...’<sup>111</sup>

In James’s cricket articles of 1937 and 1938, it is perhaps possible to detect a subtle challenge to the existing Marxist analysis of sport as formulated by Trotsky coming through. ‘We live in a serious age, and there are many estimable people who despise cricket and lovers of cricket’, James wrote in July 1937, perhaps thinking of some of his more serious comrades on the far-left. Yet in an appreciation of the Australian fast bowler E.A. McDonald who had tragically recently died in a car accident, James proudly defended his love of the game. Declaring Ted McDonald ‘the greatest of modern fast bowlers’, James wrote that ‘I confess freely that I looked, and still look, on a man like McDonald with open-eyed admiration’.

The splendid physique, trained and adapted to endurance and highly skilful performance, is not only the enjoyment of millions of modern people. All through the ages humanity has admired such men. That most intellectual of peoples, the Greek, gave their

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<sup>110</sup> While this needs more investigation, it seems the C.P.G.B. paper the *Daily Worker* accordingly went from saying little about sport to devoting pages to sports coverage.

<sup>111</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 151, 205-206.

athletes a high place, a thing our modern “high-brows” might remember. And I cannot conceive of a time when McDonald and his kind will not fill the eye and minds of their fellows with admiration and a generous envy of their natural gifts developed by patient toil to such strength and endurance and skill.<sup>112</sup>

Christopher Hitchens once noted James’s cricket writing reminded him

... of what Lionel Trilling once said about George Orwell - that “he must sometimes have wondered how it came about that he should be praising sportsmanship and gentlemanliness and dutifulness and physical courage. He seems to have thought, and very likely he was right, that they might come in handy as revolutionary virtues.”<sup>113</sup>

In any case, James held fast to his idea that cricket because of its ‘inherent decency’ and ‘deep roots’ would, if not quite help make a socialist revolution, at least have a fair chance of surviving one. In 1938, the inspirational Kent and England batsman Frank Woolley announced his retirement, and as James regretfully noted in a fine article, ‘Cricket is Losing a Supreme Artist’.

The foundations of his style were laid in another age. Whatever his virtues, no batsman of the modern school will ever play like Woolley, as no modern historian will ever write like Gibbon ... He was one of the great cricketers of his time, but he was more than that. He gave to thousands and thousands of his countrymen a conception of the beautiful which artists struggle to capture in paint and on canvas ... they recognised in him something beyond the average scorer of runs, some elegance of line and harmony of movement which went beyond the figures on the scoreboard. That, indeed, will give him his place in the game, a place higher than many who won more matches for their side ... He is

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<sup>112</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 28 July 1937. McDonald had died in a car accident on July 26 1937. In the article, James recalls playing a friendly match for Nelson in 1934 against McDonald, who had been an outstanding Test cricketer in the 1920s before playing for Lancashire and then as a professional in the Lancashire League for Bacup. ‘I played in a friendly match with him about three years ago, when he was long past his best. Standing at mid-on, I watched him closely, as well I might. Mere scribes do not often get the chance to watch such men in action at close quarters ... he was taking things easily that day, and his action had already dropped a little, but it was still the most perfect thing on the cricket field, and half his success was due to it’.

<sup>113</sup> Christopher Hitchens, ‘Mid off, not right on’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 January 2002.

fifty-one. Think of it, fifty-one! This means by the same reckoning that Compton, if he does as well, will have reached similar eminence in 1968. What wars and revolutions will have rolled by!

Yet thanks to players like Woolley, James was confident cricket would survive 'the epoch of wars and revolutions'.

For if the game of cricket were ever put on trial for its life, its advocates would bring Grace and Bradman and Ranjitsinhji and a few others as evidence on behalf of the defence. But they would bring Woolley too. And if they were clever advocates they would play him as their strongest card. For if he could not win the sympathy of the jury then what other cricketer could?<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 17 August 1938. One other cricketer who might have had a chance of winning over a revolutionary workers' tribunal deciding on the fate of cricket was H.M. Hyndman (1842-1921), leader of the Social Democratic Federation, who Bernard Porter notes 'may be the only Marxist leader in history who has played county cricket as a "Gentleman"', a right-hand middle-order batsman for Sussex from 1863-64 with an average of 16.26 runs. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, pp. 217, 403.



Our loan loan no 173(a)

E Robinson  
99, Marsden Hall Rd  
Nelson

J. Robinson

Aug. 16<sup>th</sup> 1938

1<sup>st</sup> Row — John Kirk Elias Constantine, Geo. Headley, Ashong,  
E. St. Hill  
(Lord)

2<sup>nd</sup> Row — Martindale, Amar Singh, Constantine, J Robinson  
(Mayor)

— Alfred Charles, C.L.R. James  
NELSON, NOSTEN  
151, NETHERFIELD RD.  
H. BENTHAM

Plate 14. C.L.R. James and Learie Constantine at a charity cricket match in Nelson organised by Constantine for Mayor Joseph Robinson, 16 August 1938.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>115</sup> [Photograph]. Originally in the *Nelson Leader*, copy courtesy of Eric E. Robinson.

## CHAPTER NINE

### **‘There is no Drama like the Drama of History’: *The Black Jacobins, Toussaint Louverture* and the Haitian Revolution**

In early 1936, Winston Churchill decided to pay a rare visit to the theatre in London’s West End. Churchill had read ‘some unappreciative descriptions’ of a play, a historical drama set in the Napoleonic period, and admitted to initially feeling ‘discouraged’ from going.

However, upon the advice of Mr. Edward Marsh, a high connoisseur and keen supporter of the living stage, I went last night to see this remarkable play. In my humble judgment as a life-long but still voracious reader of Napoleonic literature, it is a work of art of a very high order. Moreover it is an entertainment which throughout rivets the attention of the audience ... If it be the function of the playwright as of the historian “to make the past the present, to bring the distant near, to place the reader in the society of a famous man, or the eminence overlooking a great battle,” this is certainly discharged ...

Those lines, written in a letter to *The Times* and coming as they did from the former chancellor of the exchequer, meant that despite weak reviews, the play in question, *St Helena* by R.C. Sherriff and Jeanne de Casalis, was swiftly granted an extended run in another theatre. Churchill was no doubt greatly satisfied, for he clearly found its portrayal of the last years in exile of the former French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte on the island of St Helena deeply moving. ‘There is a grandeur and human kindness about the great Emperor in the toil which make a conquering appeal’, Churchill insisted. ‘Nor need the sense of inexorable decline and doom sadden unduly those who have marvelled at Napoleon’s prodigious career.’<sup>1</sup>

Yet Churchill, that ‘voracious reader of Napoleonic literature’, for some reason failed to muster the energy to go and see another historical drama on London’s West End, one which had opened a month after he had written to *The Times*, and one which also featured a portrayal of Napoleon Bonaparte. Set on the island of Saint Domingue as opposed to that of Saint Helena, that play was *Toussaint Louverture*;

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 15 February 1936.

*The story of the only successful slave revolt in history*, a panoramic dramatisation of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804. Then again, written by C.L.R. James in 1934 and staged by the prestigious Stage Society on 15 and 16 March 1936 at the Westminster Theatre, *Toussaint Louverture* was not just ‘another historical drama’, but almost certainly the first play about the Haitian Revolution ever performed on a British stage.<sup>2</sup> After seeing James’s play, one would have found it rather difficult to detect any particular ‘grandeur’ behind Napoleon’s ruthless determination to restore slavery on the French colony of Saint Domingue, after the enslaved of that colony had already died in their thousands to liberate themselves from their conditions of barbaric bondage. As for the ‘human kindness’ of Napoleon, any readers of Churchill’s letter who had seen James’s play would have no doubt been bemused to learn of the Emperor’s proposed plans once his highly feared, professional armies had destroyed the exhausted rebel army of former slaves: ‘I shall not leave an epaulette on the shoulders of a single nigger in the Colony.’<sup>3</sup> If the audience of James’s play in 1936 had left the theatre feeling a ‘conquering appeal’ for anybody, it would surely have not been for Churchill’s ‘great Emperor’ Napoleon, but for a former slave of the French Empire, the great Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture. Indeed, with the legendary black American artist Paul Robeson in the starring role as Toussaint, words like ‘grandeur’ and ‘human kindness’ could not fail but be utterly redeemed and gloriously invested with new content and new meaning. As James would note in his magisterial history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, if the life story of Toussaint ‘does not approach the greater dramatic creations, in its social significance and human appeal it far exceeds the last days at St Helena’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a very useful discussion of plays about the Haitian Revolution, (though one which oddly claims James’s *Toussaint Louverture* was performed in Trinidad in 1935), see VèVè A. Clark, ‘Haiti’s Tragic Overture: (Mis) Representations of the Haitian Revolution in World Drama (1796-1975)’, in James A.W. Heffernan (ed.), *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art* (London, 1992). The claim that James’s play was the first time that a play of the Haitian Revolution had been staged in Britain depends in part on one’s reading of Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1920) which Clark discusses in detail. In 1925, *The Emperor Jones* had been staged in Britain for the first time at the Ambassador’s Theatre, with Paul Robeson in the title role. James Light remembered of the British audience that ‘their nerves were frayed by the drum - as Gene O’Neill intended.’ As the critic of the *Westminster Gazette* noted, ‘*The Emperor Jones* sure is a weird play. I do not think anything comparable with it has been seen in England before.’ Marie Seton, *Paul Robeson* (London, 1958), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> For Napoleon’s proposed plans for Saint Domingue, see James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 237-39.

<sup>4</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 237.



PAUL ROBESON  
AS THE NEGRO NAPOLEON.

PAUL ROBESON, the distinguished coloured actor and singer, took the name-part in the Stage Society's production of "TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE," by C. L. R. James. The play deals with the tragedy of the great negro who led the revolt against slavery in San Domingo while the French rulers of the country were occupied with their own Revolution. Mr. Robeson will soon be seen in a new film, "Song of Freedom," in which he plays the part of a negro who, after having been a dock labourer, becomes a singer, and later discards fame and returns to his people in Africa.

Plate 15. Paul Robeson as Toussaint Louverture, March 1936.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [Photograph]. From *The Sketch*, 25 March, 1936.

To attempt to do justice to ‘the making’ of either James’s historical drama *Toussaint Louverture* or his masterful epic ‘grand narrative’ *The Black Jacobins* in one chapter would be to do an injustice. Nevertheless, the linking of the two works not only reminds us that they should be seen together as companion pieces of historical literature, each complementing each other, but also allows us to explore at greater length some of the forces and passions shaping both works. James’s *Toussaint Louverture*, the production of which was the first time black professional actors had ever performed on the British stage in a play written by a black playwright, is in the process of being published for the first time, and the scholarship on that work remains in its infancy.<sup>6</sup> *The Black Jacobins* on the other hand has long won for itself the status of a classic, and, as James Walvin notes, not only ‘remains *the* pre-eminent account’ of the Haitian Revolution ‘despite the vast accumulation of detail and argument advanced by armies of scholars’ since, but also stands as the ideal ‘starting point’ for understanding the experience of slavery in general.<sup>7</sup> James’s insights, developed in partnership with his fellow Trinidadian, former pupil at Q.R.C., and author of *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), Eric Eustace Williams (1911-81), have become an established subject of research. However, if *The Black Jacobins* has since helped raise ‘armies of scholars’ who have revisited the great battlefield of Haiti armed with James’s work, far fewer have been concerned with understanding how James himself came to write such a powerful work of revolutionary history. *The Black Jacobins* stands as a fine culmination and conclusion to the work of James in imperial Britain over six years, indeed it was James’s finest single intellectual achievement of this period of his life, and this chapter will hopefully also continue the themes raised in earlier chapters, illuminating in particular the importance of James’s revolutionary Marxism and ‘class-struggle Pan-Africanism’ to the making of the work.

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<sup>6</sup> For the 1934 playscript, see C.L.R. James, ‘Toussaint Louverture [DJH’21]’, Jock Haston Papers, Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull. For one scene from the 1936 production, see C.L.R. James, ‘Toussaint Louverture’, *Life and Letters Today*, 14/3, (1936). For some of the context of the 1936 production, see Colin Chambers, “‘Ours Will Be a Dynamic Contribution’: The Struggle by Diasporic Artists for a Voice in British Theatre in the 1930s and 1940s’, *Key Words*, 7, (2009).

<sup>7</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xiii.

## The Historical Philosophy of the young C.L.R. James

Before James even went to Q.R.C., he had from a young age already begun to find some sort of meaning in European literature and history from his voracious reading. He remembered ‘an English history book by a man called [Cyril] Ransome. It was dry fact but I read it from cover to cover over and over again. The English always won the battles.’ His natural instincts with the underdog, James ‘resented it fiercely’ and ‘used to read and reread the few battles they had lost’, in the process cultivating ‘a fanatical admiration for Napoleon’.<sup>8</sup> The young James now perhaps had a ‘hero’ to imagine while reading Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, ‘a Novel without a Hero’, set in Britain during the wars with Napoleonic France. In the Q.R.C. library, James was excited when he ‘found all sorts of books on history and classical studies’.<sup>9</sup> One school friend remembers James would read ‘history and literature’ in class ‘instead of doing the class work ... I remember him reading [J. R.] Green’s *English History* which the ordinary run of students like myself did not read’.<sup>10</sup>

John Richard Green’s *Short History of the English People* (1874) offered a radical liberal take on the nationalist rewriting of national histories that marked the nineteenth century in general. As Green noted in his preface, ‘the aim of the following work is defined by its title; it is a history not of English Kings or English Conquests, but of the English People’. As Raphael Samuel has noted, Green

... preached a kind of democratic evolutionary gospel, believing that great men counted for comparatively little in the story of the nation and that the “real life” of the English lay in “their

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<sup>8</sup> Henry and Buhle (eds.), *C.L.R. James’s Caribbean*, p. 22. Cyril Ransome had written *A Short History of England*, abridged as *A Summary of Ransome’s Short History of England*. It is likely James is referring to this, though Ransome had also written and co-authored a number of works on this theme. See Cyril Ransome, *A Short History of England* (London, 1928).

<sup>9</sup> Buhle, ‘The Making of a Literary Life’, p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> William W. Besson, *Caribbean Reflections; The Life and Times of a Trinidad Scholar, (1901-1986)* (London, 1989), p. 49.

ceaseless, sober, struggle with oppression, their steady, unwearied battle for self-government.”<sup>11</sup>

James would later always insist that those who grew up in tiny Caribbean islands instinctively grasped a sense of the ‘totality’ of society, from top to bottom, rulers and ruled, in a way that was harder in larger societies such as Britain. As he put it to Stuart Hall, West Indians had the advantage in that ‘we kept on seeing the whole thing as a whole’.<sup>12</sup> ‘People’s history’ such as that espoused by Green therefore perhaps came almost naturally to someone like James.

During the 1920s, James would slowly develop his philosophy of history itself, as he revealed in a 1967 interview with Richard Small.

I read an enormous amount of history books ... chiefly the history of England and later, histories of Europe and ancient civilization. I used to teach history, and reading the lot of them I gained the habit of critical judgement and discrimination ... I remember three or four very important history books. These were a history of England by G.K. Chesterton and some histories of the seventeenth century by Hilaire Belloc. These books violently attacked the traditional English history on which I had been brought up and they gave me a critical conception of historical writing.<sup>13</sup>

James remembered that as teacher of both English and History in Trinidad he used to tell his students that to understand ‘the historical development’ of any given period one had to get ‘some idea of the economic circumstances, you must also get some idea of the political circumstances and you must get to know the literary circumstances’.<sup>14</sup> It is perhaps interesting here to note that in his autobiography *My Life*, Trotsky described how when he was young he too once held to ‘the theory of

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel, ‘British Marxist Historians, 1880-1980: Part One’. Samuel notes Green’s radical-democratic work inspired many English Marxists, and it provided a model for the Communist A.L. Morton’s *A People’s History of England*, written to aid the formation of a Popular Front in 1938.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, ‘A Conversation with C.L.R. James’, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Small, ‘The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist’, p. 57. Stephen Howe has commented on the later importance of this ‘influence of Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton, right-wing Catholic writers whose vision of English history offered a romantic, medievalist, conservative critique of modernity’, on James, noting it would leave a ‘romantic streak in James’s anti-capitalism’. See Howe, ‘C.L.R. James’, pp. 167-68.

<sup>14</sup> Small, ‘The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist’, p. 57.

multiple factors', economic, political, cultural, and so on, to explain social change, noting that it was then 'the most widely accepted theory in social science'. 'People denote as "factors" the various aspects of their social activity, endow this concept with a supra-social character, and then superstitiously interpret their own activity as the result of the interaction of these independent forces.' What this theory left out, Trotsky explained in *My Life*, was that it was human agency that changed society, not the 'multiple factors which were supposed to dwell on the Olympus of history and rule our fates from there'. For Trotsky, his grasp of this truth came initially through reading the 'old Italian Hegelian-Marxist', Antonio Labriola (1843-1904), in particular his *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History* (1896).<sup>15</sup> James had no such luck - such Marxist classics were absent from the Q.R.C. library. However, James's articles for *The Beacon* in 1931 reveal that already James had independently arrived at a sense of the fundamental importance of human agency in history before reading any Marxism.

In an article on 'The Problem of Knowledge' in March 1931, James stressed the importance of historians not being narrowly concerned with politics but open to the cultural movements of their day, admitting he found it remarkable that the great Whig historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, author of a *History of England*, 'who died in 1859, had no good word to say of Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and the whole Romantic Movement, the most fascinating problems in the world'. James revealed a general despair with the 'historical philosophy' behind the leading historians of his day as well.

If the average man hears a theorist saying too often "I think" or "I am not sure," "It is on the whole safer to believe," he thinks, that the man does not know his business. This is the simple truth ... I have some sympathy with scientific men. But with philosophers, especially philosophers of history, I have little. There is no need for their absurdities.

James took to task Henry Thomas Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England* (1857-61) savaging

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<sup>15</sup> Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 123. For an outline of Labriola's Marxist theory of history, see Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution*, pp. 264-65.

... [Buckle's] preposterous theory of the Nordic races being stimulated to extra effort by the cold climate of the North, while the Italians, Spaniards and Greeks of the South were enervated by the climate thus accounting for the nineteenth-century supremacy of Northern Europe. How the man, a historian writing a history of civilisation could allow his prejudices to blind him to the truth is a remarkable instance of the best human brains.

James then moved on to discuss 'the rise, decline and fall of the Roman Empire, which was certainly the greatest European organisation of the early world and, comparatively speaking, is perhaps "the greatest panorama in the history of mankind."' Yet Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) also disappointed James.

What was the cause of this decline? I do not know, but I shall tell you what I do know. Gibbon was an atheist, and he attributed it to the adoption of Christianity ... we learn a lot about Gibbon ... we learn many interesting facts about Roman History, but what we want is some authoritative and positively convincing presentation of the reasons why this great empire collapsed. That we do not get nor are we ever likely to get. To say that it was due to a variety of causes ... is merely a beginning of the question.<sup>16</sup>

How to move past an explanation based on 'a variety of causes'? In the summer of 1931, James reviewed an edited collection of Mahatma Gandhi's writings, noting 'the most amazing thing' about Gandhi was the fact that 'over two hundred millions of men are behind him'.

If he wished he could turn India into a seething confusion of riot and bloodshed which would be unparalleled even in this century of violence. What is the secret of this power? ... it is this [Gandhi's] personal sincerity, this unquestioned integrity of soul, which has so caught the imagination of the Oriental people to whom he belongs and made him the wielder of power such as few men in history have handled ... there is something in common between Gandhi and these men, some secret well of power, something which Western civilisation doesn't understand and against which its militarism, its

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<sup>16</sup> James, 'The Problem of Knowledge'.

political organisation, its mastery of the physical forces of nature, are quite powerless.

The abstract and determinist notion of the theory of ‘multiple factors’ shaping historical development simply couldn’t explain the power of the mass movement around someone like Gandhi, which proved that it was human beings fundamentally at the heart of making history. Reading about Gandhi had, James put it, provided

... the solution of a historical problem which has in the past caused me some difficulty - whether great men make history or are but the crests of inevitable waves of social evolution. I am now more than ever inclined to believe that they shape the environment more than the environment shapes them.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Memory of the Haitian Revolution in the British Caribbean**

James’s questioning of the ‘militarism’ of ‘Western civilisation’ which had already turned the twentieth century into a ‘century of violence’ in this 1931 article is also illuminating, given that he had already begun to independently research the rich hidden history of resistance to slavery in the Caribbean. James remembers he was ‘one of the pioneers’ in introducing ‘West Indian history’ in school, something not then on the official curriculum.<sup>18</sup> One friend from this period, Ralph de Boissière, later recalled James’s early ‘opposition to colonialism had a solidly grounded historical base, something that none of us possessed’, and ‘C.L.R. delivered telling blows with history’.<sup>19</sup> In particular, James was ‘reading everything’ he could on the Haitian Revolution, but aside from a couple of books written by British writers during the 1850s, including Rev. J. R. Beard’s little 1855 biography of Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture, he was grievously disappointed on finding no books of

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<sup>17</sup> James, ‘Review of *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story*’.

<sup>18</sup> Buhle, ‘The Making of a Literary Life’, p. 58. It was not until 1939 that West Indian history was recognized as formally as a subject for a certificate and part of school curriculum. See Williams, *Inward Hunger*, p. 35. Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> De Boissière, ‘The Rise of the Beacon Group’, p. 10.

‘serious historical value’ while in colonial Trinidad.<sup>20</sup> James remembered his reaction on reading one recent ‘very bad’ biography of Toussaint, Percy Waxman’s *The Black Napoleon* (1931): ‘What the goddam hell is this?’ ‘I was tired of hearing that the West Indians were oppressed, that we were black and miserable, that we had been brought from Africa, and that we were living there and that we were being exploited.’<sup>21</sup>

Another insult was added to the injury, as James remembers, when in Dr. Sidney Harland, a ‘distinguished scientist’ from England resident in Trinidad, ‘foolishly took it upon himself to write an article proving that Negroes were as a race inferior in intelligence to whites. I wasn’t going to stand for that and in our little local magazine I tore him apart.’<sup>22</sup> James’s article ‘The Intelligence of the Negro’, published in *The Beacon* in August 1931 not only effectively ‘tore apart’ Harland, but also was notable for being the first time James wrote about the astonishing achievements of Toussaint. Indeed, ‘I would have far preferred to write on Toussaint’ rather than on the ‘arrant nonsense’ of Harland, James noted with a slight pang of regret towards the end of his article.<sup>23</sup> Robert Hill has rightly emphasised the importance of ‘the over-riding vindicatory nature’ of James’s discussion of Toussaint in 1931, noting that ‘in the context of the domination of European colonialism, vindication was never a personal luxury. It was also a cultural and ideological necessity.’<sup>24</sup>

The collective memory of the Haitian Revolution and its legacy in the rest of the Caribbean was highly contested. In Trinidad, the white elite had been

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<sup>20</sup> M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 267. This gives James quoting the date of 1850 for these two books by British writers, but in the original 1975 interview with Alan MacKenzie, James says these books were written ‘around 1859’. See MacKenzie, ‘Radical Pan-Africanism in the 1930s: A Discussion with C.L.R. James’. James, *Black Jacobins*, pp. xv, 336. James would later note that while Beard ‘read industriously’ and was ‘on the whole, accurate’, his work made Toussaint out ‘to be an admirable example of a Protestant clergyman turned revolutionary’.

<sup>21</sup> M.A.R.H.O. (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 267. Hall, ‘A Conversation with C.L.R. James’, p. 21. In 1938, James would describe Waxman’s biography as ‘superficial’. James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 336.

<sup>22</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 117. The offending article, ‘Race Admixture’ by Dr. Sidney Harland appeared in *The Beacon*, I/4, (July 1931) and noted that ‘while it is not apparent to what extent the negro is inferior in intelligence to the white man, there is little doubt that on the average he is inferior’.

<sup>23</sup> The controversy is discussed in David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity; The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (London, 2004), pp. 80-81.

<sup>24</sup> Robert A. Hill, ‘C.L.R. James: The Myth of Western Civilisation’, in George Lamming (ed.), *Enterprise of the Indies* (Port of Spain, 1999), pp. 256-57.

predominantly French at the time of the Haitian Revolution, and so the ‘Haytian Fear’ was a very real one. However, as Bridget Brereton notes, by the second half of the nineteenth century, ‘fear of violence from the African Trinidadians receded’ for the British elite, and one Governor, A.H. Gordon, in 1869 described them as ‘the quietest and most inoffensive people it has ever been my lot to meet with’.<sup>25</sup> A kind of silencing about the event took place accordingly in the discourse of the island. This silence was rudely interrupted however in 1887, when James Anthony Froude (1818-94), the famous English ‘man of letters’, a historian, biographer and friend of Thomas Carlyle, who was to end his life as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, visited the British West Indies.<sup>26</sup> On his return to Britain, Froude wrote *The English in the West Indies, or the bow of Ulysses* to try counter the increasingly popular argument that the West Indian colonies should now be given Home Rule or self-government, and his method - his ‘historical philosophy’ - was quite simply the most crude and blatant racism against black people imaginable. Racism necessarily underpinned the ‘intellectual’ legitimisations of British colonial rule in the West Indies, before and subsequently, but it was customary to express this in ‘respectable’, restrained and sophisticated terms.<sup>27</sup> Yet as Eric Williams once noted of Froude, ‘no British writer, with the possible exception of Carlyle, has so savagely denigrated the West Indian Negro’.<sup>28</sup> According to Froude, those Africans who had gone through the slave trade and colonial slavery at the hands of the English should count themselves ‘lucky’ to have escaped Africa.

In no part of the globe is there any peasantry whose every want is so completely satisfied as her Majesty’s black subjects in these West Indian islands. They have perfect liberty, and are safe

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<sup>25</sup> Bridget Brereton, ‘Haiti and the Haitian Revolution in the Political Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Trinidad’, in Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw (eds.), *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and Its Cultural Aftershocks* (Kingston, 2006), p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> On Froude at Oxford, see Symonds, *Oxford and Empire*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>27</sup> In 1896, Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies under Salisbury, declared that black West Indians were ‘totally unfit for representative institutions’. British colonial officials had echoed such ‘respectable’ sentiments subsequently. In 1906, Walsh Wrightson, director of Public Works in Trinidad, told the Legislative Council that ‘it would appear that in the tropics the great mass of the people have not that energy, self reliance and determination to be masters of their own destiny which characterise the people of Great Britain’. See Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour*, p. x.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies*, p. 138.

from dangers, to which if left to themselves they would be exposed, for the English rule prevents the strong opposing the weak.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, despite generations of English rule, for Froude, black people in the West Indies were still, however, ‘poor children of darkness’, and ‘if left entirely to themselves, they would in a generation or two relapse into savages’. There were ‘two alternatives’ facing ‘all the English West Indies - either an English administration pure and simple’, or ‘a falling eventually into a state like that of Hayti, where they eat the babies, and no white man can own a yard of land’. Froude was not at all silent about the Haitian Revolution - he detested everything it represented.<sup>30</sup> While visiting Trinidad, Froude had been horrified to actually witness a demonstration for Home Rule as a black Trinidadian ‘knows what happened in St. Domingo’ and ‘that his race is already in full possession of the finest of all the islands’.<sup>31</sup>

The republic of Toussaint L’Ouverture, the idol of all believers in the new gospel of liberty, had, after ninety years of independence, become a land where cannibalism could be practiced with impunity ... the African Obeah, the worship of servants and trees and stones, after smouldering in all the West Indies in the form of witchcraft and poisonry, had broken out in Haiti in all its old hideousness.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, while ‘the blacks as long as they were slaves were docile and partially civilised’ but in Haiti, after ‘90 years of negro-self-government’, ‘there are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own’. ‘The

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<sup>29</sup> James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or the bow of Ulysses* (London, 1888), pp. 50, 80. In a private journal Froude kept while in the Caribbean, he declared ‘Niggerdom perfect happiness’, and referred to seeing ‘swarms of niggers’, ‘all of them perfectly happy, without a notion of morality’. Quoted in Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, p. 149.

<sup>30</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or the bow of Ulysses*, pp. 50, 56, 80-81. ‘If, for the sake of theory, or to shirk responsibility, we force them to govern themselves, the state of Hayti stands as a ghastly example of the condition into which they will then inevitably fall.’

<sup>31</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or the bow of Ulysses*, pp. 7, 86, 88. ‘As it has been in Hayti, so it must be in Trinidad if the English leave the blacks to be their own masters,’ Froude noted. ‘Liberty in Hayti had been followed by a massacre of the French inhabitants, and the French settlers had done no worse than we had done to deserve the ill will of their slaves.’

<sup>32</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or the bow of Ulysses*, p. 126.

effect of leaving the negro nature to itself is apparent at last', they were at worst savages and at best 'good natured animals'.<sup>33</sup>

Yet Froude's racist tirade had been famously and gloriously countered almost immediately by a black Trinidadian schoolmaster, John Jacob Thomas (1840-1889). Despite being in ill-health, Thomas had travelled to England and in 1889 published for the benefit of an English audience an exposure of both Froude's fraudulent racism as well as his audacity in damning a people of which he knew nothing. In *Froudacity; West Indian Fables Explained*, Thomas noted Froude's 'oft-repeated predictions about West Indian Negroes degenerating into the conditions of their fellow-Negroes in the "Black Republic"' and indeed that 'the West Indies degenerating into so many white-folk-detesting Haytis, under our prophet's dreaded supremacy of the Blacks, is the burden of the book'. Thomas accordingly tore into Froude's racism towards the people of Haiti, and in a devastatingly powerful conclusion to his book, noted that 'cannibalism and the hideous concomitants' were for various reasons 'relatively minor and restricted dangers to man's civilisation and moral soundness'. Far more 'fatal and further-reaching dangers to public morality and happiness' was the poison of racism, 'the circulation of malevolent writings whereby the equilibrium of sympathy between good men of different races is sought to be destroyed, through misleading appeals to the weaknesses and prejudices of readers'.<sup>34</sup>

As a supporter of West Indian self-government, James was almost certainly aware of Thomas's brilliant vindictory counter-blast to Froude. Yet what remains striking about *Froudacity* was the comparative silence about Haiti in comparison with the British West Indies, possibly on the grounds that it was more important to put a clear case for self-government by avoiding plunging into complicated historical controversies. Yet Froude had made repeated references to Haiti, and at one point even wrote a brief 'history' of the Haitian Revolution. It is possible that James as a historian felt a certain frustration while in colonial Trinidad with this silence of the democratic movement on the question of the Haiti. After all, as James later demonstrated regarding Froude's racist 'analysis' of the Haitian Revolution, 'every sentence that Froude writes is absolutely and completely wrong. *Every single*

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<sup>33</sup> Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or the bow of Ulysses*, pp. 345, 347-48.

<sup>34</sup> J.J. Thomas, *Froudacity; West Indian Fables explained* (London, 1969), pp. 165, 175-76.

sentence.<sup>35</sup> On arriving in England in 1932, James continued to research the Haitian Revolution. 'I began to look for materials and found only the same shallow ones I had read in the Caribbean. I immediately began to import books from France which dealt seriously with this memorable event in French history.'<sup>36</sup>

### Commemorating Anti-Slavery in Britain

The summer of 1933 in Britain saw the centenary anniversary of the official declaration of the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire. As J.R. Oldfield has noted, 'the centenary is best understood as a rolling programme of events that was intended to mark Emancipation (1 August 1834), as well as the passage of the Emancipation Bill in 1833 ... it seems likely that over 250 commemorative events were put on between March 1933 and November 1934'. As Oldfield continues, 'just as remarkable as the size and scale of these celebrations was their range and diversity', including not only lantern lectures, church services and meetings but at least seventeen performances of a specially commissioned pageant play, *Slavery or Towards Freedom*. First performed in London in October 1932, the play ranged chronologically from 500 A.D. to the present day, though it 'came dangerously close to reinforcing what was rapidly becoming a standard or orthodox view' by placing the Tory M.P. for Hull, William Wilberforce, centre-stage. As one character representing 'Liberty' noted, 'he caused the abolition of the slave trade'.<sup>37</sup>

We can follow the course of the national debate created around the issue through *The Listener*, the official journal of the B.B.C., which ran a series of articles by the great and good on 'Slavery, 1833-1933', the title of a series on B.B.C. National Radio. The B.B.C. series began in late April 1933 with 'The Crime of Slavery' by Sir John Harris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and author of *A Century of Emancipation* (1933).

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<sup>35</sup> C.L.R. James, 'The West Indian Intellectual', in J.J. Thomas, *Fraudacity: West Indian Fables explained* (London, 1969), p. 39. Italics in the original.

<sup>36</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, p. xv.

<sup>37</sup> J.R. Oldfield, "*Chords of Freedom*"; *Commemoration, ritual and British transatlantic slavery* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 92-104. See also Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, pp. 117-26.

This was followed by 'Britain's Efforts to Abolish the Slave Trade' by Charles Kingsley Webster, Professor of International History at the L.S.E. while the Beit Professor of Colonial History at Oxford University, Reginald Coupland, author of works such as *Wilberforce* (1923) and *The British Anti-Slavery Movement* (1933), commented on 'The Emancipation of the Slaves'. He was in turn followed by the Rt. Hon. The Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, who had helped set up the new Permanent Slavery Commission at the League of Nations, and then Lady Simon, author of *Slavery*. The theme of all of these self-satisfied experts can be summarised by one quote from Coupland, who noted with pompous pride that after abolishing the slave trade in 1807, 'Britain once more led the way in abolishing slavery itself'.<sup>38</sup>

By the 1930s, this invented tradition of an abolitionist British state fundamentally committed to liberty had become one of the oldest and most cherished myths of British nationalism. Soon to be reinforced by works such as C.M. MacInnes's *England and Slavery* (1934) and F.J. Klingberg's *The Antislavery movement in England*, this dominant view of abolition in Britain had held sway for over a century but been perhaps best summed up by the Victorian writer, W.E.H. Lecky, who insisted in his *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (1869) that 'the unweary, unostentatious and inglorious crusade of England against slavery may probably be regarded as among the three or four perfectly virtuous pages comprised in this history of nations'.<sup>39</sup>

It was this mythological and self-serving narrative which had helped ideologically legitimise Britain first taking the 'lion's share' of Africa in the European imperialist 'scramble' for that continent in the late nineteenth century, giving a supposedly abolitionist British state the moral high ground necessary to undertake Victorian 'civilising missions' among non-Europeans. After the Great War, this myth was steadily refashioned into a new sophisticated imperialist and

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<sup>38</sup> See *The Listener*, 26 April 1933, 3 May 1933, 10 May 1933, 24 May 1933. Of course, there were some discordant voices among some Conservatives in Britain to all this. Evelyn Waugh had recently visited Trinidad, and taking a leaf out of Froude's racist book, returned to Britain to challenge this national adulation of William Wilberforce, asking 'Was He Right to Free the Slaves?' 'Negroes', Waugh informed readers of the *Daily Express* in July 1933, were 'a superstitious and excitable riff-raff hanging round the rumshops and staring glistlessly at the Chinese, Madeiran and East Indian immigrants who outstrip them in every branch of life'. See *Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 August 1933. On the anti-black immigrant racism of John Harris in this period, see Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, pp. 135-43.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London, 1975), p. xx.

paternalist doctrine of 'trusteeship', which counter-posed 'good government' in the colonies to the rising demands among the colonised for immediate 'self-government'. In 1923, Coupland had insisted that William Wilberforce began a new 'tradition of humanity and of responsibility towards the weak and backward black peoples, whose fate lay in their hands. And that tradition has never died.' Or as Lady Simon maintained in her work *Slavery* (1929), 'Wilberforce was not the first to put forward the ideal of trusteeship for the backward races, but he was one of the first to put it into active and vigorous practice'.<sup>40</sup>

It was this idea that the 'backward races' of the British West Indies still needed the 'trusteeship' of Great Britain that James was determined to counter when, on the evening of 29 May 1933, he found himself sitting down in the studios of B.B.C. National Radio to give the sixth and final talk in the series on 'Slavery, 1833-1933'.<sup>41</sup> James's talk was published in that week's *The Listener* under the title 'A Century of Freedom'. In it James, the 'great-grandson of a freed slave tells how, since emancipation, the West Indian Negro has been able to attain to high positions of trust and responsibility in Trinidad and the West Indies'.<sup>42</sup> As James remembered of his broadcast,

I visualized my audience as people who had to be made to understand that West Indians were a Westernized people. I must have stressed the point too hard, in fact I know I did. Colonial officials in England, and others, began their protests to the B.B.C. almost before I had finished speaking.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Lady Simon, *Slavery* (London, 1929), p. 206. On the British imperial doctrine of Trusteeship, see Kenneth Robinson, *The Dilemmas of Trusteeship; Aspects of British Colonial Policy Between the Wars* (Oxford, 1965). See also Reginald Coupland, 'The British Commonwealth and Colonial Empire. Trusteeship for Backward Peoples', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 October 1936. Here Coupland noted that 'the Trust for the native peoples is vested in the British people'. Consciously invoking Wilberforce, and quoting Lecky for good measure, Coupland described how anti-slavery marked the birth of the 'humanitarian tradition' among the British people. That tradition was continued by the work of Dr. David Livingstone in Africa, and 'trusteeship' was now the 'humanitarian' option for British colonial empire. 'We cannot confess that our idealism is feebler than our fathers'. Coupland wrote, and 'we cannot dishonour the memory of Livingstone and Wilberforce'.

<sup>41</sup> For the Radio script of the lecture itself, see C.L.R. James, 'Slavery Today, 1833-1933 (6)', B.B.C. Written Archives Centre.

<sup>42</sup> James, 'A Century of Freedom,' *The Listener*, 31 May 1933.

<sup>43</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 121. James remembers Constantine was 'very, very pleased' by the broadcast while Harold Moody also paid tribute to James's intervention. See *The Keys*, 1/1 (July, 1933), p. 17. James replied to the storm of protest from colonial officials by making sure 'A Century

James's broadcast was praised by the *Port of Spain Gazette* regular columnist, 'Carton', who noted the addresses on Slavery up to now 'have been among the best of the "talks" of the present year', but amid a 'goodly company Mr. James competently held his own'.

Mr. James did not mince the situation, and he never descended to a gibe in the midst of his plain-speaking. The broadcast could not have been better done ... I suppose Mr. C.L.R. James is the only West Indian who, up to the present, can claim that he has addressed an audience of millions! To do this is only possible by the microphone, and from one of the great broadcasting centers of the world.<sup>44</sup>

Yet though stressing that West Indians were more than 'ready' now for self-government and democracy, perhaps aware that he was speaking as a member of the L.C.P. and from such a prestigious platform, James did little to challenge the elitist and mythological historical narrative that had been previously presented. Indeed, not only was there no mention of Toussaint Louverture or the Haitian Revolution, James chose to play down the significance of these earlier liberation struggles in the Caribbean altogether. 'The emancipation from slavery [in 1833] is the greatest event in the history of the West Indies. For the average West Indian Negro it is his Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, Independence Day, and French Revolution, all in one.'<sup>45</sup> In early August 1933, in an article for *Tit-Bits* magazine, James paid tribute to 'the memory of Wilberforce' but went even further in his praise for the British Parliament's passing of the Act in 1833, making the astonishing statement that for West Indians, 'our history begins with it. It is the year One of our calendar. Before that we had no history.'<sup>46</sup> After his major shift towards revolutionary Marxism and

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of Freedom' was 'circulated far and wide', including getting it published back home in the *Port of Spain Gazette* on 17 June 1933.

<sup>44</sup> *Port of Spain Gazette*, 2 July 1933, and 9 July 1933.

<sup>45</sup> James, 'A Century of Freedom', *The Listener*, 31 May 1933.

<sup>46</sup> James, 'Slavery today'. As a leading member of the L.C.P., James was even asked to give 'the oration on Wilberforce' at a 'civic week' organised by the Lord Mayor of Hull in late July 1933 to remember Hull's former illustrious M.P., no small honour, though in the event work commitments meant he spent that week in London, reporting Lancashire playing Surrey at the Oval for the

Pan-Africanism in the seminal year of 1934, James would never make such statements ever again in order to compromise with ‘imperial respectability’ and indeed would that year put the finishing touches to a play which in part set out to tell British audiences the truth about abolition.

### **Resurrecting a Revolutionary: C.L.R. James’s *Toussaint Louverture***

‘The play was conceived four years ago and was completely finished by the autumn of 1934’, James informs us in his author’s note in the original 1936 programme of *Toussaint Louverture*.<sup>47</sup> In the course of writing *Toussaint Louverture* James had become a Trotskyist, and one can detect the influence of Trotsky’s masterful *History of the Russian Revolution* in the play. As Trotsky had noted,

Thousands and thousands of books are thrown on the market every year presenting some new variant of the personal romance, some tale of the vacillations of the melancholic or the career of the ambitious. The heroine of Proust requires several finely wrought pages in order to feel that she does not feel anything. It would seem that one might, at least with equal justice, demand attention to a series of collective historic dramas which lifted hundreds of millions of human beings out of non-existence, transforming the character of nations and intruding for ever into the life of all mankind.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, ‘the history of a revolution’, Trotsky had written, ‘is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny’.<sup>49</sup> James’s stress on the agency of the masses of black slaves in lifting themselves out of non-existence during the ‘collective historic drama’ of the Haitian Revolution was to be the great underlying theme of his play *Toussaint Louverture*. As James notes in his stage instructions at the outset of Act 1, Scene 2 of *Toussaint*

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*Manchester Guardian*. See *The Keys*, 1/1, (July, 1933), p. 17. In the event, Harold Moody gave the oration in Hull. See *The Keys*, 1/2, (October, 1933), p. 22. The L.C.P. intervention in Hull is also described in Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson*, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> James, ‘Author’s Note’, *Toussaint Louverture* programme.

<sup>48</sup> Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 508.

<sup>49</sup> Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 17.

*Louverture*, the moment the enslaved of Saint Domingue had gathered in 1791 to plot their rising in the depths of the forest, ‘they, the Negro slaves, are the most important character in the play. Toussaint did not make the revolt. It was the revolt that made Toussaint.’ James’s play shows the transformation of the black masses themselves during the liberation struggle from being ‘nearly naked’ and ‘dirty and unkempt’. scattered in groups and living in fear of their white masters at the start of the play to forming what James describes as ‘a solid mass ... in dress and bearing ... a civilised people’ at the moment of final victory.

In the Haitian Revolution, the ideals of the Enlightenment, of liberty, equality and fraternity, became a material force to be reckoned with, embodied in the rebel slave army. During their mighty collective struggle for freedom, long-held and cherished beliefs in kingship, rooted in ancient tribal tradition, were transcended. James’s play accordingly was concerned with the vital question of revolutionary leadership, and in particular the heroic commander of the rebel slave army. It was Toussaint who had been central to ensuring it was the new ideas which triumphed over the old, and so the making of ‘the only successful slave revolt in history’.<sup>50</sup> James’s play ends with Dessalines performing what Paul B. Miller has described as ‘one of the most revolutionary symbolic and enlightened gestures in the history of the struggle for Independence in the Americas. Eager to differentiate the revolutionary army from the French enemy, he designs a new Haitian flag by removing the white from the French tricolour.’<sup>51</sup>

‘There is no drama like the drama of history’, James reflected in *The Black Jacobins*, after recording the cruel death of Toussaint Louverture, whose ‘life work’ had been ‘the maintenance of liberty for all’ at the hands of the French state in the Fort-de-Joux, a freezing cold prison in the Jura mountains in April 1803.<sup>52</sup> While writing the play *Toussaint Louverture* had allowed James full artistic freedom to

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<sup>50</sup> James, ‘Toussaint Louverture [DJH/21]’. *Toussaint Louverture’s* subtitle ‘the only successful slave revolt in history’ perhaps deserves more discussion. Robin Blackburn notes that ‘resistance has been ubiquitous in slave systems but has usually been particularistic, seeking freedom for a given person or group, and frustrated. In fact the Haitian Revolution is the only successful large-scale and generalized slave revolt known in history.’ See Robin Blackburn, ‘Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 63/4, (2006).

<sup>51</sup> Paul B. Miller, ‘Enlightened Hesitations: Black Masses and Tragic Heroes in C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins*’, *MLN*, 116/5, (2001), p. 1084.

<sup>52</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 294.

portray the life, character and tragic death of the heroic revolutionary personality, it should not be forgotten that in many ways *The Black Jacobins* also had at its heart a biography of Toussaint.<sup>53</sup> Toussaint, James insisted, ‘dominated from his entry until circumstances removed him from the scene. The history of the San Domingo revolution will therefore largely be a record of his achievements and his political personality.’<sup>54</sup>

The revolution had made him; but it would be a vulgar error to suppose that the creation of a disciplined army, the defeat of the English and the Spaniards, the defeat of Rigaud, the establishment of a strong government all over the island, the growing harmony between the races, the enlightened aims of the administration - it would be a crude error to believe that all these were inevitable. At a certain stage, the middle of 1794, the potentialities in the chaos began to be shaped and soldered by his powerful personality, and thenceforth it is impossible to say where the social forces end and the impress of personality begins.<sup>55</sup>

Such a stress on the importance of Toussaint’s revolutionary leadership challenges the assumption that James’s *Black Jacobins* was somehow about attempting to demonstrate that ‘the lack of specially-trained leaders, a vanguard, did not hold back the movement of the San Domingo revolution’.<sup>56</sup> There are lots of possible influences shaping James’s critical stress on the role of the individual in history here. For example, in 1937, Secker & Warburg had published *Bonaparte* by the great Soviet historian Eugene Tarlé, a biography of Napoleon James consulted while writing *The Black Jacobins*.<sup>57</sup> In his introduction, Tarlé distinguished his Marxist approach from the ‘romantic or idealistic conceptions of history’ as well as ‘that species known as the “heroic school”’ who ‘ascribed to Napoleon ‘the role of

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<sup>53</sup> ‘I had long intended to write a biography of Toussaint L’Ouverture as a study in colonial revolution’, James once recalled. James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. xviii-xix.

<sup>55</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>56</sup> Grimshaw, ‘C.L.R. James: A Revolutionary Vision’, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 348. On Tarlé, who was arrested and imprisoned by the Stalinist regime in 1930 and briefly exiled to Alma Ata in Kazakhstan in 1931, see Ann K. Erickson, ‘E.V. Tarle: The Career of a Historian under the Soviet Regime’, *American Slavic and East European Review*, 19 2, (1960).

“creator” of his epoch’. Nonetheless, ‘the man, with whose life and personality this book deals, presents one of the most extraordinary phenomena in world history’:

For us, the Napoleonic empire is the birth of the stubborn conflict of new social and economic forces, a conflict which did not begin with Napoleon or end with him, and whose basic significance consisted in the victorious assault of the middle class against the feudal and semi-feudal order in France and Europe. This struggle was complicated by the simultaneous conflict between the French and the economically more powerful English commercial and industrial groups for control of the more backward countries. This, and the wars of national liberation which followed, succeeded in placing Europe on the road of “free” capitalism. It does not mean, however, that we should underestimate the gigantic personality standing in the centre of this dual conflict and imposing upon it the impress of his tragic destiny.<sup>58</sup>

James’s debt to Trotsky’s masterpieces of historical literature, *My Life* and *The History of the Russian Revolution*, are also fundamental in this context. Trotsky’s *History* for example explicitly stressed the crucial role played by Lenin in making the October Revolution after arriving back in Russia from exile in April 1917 during a revolutionary situation.

The role of the personality arise before us here on a truly gigantic scale. It is necessary only to understand that role correctly, taking personality as a link in the historic chain ... from the extraordinary significance which Lenin’s arrival received, it should be inferred that leaders are not accidentally created, that they are gradually chosen out and trained up in the course of decades, that they cannot be capriciously replaced.<sup>59</sup>

Many commentators, from Isaac Deutscher onwards, have challenged Trotsky’s stress on personality and the role of the individual in history, arguing that it ‘goes so strongly against the grain of the Marxist intellectual tradition’, as laid down

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<sup>58</sup> Eugene Tarlé, *Bonaparte* (London, 1937), pp. 9-11.

<sup>59</sup> Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 343-44.

most famously by Plekhanov.<sup>60</sup> Anthony Maingot has accordingly accused James in *The Black Jacobins* of ‘voluntarism’ (as opposed to ‘orthodox Marxism’ and ‘materialism’), asserting that ‘for Engels ... there were no indispensable heroes’. This is not the place to go into that debate at length here, but it is worth remembering that if Engels really ‘depersonalized history’ as claimed by Maingot, then the question might be asked why, for example, he thought it important to spend so long discussing ‘the magnificent figure’ of Thomas Münzer, ‘the soul of the entire revolutionary movement in Southwestern Germany’ during 1525, in *The Peasant War in Germany*.<sup>61</sup> As one writer, almost certainly James, wrote in *Fight* in June 1937,

Revolutionary Socialists accept the materialist interpretation of history. They see a man himself in terms of the nation, the epoch, the class and the family to which he belongs. Nevertheless they recognise the role of the individual. On the October Revolution was the imprint of Lenin. The character of the counter-revolution is in the rude, disloyalty of Stalin.<sup>62</sup>

### **C.L.R. James, Eric Williams and the Destruction of the Myth of Abolition**

When James resigned his prestigious post as a lecturer in English and History at Trinidad’s Government Training College in order to come to Britain, the job was initially offered to a former student of James’s at Q.R.C., Eric Williams. However, Williams had also been training, with James’s help, for a Trinidadian Government Scholarship to go and study at Oxford University, and when he successfully won this he followed in James’s footsteps and came to Britain in 1932 as well.<sup>63</sup> James has

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<sup>60</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, pp. 241-47. For a defence of Trotsky here against Deutscher see Neil Davidson, ‘The Prophet, His Biographer and the Watchtower’, *International Socialism*, 104, (2004).

<sup>61</sup> Anthony P. Maingot, ‘Politics and populist historiography in the Caribbean: Juan Bosch and Eric Williams’, in Alistair Hennessy (ed.), *Intellectuals in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean: Volume II, Unity in Variety: The Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean* (London, 1992), pp. 150-51. Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (Moscow, 1956), pp. 50, 77.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Politics and psychology’, *Fight*, 1/7, (June, 1937).

<sup>63</sup> Williams, *Inward Hunger*, p. 39.

described meeting Williams in 1932, 'congratulating him on his scholarship and saying to him that I was glad to see that he had broken out of the law and medicine routine and was going in for history. I said: "You need not be afraid of the future. Trinidad and Tobago in 15 years will be a very different place from what it is now."'64 The young Williams studied hard for an undergraduate degree in Modern History at Oxford, which involved studying Latin, French, European History from 700 to 1789 and Political Economy, while he took a special subject in British Colonial History from 1830-60.65 As James remembered, 'Williams used to come to my house in London and spend his vacations with me. Frequently I used to go up to Oxford and spend some time with him ... He used to send me his papers from Oxford on Rousseau, on Plato and on Aristotle for my comments.'66 James also recalls spending free evenings on pub-crawls around London with Williams and his friends from Oxford, which he could enjoy so long as he had 'Marx, Jane Austen or H.G. Wells in my pocket'.67

In 1935, Williams graduated with first class honours, a tremendous achievement. 'I had come, seen and conquered - at Oxford!' At the start of the new term in September 1935, Williams enrolled on another course in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (P.P.E.) in order to try and win an All Souls Fellowship.68 However he was unsuccessful in winning a Fellowship, and abandoned his P.P.E. course in 1936 to return to historical scholarship. By summer 1936, James's play *Toussaint Louverture* had been performed and he was working on what would become *World Revolution*. James's research on Haiti was now very advanced, and indeed before he decided to write on the Communist International he had already secured a contract with Methuen to publish his history of the Haitian Revolution in 1937.69 According to James, in the summer of 1936,

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64 James, 'Dr. Eric Williams', p. 332.

65 Williams, *Inward Hunger*, pp. 40, 49.

66 Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander (eds.), *Kas-Kas; Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas: George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris* (Texas, 1972), pp. 36-37.

67 Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Archive*, p. 59.

68 Williams, *Inward Hunger*, pp. 43, 45.

69 After James had finished writing *World Revolution*, he cancelled his contract with Methuen, and published *The Black Jacobins* with Secker & Warburg.

... [Williams] came to me, as he usually did, asking me questions. He said, "I am to do a doctorate. What shall I write on?" ... I told him, "I know exactly what you should write on. I have done the economic basis of slavery emancipation as it was in France. But that has never been done in Great Britain, and Britain is wide open for it. A lot of people think the British showed good will. There were lots of people who had good will, but it was the basis, the economic basis that allowed the good will to function." He said, "Do you think it will be good?" I said, "Fine." He said, "Well, what shall I say?" I said, "Give me some paper!" and I sat down and wrote what the thesis should be with my own hand, and I gave it to him. He must have copied it down, and took it to the Oxford authorities. Later he told me they said it was fine. And he went from there.<sup>70</sup>

Whatever input James had in formulating the primary thesis, Williams began to study a doctorate on 'The Economic Aspect of the Abolition of the West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery', 'of all the chapters in British colonial history, the least known'. His tutor for his doctorate was Vincent Harlow, a historian of seventeenth-century Barbados, and 'the premier colonial scholar at Oxford'.<sup>71</sup> James remembers whenever he now went over to France for research purposes, Williams 'would go with me'.<sup>72</sup>

However, there was more than James's Marxism turning the two West Indians away from the traditional focus on religion and the rise of 'humanitarianism' in Britain, championed by the likes of Coupland, and towards a focus on the social and economic realities of the Caribbean. Williams was right to note that 'no work of scholarly importance had been done in England' on the abolition of the slave trade, and that 'the British historians wrote almost as if Britain had introduced Negro slavery solely for the satisfaction of abolishing it'.<sup>73</sup> However, outside England there

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<sup>70</sup> Munro and Sander (eds.), *Kas-Kas*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>71</sup> Williams, *Inward Hunger*, pp. 49, 51.

<sup>72</sup> Munro and Sander (eds.), *Kas-Kas*, pp. 36-37. Williams did not go to France while an undergraduate at Oxford. See Williams, *Inward Hunger*, pp. 42, 51.

<sup>73</sup> Williams, *Inward Hunger*, p. 49. Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies*, p. 182.

had been work done.<sup>74</sup> As James later told Stuart Hall, while in France he came across French historians who ‘had made it clear, that the movement toward the abolition of slavery came from the capitalistic element who were tired with the poor production of ... feudalism and slavery ... I had learnt this in France, I didn’t discover it.’<sup>75</sup>

Equally important was a 1928 work by an American historian, Lowell Joseph Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833; A Study in Social and Economic History*. Like several other white American professors in the 1920s, Ragatz was personally racist.<sup>76</sup> Yet Ragatz understood the need to examine the social and economic history of the Caribbean, and he traced a quite amazing long-term structural decline of the West Indies from the 1750s to the 1830s. In the 1750s, West Indian sugar planters ‘were the conspicuously rich men of Great Britain’, often absentee landlords like the Lascelles family who owned Harewood House. ‘Sugar was king. They who produced it constituted the power behind the throne, and the islands on which their opulence and commanding position had been reared were regarded by all as the most valued of overseas possessions.’<sup>77</sup> However by the 1820s, the position of this once powerful planter class in the British Caribbean could not be more different, as the once beneficial monopoly of trade with Britain became a stranglehold, ‘the dwindling returns from their decayed properties all but completely engrossed by creditors’. ‘The sugar colonies themselves, sunk into social and economic stagnation, were viewed with hostile eyes and their value to the homeland was commonly questioned ... Never in imperial history has there been a more striking contrast.’<sup>78</sup> The impact Ragatz’s thesis made on James and Williams should

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<sup>74</sup> In 1905, there had been important insights in a German work of economic history by Franz Hochsetter, though it is unlikely either James or Williams were aware of this. See Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, p. xxi.

<sup>75</sup> Hall, ‘A Conversation with C.L.R. James’, p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> ‘The West Indian negro had all the characteristics of his race. He stole, he lied, he was simple, suspicious, inefficient, irresponsible, lazy, superstitious, and loose in his sex relations.’ Lowell Joseph Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833; A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York, 1963), p. 27.

<sup>77</sup> Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*, pp. vii, 50. Ragatz noted the time King George III and Prime Minister Pitt were visiting Weymouth and their encounter with a wealthy white Jamaican absentee planter who had an imposing array of servants and luxuries even greater than that of the King himself. ‘His Majesty, much displeased, is reputed to have exclaimed, “sugar, sugar, eh! All *that* sugar! How are the duties. eh, Pitt, how are the duties?”’

<sup>78</sup> Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*, p. vii.

not be underestimated. James thought it ‘yet another of those monumental pieces of research into European history which American scholarship is giving us in such profusion’.<sup>79</sup> When Williams’s thesis was eventually published, he dedicated it to Ragatz, ‘whose monumental labours in this field may be amplified and developed but can never be superceded’.<sup>80</sup>

In 1935, Reginald Coupland had given a lecture on ‘The Meaning of Wilberforce’.

The conscience of all England was awakened. That, in a word, is how the slave system was abolished. Not because it was good policy or good business to abolish it - it was neither, it was the opposite - but simply because of its iniquity.<sup>81</sup>

In 1933, James had written that ‘the slave trade is the one trade which has never felt a slump’.<sup>82</sup> James did not retreat from that argument in *The Black Jacobins*, noting ‘profits were always high’, but simply pointed out that ‘nothing, however profitable, goes on forever’.<sup>83</sup> However, after reading Ragatz, it seemed clear that the British had partly abolished the slave trade because they were slowly realising that slavery itself was not as profitable as free labour, nor the old mercantilist system as potentially profitable as free trade.

The rising industrial bourgeoisie, feeling its way to free trade ... were beginning their victorious attack upon the agricultural monopoly which was to culminate in the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The West Indian sugar-producers were monopolists whose methods of production afforded an easy target, and Adam Smith and

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<sup>79</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 334.

<sup>80</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1981), p. iv. According to James, Ragatz himself, ‘the acknowledged master of this period’, ‘encouraged Williams all the way for what he recognised was a highly significant revaluation of one of the most important historical events in world history’. James, ‘Dr. Eric Williams’, p. 336.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies*, p. 157.

<sup>82</sup> James, ‘Slavery Today’.

<sup>83</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 18, 21.

Arthur Young, the forerunners of the new era, condemned the whole principle of slave-labour as the most expensive in the world.<sup>84</sup>

James now tore into Coupland and his ilk with typically devastating wit.

Those who see in abolition the gradually awakening conscience of mankind should spend a few minutes asking themselves why it is man's conscience, which had slept peacefully for so many centuries, should awake just at the time that men began to see the unprofitableness of slavery as a method of production in the West Indian colonies.<sup>85</sup>

Coupland's ilk were 'a venal race of scholars', who, because 'profiteering panders to national vanity, have conspired to obscure the truth about abolition'. In a few path-breaking paragraphs, and for arguably the very first time in the English language, James, in the words of Roger Anstey, had 'propounded an ingenious explanation of how humanitarian motives were subordinated to economics in the Younger Pitt's conduct of abolition in the 1790s'.<sup>86</sup> For this section, James had doubtless been helped more than he acknowledged by Williams, who spent two years undertaking doctoral research in the Public Record Office, Parliamentary Papers, Hansard records, Colonial Office papers, Foreign office papers and the Chatham papers.<sup>87</sup>

In 1944, in his classic *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams would rightly praise James for having presented 'in a general way the relationship between capitalism and slavery' in *The Black Jacobins*. However, Williams erred slightly when he followed this up by declaring that 'the thesis advanced' in *Capitalism and Slavery* is 'stated clearly and concisely and, as far as I know, for the first time in English' in *The Black*

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<sup>84</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 42.

<sup>85</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], p. 311.

<sup>86</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 41-43. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, p. xxi. For more discussion of James's achievements, see David Richardson (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath* (London, 1985).

<sup>87</sup> Williams, *Inward Hunger*, p. 50. James apparently also read two drafts of Williams's thesis, which was successfully awarded a Ph.D. in December 1938, after James had left Britain. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, p. 39.

*Jacobins*.<sup>88</sup> For in *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams went further than he did in his Oxford thesis, and now tried to suggest that colonial slavery had made possible the breakthrough in England of modern capitalism, which in turn then killed slavery because of free trade and the profitable advantages of free labour.<sup>89</sup>

For James, the enormous profits from slavery and the slave trade did of course help ‘enrich British capitalism’ and French capitalism and so help bring down the old aristocracy and its colonial monopoly in France. Indeed, ‘slavery and the colonial trade were the fount and origin and sustenance’ of France’s ‘thriving industry and far-flung commerce’.

Long before 1789 the French bourgeoisie was the most powerful economic force in France, and the slave-trade and the colonies were the basis of its wealth and power. The slave trade was the economic basis of the French Revolution. “Sad irony of human history,” comments Jaurès. “The fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes, by the slave trade, gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation.”<sup>90</sup>

Yet James in *The Black Jacobins*, in an outstanding application of the ‘law of uneven and combined development’, grasped something that Williams did not, which was that Atlantic slavery and the slave trade, the plantations and the slave ships, were fundamentally *modern capitalist* institutions in themselves, things which did not just enrich but had been themselves formed by ‘the French bourgeoisie’ and ‘the British bourgeoisie’. James described the plantations as ‘huge sugar-factories’ and the slaves as a proto-proletariat, indeed ‘closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time and the rising was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organised mass movement’. When they rose as ‘revolutionary labourers’ and set

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<sup>88</sup> Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 268. Williams refers specifically to pages 38-41 of the 1938 edition of *The Black Jacobins*.

<sup>89</sup> For analysis of William’s 1938 Oxford thesis, see Howard Temperley, ‘Eric Williams and Abolition: The Birth of a New Orthodoxy’, in Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.) *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery; The Legacy of Eric Williams* (Cambridge, 1987), and Seymour Drescher, *From Slavery to Freedom; Comparative Studies in the Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery* (London, 1999), pp. 358-60.

<sup>90</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 6, 38-40. For more on ‘slavery and accumulation’, see ‘Part Two’ of Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery; From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London, 1998).

fire to the plantations, James compared them to ‘the Luddite wreckers’.<sup>91</sup> Vindicated in his views about the essential modernity of the West Indian working class by the recent Caribbean labour rebellions, James would describe the most militant rebels of the Haitian Revolution as ‘revolutionaries through and through ... own brothers of the Cordeliers in Paris and the Vyborg workers in Petrograd’.<sup>92</sup> It was James’s grasp of the modernity of Atlantic slavery and the slave experience that made *The Black Jacobins* such an outstanding advance on all previous scholarship as much as his understanding of the class dynamics of abolition.<sup>93</sup>

For James, the battle over abolition was not simply between the dynamic industrial bourgeoisie of Britain on the one hand and the stagnant West Indian sugar planter-class and their representatives in Parliament on the other, itself ‘but one stage in the successive victories of the industrial bourgeoisie over the landed aristocracy’.<sup>94</sup> It was also a struggle between two factions of the British capitalist class - ‘the British bourgeois’ who were the ‘most successful of slave-traders’ against ‘those British bourgeois who had no West Indian interests’ who now ‘with tears rolling down their cheeks for the poor suffering blacks ... set up a great howl for the abolition of the slave trade’.<sup>95</sup> James’s *Black Jacobins* did not dishonour the memory of the historic contribution made by ‘those millions of honest English Nonconformists who listened to their clergymen and gave strength to the English movement for the abolition of slavery’, people whom ‘the sons of Africa and the lovers of humanity will remember with gratitude and affection’. Yet James damned the likes of Wilberforce, those he called, invoking a phrase of Cecil Rhodes, ‘the “philanthropy plus five per cent” hypocrites in the British Houses of Parliament’.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 69, 71, 73.

<sup>92</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 224.

<sup>93</sup> James developed on this profound Marxist insight in his 1963 appendix to *The Black Jacobins*, where he explained how, in language that perhaps only a black West Indian can really get away with, that ‘the sugar plantation has been the most civilising as well as the most demoralising influence in West Indian development’. ‘The Negroes, therefore, from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life. That is their history - as far as I have been able to discover, a unique history.’ James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 305-306. For more on the relationship between capitalism and slavery, see Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, pp. 376-77, and Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 113.

<sup>94</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], p. 311.

<sup>95</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 41.

<sup>96</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 113.

The slave trade and colonial slavery in the Americas had been seen as so natural and essential to the success of the emerging global capitalist system and the making of the modern world that very few Europeans even questioned it, let alone agitated for its end. It was to be the Haitian Revolution that began in 1791 that, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, ‘blasted open the continuum of this history’, forcing the French to abolish slavery across their vast Empire in 1794 within three years of the Revolution beginning and forcing the British to abandon their participation in the highly profitable Atlantic slave trade in 1807 only three years after the Revolution end.<sup>97</sup> It is true that W.E.B. Du Bois had grasped this essential truth in passing back in 1897 in his thesis on the *Suppression of the Slave Trade*. Yet James in 1938 for the first time historically demonstrated that it was indeed the Haitian Revolution that ‘killed the West Indian slave-trade and slavery’.<sup>98</sup> Through a skilful use of sources and the insights of other historians including even the likes of the Tory military historian J.W. Fortesque, James eloquently destroyed some of the most cherished assumptions of British nationalist historiography.<sup>99</sup> In *The Black Jacobins*, James did not just ‘effectively for the first time’ give ‘slaves an agency’, he made the emancipation from slavery and the slave-trade the act of the enslaved themselves.<sup>100</sup>

### **Romanticism and Revolutionary History**

In his important and insightful work *Conscripts of Modernity*, David Scott has stressed how *The Black Jacobins* is ‘above all, a literary-historical exercise in revolutionary Romanticism ... a modernist allegory of anticolonial revolution written in the mode of a historical Romance’. It is perhaps worth dwelling a little further here on how what Scott calls ‘Romanticism and the longing for anticolonial

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<sup>97</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History [1940]’, in Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations* (London, 1999), p. 254. See also Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm; Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History"* (London, 2005).

<sup>98</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 311.

<sup>99</sup> J.W. Fortesque, *A History of the British Army*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (London, 1906). James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>100</sup> The words in quotation marks are those of James Walvin. James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. viii.

revolution' might have shaped James's work.<sup>101</sup> Without wishing to distract any attention away from the importance of what might be called 'the four Williams', Hazlitt, Shakespeare, Thackeray and Wordsworth to the young James's life-long love of English literature, one writer among the many which he read in Trinidad is often somewhat overlooked.<sup>102</sup> This was the American novelist James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), whose *Last of the Mohicans* as we have seen so inspired the young James.<sup>103</sup> Though often simply seen as a writer of 'adventure stories', the Hegelian Marxist theorist and literary critic Georg Lukács more properly termed Cooper's writings classical 'historical novels', and recognised him as the only worthy follower of the great Sir Walter Scott in the English language. Scott himself had experienced the tumult of the revolutionary wave of 1789-1815, and as Lukács noted in *The Historical Novel* (1937), Scott's vision of history was therefore one of 'an uninterrupted series of such revolutionary crises'. 'The important thing' for Scott in his historical novels was 'to lay bare those vast, heroic, human potentialities which are always latently present in the people and which, on each big occasion, with every deep disturbance of the social or even the more personal life, emerge "suddenly," with colossal force, to the surface'.<sup>104</sup> Anyone, whether a revolutionary or a reactionary, who had experienced living through the period 1789-1815 as Scott had done, would have found it difficult to imagine the history of humanity as an essentially unchanging process, conflict and crisis free.

Indeed, in a fundamental sense, the collective experience of the Great French Revolution gave birth to the discipline of 'History' itself as a science out of literature, in what Frederick Engels called the 'triumph of realism'.<sup>105</sup> If the earthquake which

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<sup>101</sup> Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, pp. 58-59. The literature on *The Black Jacobins* is not insubstantial. See, for example, Hall, 'Breaking Bread with History,' Brian Meeks, 'Re-reading *The Black Jacobins*: James, the Dialectic and the Revolutionary Conuncture,' *Social and Economic Studies*, 43/3, (1994), and James, 'Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*'.

<sup>102</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 17. In the 1938 preface to *The Black Jacobins*, James alluded to Wordsworth's famous Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, which had noted that 'poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity'. John O. Hayden (ed.), *William Wordsworth: Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth, 1988), p. 297.

<sup>103</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 26. Small, 'The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist', p. 51. See also the discussion of Fenimore Cooper in James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, p. 38.

<sup>104</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 56-57, 70.

<sup>105</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 59.

had just shaken the *ancien regime* to its very foundations was to be explained and understood, then a new approach to explain change in society was necessary. In the 1820s, pioneering French liberal historians like Augustin Thierry (1795-1856), Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), François Guizot (1787-1874) and François Mignet (1796-1884) brought some order to the inspired frenzy of revolution. To defend the legitimacy of the democratic gains of the French Revolution, they portrayed the rise to power of the 'Third Estate' in 1789 as the rational and inevitable triumph of the productive classes over the privileged and corrupt. In passionately championing the upheaval as a *bourgeois* revolution, these liberal historians put class, and class struggle, at the centre of historical analysis for the very first time, and their new materialist analysis now suggested that the whole history of civilization needed to be completely written afresh.<sup>106</sup> Thierry called for a 'new history' to replace the traditional dynastic focus on Kings and their courts, a popular history that was 'alive' instead of accounts of the past which were not only 'cold and monotonous' but also 'false and contrived'.<sup>107</sup> The French Revolution, Thierry noted, has 'taught us to understand the revolution of the Middle Ages; to discern the fundamental character of things beneath the letters of the chronicles', and declared that politically identifying with the collective struggles of the people 'suggests insights, divinations, sometimes even leaps of genius' to the historian, discoveries 'which disinterested scholarship and a purely zealous love of truth would not have led'.<sup>108</sup> After the 1830 Revolution in France, which saw the rise of Liberalism (and indeed liberals like Thiers and Guizot themselves) to power, it fell to more radical French historians like Jules Michelet (1798-1874) and Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), and then the first socialist historians like Louis Blanc (1811-82), to now defend the spirit of the Great French Revolution.

Yet whether liberal, radical or socialist, all of these outstanding French historians had been inspired by Romanticism, and their writings from the 1820s to the

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<sup>106</sup> Marx praised Thierry as 'the father of the "class struggle" in French historiography'. See Lionel Gossman, *Between History and Literature* (London, 1990), p. 102. See also Marx's famous letter to Joseph Weydemeyer in March 1852. 'And now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle.' See Marx, Engels, Lenin, *On Historical Materialism* (Moscow, 1984), p. 284.

<sup>107</sup> Ann Rigney, *The rhetoric of historical representation* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, p. 96.

1840s were vivid ‘rolling historical narratives’ in the spirit of Scott’s ‘historical novels’. As Thierry noted of Scott, ‘there is more true history in his novels of England and Scotland than in many compilations that still go by the name of histories’. The great writer Alexandre Dumas praised Lamartine for having ‘raised history to the level of a novel’.<sup>109</sup> The French Romantic historians wrote true ‘livre populaire’, books for the people, designed as if to urgently summon their readers to the heights of revolutionary action achieved by their ancestors in the past. For Michelet, whom Lionel Gossman describes as ‘the greatest of French Romantic historians and one of the greatest historians of all time’, history was about a ‘resurrection de la vie integrale’, the resurrection of life in its totality, something he felt was not just a possibility but a burning necessity. Michelet’s *History of the French Revolution* (1847-53) was not simply about reclaiming the hidden history of the French people; it aimed to be the Gospel of a new religion of humanity.<sup>110</sup>

While researching the Haitian Revolution both in Nelson and in France itself, James had come across some of these French Romantic historians’ dramatic accounts, which succeeded in bringing the Great French Revolution to life like nothing else he had read.<sup>111</sup> James later reflected that to write the history of a revolution one needed not only ‘scholarship’ but also ‘that respect for the Revolution without which the history of revolution cannot be written’, and he always stressed that few writers ever had more respect for the revolutionary spirit than Michelet.<sup>112</sup> However, after the

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<sup>109</sup> Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, p. 95, and G.P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth century* (London, 1913), p. 228.

<sup>110</sup> Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, pp. 155, 167, 203. For more on Michelet, see Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, pp. 66-68.

<sup>111</sup> It may be relevant to note that George Lamming, discussing James’s verbal ‘style of expression’, stressed that ‘he had, in a way I had not encountered before or since, a certain tone and clarity of delivery which made any historical event or the most abstract idea, come alive as though these were a part of his personal experience. If he made reference to the French Revolution of 1789, you got the impression that he was actually there; he saw what happened, and had a special claim to the truth about that explosion.’ George Lamming, ‘C.L.R. James, Evangelist’, in Richard Drayton and Andaiye (eds.), *Conversations; George Lamming: Essays, Addresses and Interviews 1953-1990* (London, 1992), p. 195.

<sup>112</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 331. In 1940, James would pay tribute to the ‘erratic passion’ of Michelet, and his ‘fiery’ *History of the French Revolution*, as well as mentioning in passing François Guizot. See James, ‘Trotsky’s Place in History’, pp. 120-21. For more on Michelet’s influence on James, see Foot, ‘C.L.R. James’. It would be a fascinating project to compare James’s *Toussaint Louverture* with the play of the same title written by Alphonse de Lamartine in 1848, precisely because Lamartine stood in this great liberal Romantic tradition and James read Lamartine’s play. See James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 348. For a brief discussion of Lamartine’s intriguing *Toussaint Louverture*, see Clark, ‘Haiti’s Tragic Overture’, pp. 243-45.

wave of revolution across Europe in 1848, and particularly the workers' uprising in Paris in June 1848, which baffled the likes of Michelet, it was increasingly left to the authors of *The Communist Manifesto* and then socialist historians inspired by Marxism to defend the spirit of revolution.<sup>113</sup> Yet what perhaps needs to be stressed is the extent to which Marx not only built on the materialist foundations laid by the French Romantic historians but was also inspired by the power of their writing. As Engels noted, Marx had a 'particular predilection' for French history, and what Marx owed to Romanticism can be perhaps most clearly seen in his dramatic account of the Napoleon III's *coup d'état* of 1851, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).<sup>114</sup>

Yet by far and away the most important intellectual inspiration for James when he came to write *The Black Jacobins* was Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. Trotsky's biographer, Isaac Deutscher, has argued that 'to Marx's minor historical works, *The Class Struggle in France*, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, and *The Civil War in France*, Trotsky's *History* stands as the large mural painting stands to the miniature'.<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, if there is such a thing, what might be called 'the Romantic soul of historical materialism' burns as bright in Trotsky's *History* as it did in Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*. As David Scott notes, comparing Trotsky to Michelet,

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<sup>113</sup> Michelet always identified more with the artisans and the historic 'sans culottes' as opposed to the emerging industrial working class. For his reaction to the events of June 1848, see Gossman, *Between History and Literature*, pp. 191, 195. It should also be noted that Marxists were not alone after 1848 in defending the 'revolutionary spirit'. For example, perhaps on the suggestion of Charlie Lahr, James read the great anarchist Peter Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution* (1909), a work in 1938 he described as having a 'more instinctive understanding of revolution than any well-known book on this subject' and in 1963 described as 'the best general book in English' on the French Revolution. See James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], p. 320, and James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 332. It might be noted in passing that Kropotkin's book was translated into Italian by one Benito Mussolini, then a young revolutionary socialist. Kropotkin, incidently, thought Mussolini's translation 'brilliant'. See Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution* (Quebec, 1989), p. xv.

<sup>114</sup> Frederick Engels, 'Preface to the Third German Edition' in Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow, 1984), p. 9. The classic account of what Marx owes to Michelet is Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* (1940), which James himself reviewed. See Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station; A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (London, 1967), and C.L.R. James, 'To and From the Finland Station', in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism; Selected writings of C.L.R. James, 1939-49* (New Jersey, 1994).

<sup>115</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p. 219.

... the old dream of revolution came to be keyed to a new idea of the rhythm of history, a new conception of historical agency, and a new idea of how to self-consciously wrest the future from the past ... if the tone of Trotsky's narrative is less oracular and the composition less lyrical, less given to rhapsodic flights of poetic flourish than Michelet's, the dominant mode of emplotment nevertheless remains that of Romance.<sup>116</sup>

For James, Trotsky's *History* was therefore 'far more than a brilliant history of a great event' but 'the greatest history book ever written and one of the most stupendous and significant pieces of literature ever produced in any language'. The *History* was 'the climax of two thousand years of European writing and the study of history,' and Trotsky was the historian *par excellence*:

In pure style, this materialist, as rigid with fact as Scaliger, is exceeded in no sphere by any one of his ancestors, not by Thucydides in proportion and lucidity, nor by Tacitus in invective, nor by Gibbon in dignity, nor Michelet in passion, nor by Macaulay, that great bourgeois, in efficiency. There is a profound lesson here not only in history but in aesthetics.<sup>117</sup>

James's *The Black Jacobins* is also one of the few works of Marxist history that can take their place alongside Trotsky's monumental work, and the spirit at least of Deutscher's discussion of Trotsky's *History* should also be considered with respect to James.

Whereas Marx towers above the disciple in the power of his abstract thought and gothic imagination, the disciple is superior as epic artist, especially as master of the graphic portrayal of masses and individuals in action. His socio-political analysis and artistic vision are in such concord that there is no trace of any divergence. His thought and his imagination take flight together. He expounds his theory of revolution with the tension and the *élan* of narrative; and his narrative takes depth from his ideas. His scenes, portraits, and dialogues, sensuous in their reality, are inwardly illuminated by

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<sup>116</sup> Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, p. 68.

<sup>117</sup> James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', pp. 118, 123. For more discussion of the debates between Marxists about Trotsky's *History*, see Paul Blackledge, 'Leon Trotsky's contribution to the Marxist theory of history,' *Studies in East European Thought*, 58, (2006), and Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist theory of history* (Manchester, 2006).

his conception of the historical process ... The *History* is his crowning work, both in scale and power and as the fullest expression of his ideas on revolution.<sup>118</sup>

The Haitian Revolution, as Errol Hill once noted, 'is the most epic of West Indian stories', and James was concerned when writing *The Black Jacobins* to bring alive what he called 'the drama of history' through an epic Romantic work that might inspire and instruct those engaged not simply in pursuing 'The Case for West Indian Self-Government' but those involved in anti-colonial movements across the African diaspora.<sup>119</sup> That James succeeded in writing an epic 'grand narrative' of great literary power and dramatic quality is not in doubt. As Rosengarten puts it, 'it isn't difficult to find pages of *The Black Jacobins* that rival stylistically anything James ever wrote as a novelist, short-story writer, dramatist or literary critic'.<sup>120</sup> Robert Hill has gone as far as to suggest that *The Black Jacobins* stands as the *War and Peace* of the Caribbean.

In addition to its significance as the founding text of West Indian historical scholarship, *The Black Jacobins* ranks as the great epic of West Indian literature. Like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which describes the epic story of Russia's struggle during the Napoleonic wars, James' account of the Haitian Revolution expresses a parallel national vision for the West Indies.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, pp. 219-20, 230.

<sup>119</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 294; Hill, 'Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies', p. 20.

<sup>120</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 157. See, for example, James's evocative description of the uprising itself on Saint Domingue in August 1791. James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>121</sup> Hill, 'C.L.R. James: The Myth of Western Civilisation', p. 255. James had read Tolstoy while still in Trinidad, among other Russian novelists such as Dostoevsky and Chekhov. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 71. For an illuminating discussion of *War and Peace* that helps enable one to better compare and contrast the work to *The Black Jacobins*, see Hayden White, 'Against Historical Realism: A Reading of "War and Peace"', *New Left Review*, Second Series, 46, (2007).

## Marxism, Colonial History and the Haitian Revolution

Trotsky once remarked that ‘what has been written with the sword cannot be wiped out by the pen ... at least so far as the sword of revolution is concerned’.<sup>122</sup> This did not of course stop those James called ‘Tory historians, regius professors and sentimentalists’, ‘the professional white-washers’ of the historical record, devoting themselves for well over a century to use their pens to the task of trying to wipe out all trace of what had been written in blood and fire by Toussaint’s black rebel slave army.<sup>123</sup> For Western scholars, before *The Black Jacobins* and for some time afterwards, the Haitian Revolution, when it was mentioned at all, was essentially portrayed as Froude had portrayed it, simply as a bloodthirsty and savage race war, without reason or rhyme.<sup>124</sup> James systematically demolished this racist argument in *The Black Jacobins*. ‘Had the monarchists been white, the bourgeoisie brown, and the masses of France black, the French Revolution would have gone down in history as a race war. But although they were all white in France they fought just the same.’ James stressed that fundamentally the Haitian Revolution was about class, not race.

The struggle of classes ends either in the reconstruction of society or in the common ruin of the contending classes. The French Revolution laid the basis of modern France, the country as a whole being strong enough to survive the shock and profit by it, but so corrupt and rotten was the slave society of San Domingo that it could not stand any strain and perished as it deserved to perish.<sup>125</sup>

By asserting the relevance and indeed centrality of categories of class and class struggle, James for the first time brought cold hard rationality to the history of the revolution, and his outstanding and pioneering Marxist analysis of slavery and the

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<sup>122</sup> Leon Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed; The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky*, Vol. 1 (London, 1979), p. xviii.

<sup>123</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 11, 15.

<sup>124</sup> This was essentially the thesis of the most ‘serious’ official account of the Haitian Revolution before James, and the one recommended for example by Ragatz. This was the American academic T. Lothrop Stoddard’s *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (1914). On Stoddard and his ‘vendetta against the Negro race’, see James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 335.

<sup>125</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 104.

slave experience has stood the test of time.<sup>126</sup> For example, the enslaved themselves were in part like peasants because ‘they worked on the land’ and also ‘on their private plots’, where, in the few moments of respite they had, ‘hard-working slaves cultivated vegetables and raised chickens to sell in the towns to make a little in order to buy rum and tobacco’. The fact that through cultivation ‘here and there a Napoleon of finance, by luck and industry, could make enough to purchase his freedom’, or at least buy some luxuries, shows not only that money circulated among slaves but also there was an internal slave market operating - in other words, slaves were in part and in a sense like modern consumers. Finally, the enslaved were also like modern workers because they worked and lived together on capitalist plantations, ‘in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories’.<sup>127</sup> Today, it is the orthodoxy of academic historians who specialise on studying slavery to use the terms ‘proto-proletariat,’ ‘proto-peasantry’ and ‘proto-consumers’, and though James did not use these terms, he had clearly grasped the essentials of the slave experience in all its diversity back in 1938.

Indeed, in a fundamental sense, *The Black Jacobins* was a pioneering work in the tradition of ‘history from below’, or perhaps ‘history from below-decks’, for two thirds of the people who were to ultimately make the Haitian Revolution began their lives growing up in Africa, before being captured, mostly at a young age, and then enduring the violence and terror of the Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World of the Americas in chains on European slave ships.<sup>128</sup> Marx famously once said ‘men make their own history but not in the circumstances of their own choosing’, and it is hard to imagine worse circumstances in which to try to make history than those in which the men, women and children who were to make the Haitian Revolution found themselves in. Besides Marx and Trotsky, as we have seen James had been inspired by Michelet as well as modern socialist historians of the French Revolution. James in particular would note the influence of Jean Jaurès, who he remembered showed ‘a sympathetic understanding of the great mass movements’

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<sup>126</sup> James of course did not ignore race, but throughout the work stressed that class came before race. See James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 230. ‘The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.’

<sup>127</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 9, 12, 69.

<sup>128</sup> For one outstanding recent history of the slave trade, see Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London, 2007).

in France, and also Georges Lefebvre, who coincidentally first coined the phrase ‘history from below’.<sup>129</sup>

In *The Black Jacobins*, James himself began then with not just the slave experience but also slave resistance, and in his first chapter, entitled simply ‘The Property’, he demonstrated that while ‘to the slave traders the slaves were articles of trade and no more’, the enslaved ‘remained, despite their black skins and curly hair, quite invincibly human beings’.<sup>130</sup> For Trotsky, the historian of a revolution had to ‘enter into the nerves’ and minds of the masses, as ‘the revolution is there in their nerves before it comes out into the street’. As Deutscher therefore notes, Trotsky’s *History* is ‘therefore to a large extent a study in revolutionary mass psychology’.<sup>131</sup> In his later years, James would opine that Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* was unparalleled as in *The Black Jacobins* ‘there is no understanding of when you go beyond the economic and the social and political and you get deep into the psychology of the people who made the revolution’.<sup>132</sup> But this was too modest an admission, for despite the difficulties in getting source material on the importance of African ‘survivals’ for the Haitian Revolution in the 1930s, in *The Black Jacobins* James was arguably able to effectively ‘enter into the nerves’ of the black slaves, painting a convincing picture of how, for them, the African cult of voodoo allowed those without ‘education or encouragement to cherish a dream of freedom’.<sup>133</sup> In Haiti itself by the 1930s, as Chris Harman once noted,

... the American occupation was so crude that it led to a number of intellectuals to try to overcome their separation from the vast mass in the countryside. A *Noiriste* (black cultural) movement developed among them which attempted to understand the Creole,

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<sup>129</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 332. See also Eric J. Hobsbawm, ‘History from Below; Some Reflections’, in Frederick Krantz (ed.), *History from Below; Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Identity* (Oxford, 1988).

<sup>130</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 7, 9.

<sup>131</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p. 231.

<sup>132</sup> James, ‘Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*’, p. 94.

<sup>133</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 14.

voodoo traditions of the peasantry and which sought to explain the political divisions between mulatto and black in terms of class.<sup>134</sup>

One key Haitian intellectual here was Dr. Jean Price-Mars, a diplomat who in 1928 published *Ainsi parla L'oncle*, 'The sayings of Old Uncle', a defence of voodoo.<sup>135</sup> It seems that James benefited from correspondence with Price-Mars while writing *The Black Jacobins*.<sup>136</sup> As James famously noted, 'voodoo was the medium of the conspiracy'.<sup>137</sup>

The central story of *The Black Jacobins* then became the transformation that took place among the black labourers and black slave army of Saint Domingue as a result of their mighty collective struggle for liberation.

The revolt is the only successful slave revolt in history, and the odds it had to overcome is evidence of the magnitude of the interests that were involved. The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement. Why and how this happened is the theme of this book.<sup>138</sup>

As James put it, by 1798 and the expulsion of the British from the island, the Haitian Revolution 'had created a new race of men'.

This change had first expressed itself in August 1791 ... but they were soon formed into regiments and were hardened by fighting. They organised themselves into armed sections and into popular bodies ... At bottom the popular movement had acquired an immense self confidence. The former slaves had defeated white colonists, Spaniards and British, and now they were free. They were

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<sup>134</sup> Chris Harman, 'Haiti: Pawn in their game', *Socialist Worker Review*, 85, (March, 1986), p. 19. See also Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (London, 2001).

<sup>135</sup> George Lamming (ed.), *Enterprise of the Indies* (Port of Spain, 1999), p. 230.

<sup>136</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], p. 317. James notes his address in Haiti.

<sup>137</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 69.

<sup>138</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xviii.

aware of French politics, for it concerned them deeply. Black men who had been slaves were deputies in the French Parliament, black men who had been slaves negotiated with French and foreign governments. Black men who had been slaves filled the highest position in the colony. There was Toussaint, the former slave, incredibly grand and powerful and incomparably the greatest man in San Domingo. There was no need to be ashamed of being a black. The revolution had awakened them, had given them the possibility of achievement, confidence and pride. That psychological weakness, that feeling of inferiority with which the imperialists poison colonial peoples everywhere, these were gone.<sup>139</sup>

Yet James's stress on placing the black masses centre-stage in *The Black Jacobins*, his writing the history of the Haitian Revolution 'from below' for the first time, did not mean that he lacked a grasp of the totality of social relations in which they played their role. In his preface to *The Black Jacobins*, James gave us a profound insight into his understanding of historical philosophy, and the advantages of the Marxist theory of history.

The writing of history becomes ever more difficult. The power of God or the weakness of man, Christianity or the divine right of kings to govern wrong, can easily be made responsible for the downfall of states and the birth of new societies. Such elementary conceptions lend themselves willingly to narrative treatment and from Tacitus to Macaulay, from Thucydides to Green, the traditionally famous historians have been more artist than scientist: they wrote so well because they saw so little.<sup>140</sup>

The 'traditionally famous historians', ranging from the irrationalism of the ancient Greeks and Romans up to the English Whigs with their thesis highlighting 'the divine right of kings to govern wrong', were for James less historians than primarily 'artists', writers of 'narrative' as a result of their rudimentary and idealist

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<sup>139</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 197-98.

<sup>140</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xix. David Scott is therefore mistaken in *Conscripts of Modernity* to assume that James's reference to 'Green' is a reference to the Oxford Hegelian philosopher T.H. Green. Nowhere in my study of James's writings have I ever come across a single reference to T.H. Green. James however discusses both J.R. Green and Macaulay's historical philosophy together in more detail in 1940. See James, 'Trotsky's Place in History', pp. 120-23. Eric Williams once noted that though J.R. Green discussed 'slavery' with respect to Anglo-Saxon England under the Danes he ignored completely 'the wealth which accrued to Britain from the trinity of slavery, slaving and sugar' during the eighteenth century. Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies*, p. 53.

philosophy of history. Indeed, they often admitted as much. At the start of twentieth century, the Liberal historian G.M. Trevelyan had insisted that ‘the art of history remains always the art of narrative. That is the bedrock.’<sup>141</sup> By 1938, James noted there had been a sea-change against traditional political narratives about the doings of statesmen and kings. ‘Today by a natural reaction we tend to a personification of the social forces, great men being merely or nearly instruments in the hands of economic destiny’, James commented. This shift towards social and economic history was in part influenced by the mechanical materialist philosophy of Second International Marxism, but it was one which had influenced the likes of Ragatz and had been taken even further by the *Annales* School in France.<sup>142</sup>

Yet for James, neither idealism nor materialism by themselves were adequate philosophies of history, and, moreover, ‘as so often the truth does not lie in between’. James offered an alternative to both, based on Marx’s theory of history, historical materialism.

Great men make history, but only such history as it is possible for them to make. Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment. To portray the limits of those necessities and the realisation, complete or partial, of all possibilities, that is the true business of the historian.

James proceeded to suggest how this theory, because it had the human agency of the masses as well as individuals at its heart, was able to explain revolutionary upheavals.

In a revolution, when the ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries bursts into volcanic eruption, the meteoric flares and flights above are a meaningless chaos and lend themselves to infinite caprice and romanticism unless the observer sees them always as projections of the sub-soil from which they came. The writer has sought not only to analyse, but to demonstrate in their movement, the economic forces of the age; their moulding of society and politics, of men in the mass and individual men; the powerful reaction of these

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<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Alex Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 1995), p. 44.

<sup>142</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xix. Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives*, p. 44.

on their environment at one of those rare moments when society is at boiling point and therefore fluid. The analysis is the science and the demonstration the art which is history.<sup>143</sup>

It is not too hard to see the influence of Marx on James here, in particular his insistence that history was a product of the social interaction of human beings, and the dynamic model he set out in his famous Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Marx argued that changes in the 'forces of production', the ability of humans to control the natural world in order to provide themselves with livelihoods through work, led to low level changes in the 'relations of production', as people were forced to cooperate with each other differently. The sum total of these relationships constituted 'the economic structure of society, the real foundation' or what Marx called the 'base' and James 'the sub-soil'. However, 'the economic forces of the age' as they progress and develop do not automatically 'mould society and politics' accordingly, so that humanity steadily advances forward. Marx described how a 'legal and political superstructure' was erected at every stage by those elements of society who controlled the surplus created in production, the ruling elite, in order to try to freeze the relations of production at that stage at which they perceived it was most beneficial to them. Marx noted that 'from forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution', or, as James put it, 'the ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries bursts into volcanic eruption'.<sup>144</sup> In the clash between the forces of production and the relations of production, society 'becomes fluid' and the class struggle, a hidden molten lava bubbling away like a subterranean fire down below, bursts into the open with 'meteoric flares' and 'flights above'.

History, for James, was then about both the scientific 'analysis' of the driving economic forces in society, and the artistic 'demonstration' needed to reconstruct the resulting class struggle as it arises into the open. In his second chapter, 'The Owners', which quoted from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, James offered an unsurpassed portrait of the society of Saint Domingue before the outbreak of the French Revolution, from the ruling white master-planter class at the top, down

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<sup>143</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xix.

<sup>144</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (London, 1973), pp. 181-82.

through the intermediate class of free coloured ‘mulattoes’, to finally the mass of black enslaved people in barbaric bondage themselves. It was their labour that ensured that Saint Domingue was in 1789 ‘the most profitable colony the world had ever known; to the casual eye the most flourishing and prosperous possession on the face of the globe; to the analyst a society torn by inner and outer contradictions which in four years would split that structure into so many pieces that they could never be put together again.’<sup>145</sup>

However, despite James’s own declaration that he was attempting to build on ‘the scientific study of revolution begun by Marx and Engels, and amplified by Lenin and Trotsky’, it is quite common in the literature to read that in *The Black Jacobins* he went ‘beyond European Marxism’ and aimed to appeal solely to Africans and people of African descent suffering under colonial domination.<sup>146</sup> For Robin D. G. Kelley,

His editorship of the *International African Opinion* and work on behalf of Ethiopia’s defence were clearly turning points in James’s thinking and writing. The events surrounding the invasion and the failure of Western democracies to come to Ethiopia’s defence pushed James beyond European Marxism toward a deeper understanding of the traditions of the Black resistance ... only the African masses - workers, peasants, and perhaps some farsighted intellectuals - fighting on their own terms could destroy imperialism. It was precisely this understanding that produced *The Black Jacobins* ... and *The History of Negro Revolt* ... these books were not written to appeal to white workers or a sympathetic liberal bourgeoisie. Rather, as Cedric Robinson so aptly put it, they were declarations of war.<sup>147</sup>

For Cedric Robinson, *The Black Jacobins* was ‘James’ effort to level Marxist theory to the requirements of Black radical historiography’.<sup>148</sup> This point has been

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<sup>145</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 36, 46.

<sup>146</sup> For the reference for James’s quote, see James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 229.

<sup>147</sup> Kelley, ‘The World the Diaspora Made’, p. 111. Grant Farred and Anna Grimshaw have also followed this line of thinking. See Farred, ‘First Stop, Port-au-Prince’, pp. 238-39, and Grimshaw, ‘C.L.R. James: A Revolutionary Vision’, p. 7. Frank Rosengarten has also suggested *The Black Jacobins* ‘was aimed at the African independence movements, more specifically at black nationalists in London and Paris’. Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 138.

<sup>148</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 386.

taken up and developed by Anthony Bogues, who notes that while *The Black Jacobins* was ‘an original work, drawing from classical Marxist discourse’ it is also ‘a marker within the trajectory of an alternative discourse and tradition of radical political theory’. Presumably for Bogues, the development of ‘black radical political theory’ is superior to working within what he at one point calls ‘the narrow strictures of a Trotskyist interpretation of historical materialism’.<sup>149</sup> Even Paul Buhle has written that ‘James’s theoretical resolution of the apparent disparities between Pan-Africanism and Eurocentric Trotskyism can be found in *The Black Jacobins*’.<sup>150</sup>

Yet perhaps it is important to remember that James himself, the great ‘black radical historian’, never saw anything inherently ‘Eurocentric’ about either Marxism or Trotskyism.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, James would later always insist that rather than finding Trotskyism ‘Eurocentric’, the entire ‘theoretical basis’ of *The Black Jacobins* was the Marxist theory of permanent revolution, which Trotsky himself had done so much to develop.

In a period of world-wide revolutionary change, such as that of 1789-1815 and our period which began with 1917, the revolutionary crisis lifts backward peoples over centuries and projects them into the very forefront of the advanced movement of the day.<sup>152</sup>

In his *History*, Trotsky noted that, ‘since the greatest enigma is the fact that a backward country was the *first* to place the proletariat in power, it behoves us to seek the solution of that enigma in the *peculiarities* of that backward country - that is, in its differences from other countries’.<sup>153</sup> The historical ‘law of uneven and combined development’ of capitalism meant ‘the development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process’,

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<sup>149</sup> Bogues, *Caliban’s Freedom*, pp. 60, 63. Even Stuart Hall, jokingly but also a little dismissively, referred on occasion to James’s ‘Trotskyist historical baggage’. Hall, ‘C.L.R. James: A Portrait’, p. 8.

<sup>150</sup> Buhle, ‘C.L.R. James: Paradoxical Pan-Africanist’, p. 161.

<sup>151</sup> See for example the elderly James’s response to a young black nationalist in Dhondy, *C.L.R. James*, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>152</sup> C.L.R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (London, 1977), p. 66.

<sup>153</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 19-20.

while 'their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character'.<sup>154</sup> In backward Russia, for example,

... the proletariat did not arise gradually through the ages, carrying with itself the burden of the past as in England, but in leaps involving sharp changes of environment, ties, relations, and a sharp break with the past. It is just this fact - combined with the concentrated oppressions of czarism - that made the Russian workers hospitable to the boldest conclusions of revolutionary thought - just as the backward industries were hospitable to the last word in capitalist organization.<sup>155</sup>

Trotsky would always stress that 'what characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude towards oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics'.<sup>156</sup> Yet during the 1930s, as Michael Löwy has noted, the absence of 'further major upheavals on an equivalent scale in the colonial world during Trotsky's lifetime' probably explains why Trotsky himself 'never felt the political exigency to produce a further theorization of permanent revolution in the colonial theatre'.<sup>157</sup> James's greatest achievement in *The Black Jacobins* was to make just such a further theorisation, and demonstrate that just as 'the law of uneven and combined development' under capitalism had meant the slaves of Saint Domingue, suffering under the 'concentrated oppressions' of slavery, were soon to be 'hospitable to the boldest conclusions of revolutionary thought' radiating from the Jacobins in revolutionary Paris, so the Marxist theory of permanent revolution illuminated not just anti-colonial struggles in the age of socialist revolution, but also the anti-slavery liberation struggle in the age of 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution.

Trotsky had described how the 'privilege of historic backwardness' allowed in certain circumstances the 'skipping' of 'a whole series of intermediate stages. Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling

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<sup>154</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 27.

<sup>155</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 33.

<sup>156</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 180.

<sup>157</sup> Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 86.

the road which lay between those two weapons in the past'.<sup>158</sup> Now James explained in *The Black Jacobins* how 'the San Domingo blacks had an army and leaders trained to fight in the European manner', and so were 'no savage tribesmen with spears, against whom European soldiers armed with rifles could win undying glory'.<sup>159</sup> Throughout his study of the Haitian Revolution James ably demonstrated for the first time that it was not simply an inspiring struggle on a tiny island on the periphery of the world system, but was inextricably intertwined with the Great French Revolution throughout, pushing the revolutionary process forward in the metropole itself and investing notions of human rights with new meanings and universal significance.

In writing about the Haitian Revolution, James rewrote the history of the French Revolution. One only has to look at some of the chapter titles of *The Black Jacobins*, such as 'Parliament and Property' - would the new 'Parliament' established by the French Revolution regard enslaved black people in French colonies as more than 'property' in light of the 1789 'Declaration of the Rights of Man'? James then followed this up with 'The San Domingo Masses Begin', followed by 'And the Paris Masses Complete'. Tragically, of course, while the 'Parisien masses' were able to exert tremendous influence over the French Republic from 1793-94, there were strict material limits on what was possible for them to achieve and the French Revolution itself soon stalled, degenerated and fell back into reaction. The rise of Napoleon meant a return to the imperial status quo, and eventually the attempted restoration of slavery on Saint Domingue. Though the French armies were gloriously defeated by the rebel army built by Toussaint, he was captured and taken and left to die in a French prison, while the new black nation of Haiti had been once again devastated by having to fight a national liberation struggle through guerrilla war under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines. In a fundamental sense, the destinies of the two revolutionary struggles, one in the imperial metropolis and one in the colonial periphery, were bound together, and they rose and fell as one.

'To articulate the past historically', Benjamin suggested, 'means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger'.<sup>160</sup> It is perhaps worth quoting at

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<sup>158</sup> Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 27.

<sup>159</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 219.

<sup>160</sup> Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History [1940]', p. 247.

some length from the conclusion of the 1938 edition of *The Black Jacobins*, in which James not only seized hold of the memory of the Haitian Revolution on the brink of a new inter-imperialist war, but also allowed his Marxist historical imagination free reign to suggest how the dynamics of permanent revolution might underpin political developments in the near future in colonial Africa based on his analysis of the 1935 Copperbelt mineworkers' strike outlined in *A History of Negro Revolt*. Some of it will be familiar to readers of the later revised editions, some less so.

Let the blacks but hear from Europe the slogans of Revolution, and the *Internationale*, in the same concrete manner that the slaves of San Domingo heard Liberty and Equality and the *Marseillaise*, and from the mass uprising will emerge the Toussaints, the Christophes, and the Dessalines. They will hear. The forces of emancipation are at work, far more clearly today than in 1789. In Europe and Asia the forces of revolution, though damped down, smoulder in every country. The great imperialisms arm and prepare to destroy each other. Like the red cockades and white of San Domingo, they arm the blacks of Africa. From the people heaving in action will come the leaders; not the isolated blacks at Guys' Hospital or the Sorbonne, the dabblers in *surréalisme* or the lawyers, but the quiet recruits in a black police force, the sergeant in the French native army or British police, familiarizing himself with military tactics and strategy, reading a stray pamphlet of Lenin or Trotsky as Toussaint read the Abbé Raynal.

The African revolution will be as merciless as that of Dessalines'. The blacks will know as friends only those whites who are fighting in the ranks beside them. And whites will be there. The white soldiers listening in doubt to the *Marseillaise* coming from the blacks in Crête-à-Pierrot, the Polish nationalists refusing to shoot the black nationalists, even the gesture of Dessalines when he named his blacks The Polish Regiment, these instinctive strivings of 150 years ago are clear-cut political policy today. The white workers in Europe as indifferent today as the French before August 1792, will recognise their allies in time as did the Paris workers in the hour of danger.<sup>161</sup>

In other words, European imperialism was on the verge of destroying itself in a bloody inter-imperialist conflict, which would be fought in part by black colonial

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<sup>161</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], pp. 314-15. *Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the Disturbances in the Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia*, p. 19.

armies from Africa. Africans and people of African descent had been given false promises and used as cannon fodder by colonial powers during the Great War, and with another war looming the same would happen again. Yet just as the Great War had ultimately ended in the Russian Revolution and a revolutionary wave across Europe, so James expected that any future inter-imperialist war would be brought to an end sooner or later in similar fashion through the outbreak of civil war somewhere in Europe. When black Africans, some of whom may have been fighting for one or other imperialist army, heard 'the slogans of Revolution' and the singing of the *Internationale* in a concrete manner - presumably encouraging them to rally to the side of the revolution rather than continue to fight for their imperialist overlords - a 'mass uprising' would begin, something which would quickly develop into 'the African revolution', led by unknown and undreamt of revolutionary leaders, perhaps nourished on Lenin or Trotsky, thrown up by 'the people heaving in action'.

James imagined a fluid and confused situation taking place, with some whites immediately fighting in the ranks alongside black Africans in their struggle, while the legacy of racism would mean that other white workers, even in the country in the midst of socialist revolution, would initially show 'indifference' but would doubtless recognise their true allies 'in time'. If other oppressed nationalities fighting in imperialist armies were deployed against the 'black nationalist' struggle, they would surely rebel in turn. The Trotskyist James predicted the process of revolution would see the previously 'backward' African working people leap to the very forefront of the international struggle, whereby a modern equivalent of 'the white soldiers listening in doubt to the *Marseillaise* coming from the blacks in Crête-à-Pierrot' might take place. Whatever happened, the general correct 'political policy' for both the socialist revolution in Europe and 'the African revolution' would be far more 'clear-cut' than 'the instinctive strivings' that had brought together Toussaint's black army of Saint Domingue with the white Jacobins of revolutionary Paris. The two revolutions would increasingly be part of the same process of international permanent revolution, and through this process, the Fourth International would play an important role in forging a genuine 'World Party of Socialist Revolution' that would be more than simply an aspiration and a name alone.

James's main intended audience for *The Black Jacobins* in 1938 then was not only those fighting for colonial liberation in Africa and the Caribbean in the 1930s

but also those fighting for socialist revolution in Europe.<sup>162</sup> James clearly hoped that the inspiration of the Haitian Revolution would inspire those Africans and people of African descent who read *The Black Jacobins* to seize the opportunity that would be presented by the looming inter-imperialist conflict to organise independently and strike out for freedom. However, General Franco's use of Moroccan troops during the Spanish Civil War had shown all too clearly that there was a danger that if material solidarity with anti-colonial struggles was not shown by the revolutionary movement in Europe because of the influence of Stalinism or a more general overriding commitment to Popular Front 'anti-fascism', then colonial troops could all too easily be used to crush any outbreak of socialist revolution in Europe itself. 'The colonial question' then was ultimately a question for the European revolutionary movement as much as for the colonised. If some academic historians have failed to understand this subsequently, then perhaps it is not their fault, for James was not writing for future academic historians. Rather, as a revolutionary Marxist and 'class struggle Pan-Africanist' James had other things on his mind. 'Sad though it may be', James noted in *The Black Jacobins*, revolutionary struggle 'is the way that humanity progresses. The anniversary orators and the historians supply the prose-poetry and the flowers.'<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Indeed, as James put it in 1960, 'there is no question about it, the main opposition to imperialism must come from the proletariat of the advanced countries'. C.L.R. James, *Modern Politics* (Port of Spain, 1960), p. 64.

<sup>163</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 51.

The romance of a great career  
and  
the drama of revolutionary history  
are combined in

**C. L. R. JAMES'**

magnificent biography of

**TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE**

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# **THE BLACK JACOBINS**

The black revolution in San Domingo is the only successful slave revolt in history. Chief of the rebels was Toussaint, coachman at 46, ten years later master of the island. The drama of his career is here brilliantly described in a narrative which grips the attention.

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**SECKER & WARBURG**

Plate 16. Advertisement for *The Black Jacobins*, September 1938.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>164</sup> [Advertisement]. From James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 4.

## Conclusion

The romance of a great career and the drama of revolutionary history are combined in C.L.R. James' magnificent biography of TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE just published under the title THE BLACK JACOBINS. The black revolution in San Domingo is the only successful slave revolt in history. Chief of the rebels was Toussaint, coachman at 46, ten years later master of the island. The drama of his career is here a narrative which grips the attention.<sup>165</sup>

This was how Secker & Warburg promoted *The Black Jacobins*, when it was published in September 1938. However, as Peter Fryer noted, James 'might have been writing in German for all the notice that was taken by historians'.<sup>166</sup> Flora Greirson in the *New Statesman* dismissed *The Black Jacobins* because of its 'bias', noting James was 'a Communist and wants us to see the worst'.<sup>167</sup> Leaving aside the question of quite which 'best' bits of the experience of slavery Greirson had hoped to see James highlight, the awful truth was that if he had actually been a Communist with a capital 'C' the work would have received greater attention on publication.<sup>168</sup> As Eugene Genovese noted in 1971, *The Black Jacobins* 'deserves to rank as a classic of Marxian historiography but has been largely ignored, perhaps because of the author's Trotskyist politics'.<sup>169</sup> There was no 'perhaps' about it, though Eric Hobsbawm remembers that it influenced some in the Historians Group of the

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<sup>165</sup> James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, p. 4. The *Port of Spain Gazette* noted 'another book by C.L.R. James': 'Mr. C.L.R. James, Trinidad-born writer and politician who has been residing in England for the past few years is once more in the lime-light as an Author. His latest book is "Black Jacobins" which deals with Haytian History ...' *Port of Spain Gazette*, 6 November 1938.

<sup>166</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 207.

<sup>167</sup> Flora Grierson, 'Man's Inhumanity to Man', *New Statesman*, 8 October 1938. Seventy years later, in 2009, the *New Statesman* would hail *The Black Jacobins* as their first choice 'Red Read', heading up a list of 'our top fifty books guaranteed to inspire' and 'that will change your life'. See 'Red Reads', *New Statesman*, 10 August 2009.

<sup>168</sup> Compare for example the reception of *The Black Jacobins* with the 1935 translation of Anatoli Vinogradov's novel about Toussaint, *The Black Consul*, which James recalled received an 'enthusiastic welcome...in almost the whole British press', James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 336. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, p. 53.

<sup>169</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (London, 1971), p. 155. The French Trotskyist Pierre Naville would later translate *The Black Jacobins* into French, with Daniel Guérin's assistance. See Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, pp. 228-29.

C.P.G.B. 'in spite of the author's known Trotskyism', who were key to helping develop the tradition of 'history from below' after the Second World War.<sup>170</sup>

When a revised edition of *The Black Jacobins* was published in 1963 it finally began to receive the kind of recognition and attention it deserved amid the rise of the New Left and the Black Power movements. James added six new paragraphs discussing the tragedy of Toussaint Louverture in this new edition, though he noted that the heroic Toussaint 'was attempting the impossible - the impossible was for him the only reality that mattered'. The revolutionary energy of the 1960s, epitomised in the slogan 'Be realistic - demand the impossible!' thus found its echo consciously or unconsciously in *The Black Jacobins*, helping to make it 'A book of the Sixties'.<sup>171</sup> The success of the work helped prompt James to re-write his play *Toussaint Louverture*, renaming it *The Black Jacobins*, in order so that the play might also better relate to the new realities posed by decolonisation.

Yet among those that mattered for James in the 1930s, as he later told an interviewer, *The Black Jacobins* 'was from the beginning recognised as an extraordinary work'.<sup>172</sup> For James, vindication of his efforts came when he asked for the reactions of George Padmore and Paul Robeson: 'James, I always knew the history was there, that we had it.'<sup>173</sup> Copies of *The Black Jacobins* were sent out to contacts of the I.A.S.B. in colonial Africa as James himself prepared to leave Britain. In October 1938, Secker & Warburg wrote to I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, now back in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

At the suggestion of George Padmore, I send you herewith a review copy of C.L.R. James's THE BLACK JACOBINS for review in the West African Standard. I feel sure you will do what you can to promote the book and Padmore thinks you will be able to sell in your district a dozen or so copies. I hope this may be the case.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> See Hobsbawm, 'The Historians Group of the Communist Party', p. 23. In his 1962 work, *The Age of Revolution*, Hobsbawm recommended *The Black Jacobins*. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London, 2002), p. 389.

<sup>171</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 236.

<sup>172</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 375.

<sup>173</sup> James, 'Lectures on *The Black Jacobins*', pp. 85, 91.

<sup>174</sup> TNA: KV2/1824/36a, Letter from Secker & Warburg to I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson of the West African Youth League, Trelawney Street, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 19 October 1938.

Overall, there is of course much more that could be said about *The Black Jacobins* than has been possible here. With respect to historical philosophy, it would be fascinating for example to properly investigate Stuart Hall's discussion of James's 'Hegelian imagination', and his suggestion that James 'was a Hegelian before he was a historian'.<sup>175</sup> One could explore in more detail how James saw 'the role of the individual in history', tracing his initial thoughts about this while in Trinidad to his writing of his play *Toussaint Louverture* and his discussion of this very topic in *World Revolution*, through to his masterful portrait of Toussaint Louverture in *The Black Jacobins*.<sup>176</sup> One could profitably examine in detail the parallels James drew between the Haitian Revolution and the Russian Revolution, and his comparison of 'The War of Independence' in Saint Domingue with the Russian Civil War. Was it really the case that James thought Toussaint ultimately guilty of 'Bonapartism' and portrayed Dessalines in power as akin to Stalin, as Hall has suggested?<sup>177</sup> Or was he more concerned to illustrate the truth behind Trotsky's warning that if the democratic revolution in a backward country does not have a 'victorious end' with the proletariat in power, then 'the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses'?<sup>178</sup> There are many such intriguing questions and controversies thrown up by reading *The Black Jacobins*, and it is not possible to attempt to resolve them here.

In *The Black Jacobins* James painted a vivid panorama of the Haitian Revolution, stressing that it was not simply the greatest event in the history of the West Indies, but took its place alongside the English Civil War, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution as one of the great world-historical

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<sup>175</sup> Hall, 'Breaking Bread with History', p. 25. For readings of *The Black Jacobins* which places great stress on James's alleged reading of Hegel, see Schwarz, 'C.L.R. James and George Lamming: The measure of historical time' and Schwarz, 'Not Even Past Yet'.

<sup>176</sup> James, *World Revolution*, pp. 159-63.

<sup>177</sup> Hall, 'C.L.R. James: A Portrait', p. 9. James's critique suggests Toussaint had never fundamentally succeeded in personally rising out of the black labouring class but rather was still organically tied to the black former slaves, even to the end. 'Toussaint, like Robespierre, destroyed his own Left-wing, and with it sealed his own doom. The tragedy was that there was no need for it. Robespierre struck at the masses because he was bourgeois and they were communist. That clash was inevitable, and regrets over it are vain. But between Toussaint and his people there was no fundamental difference of outlook or of aim.' James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 232-33.

<sup>178</sup> Quoted in Dunn and Radice (eds.), *100 Years of Permanent Revolution*, p. 9.

revolutions in its own right, a revolution which had forever transformed the world and laid the foundation for the continuing struggle for universal human rights. As James put it, 'the work of Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion endures in Hayti, but what they did went far, far beyond the boundaries of the island'.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, in many ways, the Haitian Revolution went further in its commitment to universal emancipation than any of these other revolutions; it was, as Paul Foot once noted, 'perhaps the most glorious victory of the oppressed over their oppressors in all history'.<sup>180</sup>

In December 1939, in 'Revolution and the Negro', an article for a 'special negro number' of the *New Internationalist*, James attempted to bring home to the international Trotskyist movement some of the main lessons to be taken from his history of the Haitian Revolution.

The Negro's revolutionary history is rich, inspiring, and unknown. Negroes revolted against the slave raiders in Africa; they revolted against the slave traders on the Atlantic passage. They revolted on the plantations ... The only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians.

All this revolutionary history can come as a surprise only to those who, whatever International they belong to, whether Second, Third, or Fourth, have not yet ejected from their systems the pertinacious lies of Anglo-Saxon capitalism. It is not strange that the Negroes revolted. It would have been strange if they had not.

But the Fourth International, whose business is revolution, has not to prove that Negroes were or are as revolutionary as any group of oppressed people. That has its place in agitation. What we as Marxists have to see is the tremendous role played by Negroes in the transformation of Western civilisation from feudalism to capitalism. It is only from this vantage-ground that we shall be able to appreciate (and prepare for) the still greater role they must of necessity play in the transition from capitalism to socialism.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], p. 311. James's use of the phrase 'beyond the boundaries' in 1938 is perhaps noteworthy.

<sup>180</sup> Paul Foot, 'The Black Jacobins', *New Statesman*, 2 February 1979. For more on this, see Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (London, 2008).

<sup>181</sup> James, 'Revolution and the Negro', p. 77.

## CONCLUSION

### **‘To Exploit a Larger World to Conquer’: C.L.R. James’s Intellectual Conquest of Imperial Britain**

The British Empire with its 500 million colonial slaves and comparatively small white population is in mortal crisis. The movement for independence in India, the revolution that is surging in the Arab countries and has continued for two years with undiminished vigour in Palestine, the sullen hostility of the African masses, the movement for genuine independence in Egypt, the troubles in the West Indies, all those are symptoms of the increasing unrest which is certain to tear the Empire to pieces under the strain of a world war ... The idea that anyone who supports Britain in a war would be supporting democracy, is either criminal hypocrisy or equally criminal stupidity. The British Empire is the greatest instrument of tyranny and oppression known to History, and its overthrow would be a great step forward in human progress. Side by side with the struggle for colonial independence must go the struggle for socialism in Britain. The British labour movement must awaken to reality. Either socialism, with material progress, peace, and fraternal relations between peoples, or empire-increasing racial hatred and imperialist wars.

Those words of C.L.R. James, from a speech entitled ‘Twilight of the British Empire’, were made at a packed S.W.P. rally at New York’s Irving Plaza on Wednesday 30 November 1938.<sup>1</sup> One of those fortunate to hear the author of *The Black Jacobins* speak after his arrival in the United States was Martin Glaberman, who remembered thinking then James was ‘one of the great orators of the twentieth century’. ‘I was entranced by this tall (six foot, four inch) dark man who kept an audience in his grasp for three hours speaking about the British Empire, striding back and forth across the stage without a podium, without a note.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘Twilight of the British Empire’, Summary of Speech at Irving Plaza, Wednesday November 30, 1938. Issued by Educational Committee, Socialist Workers’ Party, New York Local, Fourth International. Wayne State University, Walter P. Reuther Library, Dwyer Collection, Box 5, Folder 18. I am indebted to William LeFevre, reference archivist at Wayne State University for sending me a copy of this.

<sup>2</sup> Glaberman, ‘C.L.R. James’, p. 47. Other members of the audience have testified to James’s lecture being a ‘spellbinding experience’ and given as if James ‘were a great actor delivering a famous oration’. Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, pp. 59, 259. See also Constance Webb’s memories of seeing James on his 1939 speaking tour. Constance Webb, ‘C.L.R. James, the Speaker and his Charisma’, in Paul Buhle (ed.), *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* (London, 1986), and Webb, *Not Without Love*, pp. 71-72. See also the Special Branch report noting the ‘fluency, invective and irony’ on display in James’s

By the time James left for the U.S., the I.A.S.B. had declared 'the young historian and labour leader' their 'goodwill ambassador'. In New York on his arrival, James also addressed the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, while in Harlem he was the guest of honour at a testimonial dinner tendered him at the Mimos Club, to celebrate the appearance of the American edition of his book, *The Black Jacobins*, where he gave an address on 'The West Indies'.<sup>3</sup> James's oratorical powers and authority as a speaker derived from his life and recent work in imperial Britain, in particular his efforts to bring the growing resistance against British colonial rule together with the power of the industrial working class in the imperial metropolis in order to hasten the final fall of an Empire already in decline.<sup>4</sup>

Empire meant Britain was a place of critical importance for the world during the 1930s, rather akin perhaps to America's position at the centre of world affairs today.<sup>5</sup> Any black colonial subject from a tiny Caribbean island in the backwaters of the Empire who made the 'voyage in' to the 'Mother Country' was expected to simply be appropriately awed at the great civilisation that they found and simply appreciatively soak up words of wisdom from the great and good before returning home to help serve the colonial project.<sup>6</sup> They were not expected to challenge and demolish the intellectual foundations of the myths on which the whole edifice of British colonialism was constructed, and certainly not in quite the stylish manner of James. By December 1936, after witnessing the production of *Toussaint Louverture* and his friend and compatriot's leadership of the I.A.F.A., George Padmore could

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speech on 'The Twilight of the British Empire' given on 17 February 1939 for the Young Socialist League in San Francisco. TNA: KV/2/1824/42a.

<sup>3</sup> *International African Opinion*, 1/6, (February-March, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> As we have noted already, James had spoken on 'The Empire in Revolt' for the Revolutionary Socialist Party at Picardy Place Hall, Edinburgh, on 23 October, 1938. Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, pp. 137-38.

<sup>5</sup> As the First Sea Lord, Sir Ernle Chatfield, bluntly asserted in 1934, 'we are in the remarkable position of not wanting to quarrel with anybody because we have got most of the world already, or the best parts of it, and we only want to keep what we have got and prevent others from taking it away from us'. Quoted in Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> On first arrival in Britain in the midst of the Great Depression, James on the other hand described London as 'the peak, the centre, the nucleus of a great branch of western civilisation', yet revealed he 'was not impressed'. C.L.R. James, 'London First Impressions (no. 5): "The Nucleus of a Great Civilisation"', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 28 August 1932, republished in Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 111.

note that James ‘came to London in 1932 to exploit a larger world to conquer. He has done well’.<sup>7</sup>

James would later recall that the colonial subjects who came together around the I.A.S.B. in London during the 1930s ‘were able to sense the passing of colonialism’ by taking the opportunity of ‘seeing what they would not have been able to see from any other point’, ‘to be at the centre of things’ and ‘to view colonialism from several stages of development’ and so get a ‘sense of the movement of things’.<sup>8</sup> If Eric Williams could later claim that ‘I had come, seen and conquered - at Oxford!’ when he graduated with first class honours in 1935, so, with the publication of *The Black Jacobins* in 1938, James could with equal legitimacy have claimed that he had come, seen and intellectually not just exploited but conquered the larger world of imperial Britain. James was perhaps reflecting on what he had personally achieved when in 1938 he championed those anti-colonialists ‘who could combine within their single selves the unrelenting suspicion and ruthless ferocity necessary to deal with imperialism and yet retain undimmed their creative impulse and their respect for the attainments of the very culture they fought so fiercely’.<sup>9</sup>

The barriers standing in the way of such a monumental achievement should not be underestimated. As John MacKenzie notes, during the 1930s ‘a Britain without an Empire seemed almost a contradiction in terms’. Empire ‘was, quite simply, there: a source of pride, not lightly to be put aside, it was also to gain a new economic significance’. For the vast majority of British parliamentarians, whether of Right or Left, ‘the crucial thing now was to exploit it more effectively in a period of increasing world economic difficulty. As in the late nineteenth century, Empire could be portrayed as a means of arresting national decline.’ Accordingly, during the 1930s ‘when the professions of marketing, public relations, and propaganda (including censorship) all came of age’, the ‘people who controlled the levers of propaganda’ in imperial Britain were ‘the most fervent exponents of a “moral” imperialism’. Indeed,

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<sup>7</sup> George Padmore, ‘Letter to Dr Alain Locke [December, 1936]’. From the Alain Locke papers, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. Reference no. Locke 164-76 F16. Many thanks to Peter Fraser and the archivists at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center for this.

<sup>8</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘The Passing of Colonialism’, lecture given in Grenada, 6 October 1958, reported in *The West Indian*, 11 October 1958. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London: 40, K4.

<sup>9</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938], p. 288.

‘popular imperialism seemed to secure dramatic new cultural and institutional expressions,’ as media ranging from the cinema, the B.B.C., imperial exhibitions, school texts, juvenile literature to advertising all came into their own and played their part.<sup>10</sup> As James noted in *The Black Jacobins*, the 1930s was truly an ‘age of propaganda’, one that excelled all previous ages ‘in system and organisation’.<sup>11</sup>

If Stalin in 1935 could declare the British Empire ‘the greatest factor in the world for peace and stability’, even the socialist Leonard Barnes, one of the most radical British critics of imperialism during the 1930s, could not imagine its inevitable decline and fall.<sup>12</sup> ‘Coronations come and go. But the great British Empire, like the poor (of whom indeed it almost entirely consists), is always with us.’ Though Barnes felt India would not be held under imperial domination ‘indefinitely’, the most he realistically dared hope and call for in 1937 was ‘that the great imperial countries should agree voluntarily to some reorganization of their empires in the interests of the economic security of countries less happily situated than themselves’. The notion of decolonisation in Africa in particular was however quite unthinkable. ‘Colonies in general will have to be brought in to form an integral part of an international collective system. Self-government will be appropriate in some cases, of which India is the most important, but not in others, e.g. some territories of tropical Africa.’<sup>13</sup>

Such a consensus about the legitimacy and durability of British power was hegemonic among even progressive British intellectuals in the period. Labour leader George Lansbury in 1934 had declared any future ‘Socialist Government’ in Britain would not ‘at once withdraw from all the Colonies’, a position shared by even the C.P.G.B. by 1938.<sup>14</sup> For anti-colonialist activists, particularly those from Africa and the Caribbean, to educate, agitate, and organise in the ‘dark heart’ of the empire itself

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<sup>10</sup> MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Stalin is quoted in Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left* (London, 1942), p. 262. There were of course always some consistent anti-Imperialists on the British Left. See for example, Reginald Reynolds, ‘“Socialist” Imperialism’, *Controversy*, 16, (January, 1938) and F.A. Ridley, ‘The Decline and Fall of the British Empire’, *Controversy*, 19, (April, 1938).

<sup>13</sup> Leonard Barnes, *Skeleton of the Empire* (London, 1937), pp. 8, 10, 87-88.

<sup>14</sup> MacKenzie, ‘British Marxists and the Empire’, pp. 294-96, and Owen, *The British Left and India*, p. 244.

was then to undertake an often incredibly dispiriting task.<sup>15</sup> As Flora Grierson had bluntly declared in her review of *The Black Jacobins* in the *New Statesman*, reading predictions of ‘the coming upheavals’ in colonial Africa had ‘badly shaken’ her ‘faith in Mr. James’s intelligence and acumen’.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as A. Sivanandan once eloquently noted of ‘black struggles in Britain’, the multitude of ‘strands’ of resistance such as the Pan-Africanist movement in the 1930s ‘woven’ together around such activists as James and Padmore, ‘their pattern was set on the loom of British racism’.<sup>17</sup> This included in this period of course an institutional ‘Colour Bar’, which meant, as Padmore noted in 1938, almost all black people had suffered the ‘bitter experience’ of ‘looking for apartments and being told constantly. “We do not take coloured people”’.<sup>18</sup> Yet British racism was, for Padmore, ‘a reflection of the whole British Imperial policy and the result of jingo education and propaganda which makes the average Englishman point with such pride to “the Empire which the sun never sets”’.<sup>19</sup> As James apparently told a Trafalgar Square meeting of the I.A.S.B. on 8 May 1938, ‘the National Government seldom lost an opportunity to pump the working classes of this country with “colour prejudice propaganda”’.<sup>20</sup>

Amidst a crisis-ridden decade which saw Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia and a wave of labour rebellions across the British Caribbean, James recalled that ‘the guardians of imperialism, either directly or indirectly, always had people meeting among the colonial residents and organisations in London seeking to use them or to neutralise them on colonial issues’. Accordingly, as James recalled of the I.A.S.B, ‘the centre of anti-imperialism and the struggle for African emancipation in London’,

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<sup>15</sup> As the Indian nationalist Nehru noted in 1936, British officialdom had ‘the calm assurance of always being in the right’. Quoted in Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies*, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Flora Grierson, ‘Man’s Inhumanity to Man’, *New Statesman*, 8 October 1938.

<sup>17</sup> A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger; Writings on Black Resistance* (London, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> George Padmore ‘A Negro Looks at British Imperialism’, *The Crisis*, 45/12, (December, 1938). As Padmore continued, ‘In five weeks of flat-hunting the writer learned to find his way competently about London’. For more on the Colour Bar in Britain, see Ethel Mannin’s letter on ‘The Colour Bar and Democracy’, *New Statesman*, 13 February 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Padmore ‘A Negro Looks at British Imperialism’. As Padmore added, this ‘racial egotism and national arrogance’ had ‘created a conflict between the British and colonial peoples of the Empire, which will render a social reconciliation difficult even after a political and economic adjustment has been effected’.

<sup>20</sup> TNA: KV/2/1824/23a.

‘we were there on guard. Colonial people in London found it difficult to be openly pro-imperialist among other colonial people, and as we were always armed with facts and documents, we exercised a sort of moral terror over the feeble-minded.’<sup>21</sup> While many Pan-African activists in Britain of course retained their ‘feeble-minded’ identification with imperial Britishness throughout, such a ‘moral terror’ waged through education and agitation remains remarkable.<sup>22</sup> James recalled that when Marcus Garvey began to suggest in his lectures in Hyde Park that there was a positive side to British and French imperialism in Africa,

... Padmore and I used to stand in the audience and we wouldn’t crudely attack him, because he was a man of some status, but we would say, “But that is not so. You didn’t use to say so before. Why have you changed your opinion?” And Garvey would say, “Oh, you boys, you boys!”<sup>23</sup>

As historian Winston James notes, the work undertaken by the likes of James and Padmore helped ensure 1930s Britain witnessed ‘the birth and emergence of a number of new black organisations and a level of black activism that was unprecedented’, ensuring the decade itself stands as ‘one of the most crucial decades in the history of black Britain’.<sup>24</sup>

It is sometimes easy to forget that James himself on first arrival in Britain in 1932 would had to have included himself among the ‘feeble-minded’ with respect to ‘anti-imperialism and the struggle for African emancipation’, at least by his own later

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<sup>21</sup> James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, pp. 24, 33. Estimates vary on the size of Britain’s black population during the 1930s. James D. Young gives a figure of 20,000 for 1935. Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, p. 126. Hannen Swaffer in 1935 gave a figure of 2,200 black people in London and 7,000 nationally. *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1935. Learie Constantine noted that ‘Before World War II, most of London’s coloured residents lived in an area of a few hundred yards square, round Tottenham Court Road’. Learie Constantine, *Colour Bar* (London, 1954), p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> As Alan MacKenzie notes, the politics of the two members of the Gold Coast A.R.P.S. delegation in 1930s Britain, George A. Moore and Samuel R. Wood, ‘remained of the classical reformist kind’, despite their relationship with the likes of James and Padmore. On 5 September 1936, for example, in a speech to a W.A.S.U. gathering, Moore ‘denounced the injustices of the colonial administration yet fervently pledged West African’s allegiance to the Crown and the Empire, “this great commonwealth of nations of which we are proud to be members, *and on which, we pray God, the sun may never set*’. Quoted in MacKenzie, ‘British Marxists and the Empire’, p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey*, p. 145.

<sup>24</sup> Winston James, ‘The Black Experience in Twentieth-Century Britain’, in Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (eds.), *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 363, 365-66.

high standards and certainly by those of Padmore. One could point to James's early hopes for West Indian autonomy and 'Dominion status' within the wider British Empire rather than a complete break with colonialism, his year-long membership of the L.C.P. Executive, his early illusions about the League of Nations, his praise for William Wilberforce, his hopes in the British Labour Party to fulfil its pledges with respect to the colonies, and so on. Indeed, James even seems to have been briefly a member of the ultra-respectable London Group on African Affairs (L.G.A.A.), the leading pressure group in 1930s Britain on such matters.<sup>25</sup>

Yet while not an inevitability, there is an important sense in which James's natural talents, abilities and nationalist and democratic sympathies mean that it is almost impossible to imagine him not breaking with his early identification with imperial Britain and indeed 'intellectually conquering' sooner or later. One gets some sense of this from his famous interchange with the novelist Edith Sitwell in London's Bloomsbury district as early as 18 May 1932, when James impressed all with his appreciation and knowledge of the contemporary literary world.<sup>26</sup> It is all too easy to envisage James, had he wanted to, succeeding in making himself a career as a novelist in Britain and remaining throughout the 1930s *primarily* a literary figure, which is perhaps why so much of previous James-scholarship has assumed as a matter of course that this somehow must have been the case. After all, he was more than talented enough as a writer, indeed he had already had made a 'name' for himself as such, and one feels he could have 'net-worked' and cultivated the necessary contacts had he so wished.<sup>27</sup> As he wrote in 1932, 'even though I see the Bloomsbury life for the secondary thing it is, nevertheless both by instinct and by

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<sup>25</sup> TNA: KV/2/1824/1z. The L.G.A.A. was 'non-political and non-sectarian', and sought to recruit 'Conservative and Liberal' members with 'progressive principles' on race in order to develop 'mutual understanding' between races and so counter the 'dangers of Communism and Indian nationalism' among 'unguided' Africans. Harold Moody and Leonard Woolf were prominent members. See Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, pp. 187, 233, 319.

<sup>26</sup> C.L.R. James, 'London First Impressions (no. 1)', republished in Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 28. See also Schwarz, 'Black Metropolis, White England', p. 193. As James later recalled of the moment of his arrival in Britain, 'what surprised me most was that I had read more and had absorbed more of English literature and history than almost every English person I met. My knowledge astonished them and I was astonished too because I thought I had been reading what the average educated person in England read.' C. L. R. James, 'Africans and Afro-Caribbeans: a personal view', *TEN*.8, 16, (1984), p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> As a writer, James was even mentioned in Cunard's *Negro Anthology*. See Olga Comma, 'Folklore in Trinidad', in Nancy Cunard (ed.), *Negro: Anthology made by Nancy Cunard, 1931-1933* (London, 1934), p. 486.

training I belong to it and have fit [sic] into it as naturally as a pencil fits into a sharpener'.<sup>28</sup> James had plans to write a semi-autobiographical novel highlighting 'different stages of the form of existence of black people in the Caribbean', and in all likelihood would have ultimately produced some work of importance about Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution, whether a play, novel or biography.<sup>29</sup> Yet after only a few months in Bloomsbury, James left to stay with Learie Constantine up in 'Red Nelson', and the rest, as they say, is history.

That James would have radicalised politically to some extent as a result of living in Britain during the 1930s in the context of the Great Depression and the rise of fascism, even if he had not stayed in Nelson for ten months at such a critical moment, seems certain, particularly if he had happened to run into his old boyhood friend George Padmore again at any point. George Orwell recalled the appeal of anti-fascism among intellectuals in England, noting

... as early as 1934 or 1935 it was considered eccentric in literary circles not to be more or less "left". Between 1935 and 1939 the Communist Party had an almost irresistible fascination for any writer under forty ... for about three years, in fact, the central stream of English literature was more or less directly under Communist control.<sup>30</sup>

Orwell here over-states the actual intellectual allure and organizing power of the C.P.G.B. as it attempted to construct a 'Popular Front' against fascism. However, while it is impossible to speculate about such matters on one level, it is all too easy to imagine James in 1930s Britain establishing a reputation as a 'committed' novelist and playwright, and becoming someone fêted by Communists and respected by all manner of progressive intellectuals in Britain, particularly those around the likes of Unity Theatre and the Left Book Club.

Yet if James had chosen this route and even if he had by then broken with his earlier identification with imperial Britishness, it seems almost certain he would have stayed more or less loyal to both the Labour Party and the L.C.P. Perhaps he would

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<sup>28</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Buhle, 'The Making of a Literary Life', p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> George Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London, 1989), p. 32.

have remained a writer, or maybe ultimately carved out a conventionally successful academic or political career in Britain, America or Trinidad after the Second World War during decolonisation, in the manner of say, W. Arthur Lewis or Eric Williams. One thing is quite certain however. If James's dedication to the cause of revolutionary socialism had not been utterly sincere when he left for his lecture tour of the U.S. in 1938, it is impossible that he would have ended up going 'underground' and living a pseudonymous existence in and among the crisis-ridden American Trotskyist movement for the next fifteen years.

### **C.L.R. James's Marxism**

'The tumultuous thirties', James once recalled, saw

... the Great Depression, the success of the first Five Year Plan, the rise of Nazism, the threat of Hitler, the threat, and very real it was, of a Fascist movement in England, the spread of Marxism, the anti-imperialist struggle ... all this contributed to making England a seething cauldron of political and social ideas. All traditional conceptions were examined and stripped to the bone.<sup>31</sup>

In actuality, England was a relatively stable society that neither constituted 'a seething cauldron of political and social ideas' in which 'all traditional conceptions were examined' during the 1930s outside of the activist milieu nor, under the hegemonic and conservative National government was it ever really threatened by a domestic fascist movement.<sup>32</sup> Yet despite their overly romanticised and dramatised nature, James's comments serve to remind us of the circumstances in which he politically orientated towards revolutionary Marxism. James's Marxism, forged in

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<sup>31</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Marxism and the Intellectuals [1962]', in C.L.R. James, *Spheres of Existence; Selected Writings*, Vol. 2 (London, 1980), p. 114. James, 'Dr. Eric Williams', pp. 332-33.

<sup>32</sup> As Tony Cliff and Colin Barker once noted of 1930s Britain, though 'often remembered as the "the red 30s" because of the activities of the unemployed workers' movements ... the 1930s were also a period of low strike activity, of the greatest Tory vote this century, of workers fighting one another for jobs or scraping before their foremen to keep their jobs, of declining union membership, of despair and demoralisation. In their poverty workers often generated a marvelous sense of solidarity it is true, but often too this was not a fighting solidarity but the solidarity of misery and defeat.' See Tony Cliff, *In the Thick of Workers Struggle; Selected Writings*, Vol. 2 (London, 2002), p. 106.

the cauldron of Nelson's working-class politics and early 1930s British politics, was critical to shaping the exact shape, form and manner his intellectual conquest of imperial Britain took. He saw more of British society than most other 'outsiders', and indeed no doubt also many 'insiders', seeing the society from top to bottom, from meeting with aristocrats like Edith Sitwell and Nancy Cunard to reporting the struggles of striking miners in South Wales, from commenting on Test Matches at Lord's to witnessing the proud resistance of the working-class communities of East End London and North East Lancashire to the government and the B.U.F. amid appalling levels of poverty and deprivation.<sup>33</sup> James seemed equally 'at home' at a London concert of the world-famous Austrian pianist Artur Schnabel or quietly smoking his pipe and enjoying a dram of whisky among his fellow revolutionary socialists in Edinburgh.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, unlike almost any other black colonial subject during this period, with the possible exceptions of George Padmore and maybe one or two others around the I.A.S.B. like Chris Braithwaite who had links with the I.L.P. or a past association with the C.P.G.B., James met and got to know hundreds of British working class militants, while thousands must have heard him passionately and eloquently put the case for international socialism against the barbarism of imperialism, fascism, racism and war. In August 1938 for example *Fight* noted the 'splendid reception that Comrade James has been receiving everywhere from comrades' on his tour of Northern England on behalf of the Revolutionary Socialist League.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it was from his discussions with such working-class audiences that James quickly learnt that, as he put it in early 1936, 'British Imperialism does not govern only the colonies in its own interests ... it governs the British people in its own interests also'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> According to Special Branch, on 24 September 1935 Nancy Cunard met with Padmore, James, Jomo Kenyatta, Robeson's pianist Larry Brown and the writer Marie Seton at Bogey's Bar Cabin, Southampton Row, London, where they discussed the crisis over Ethiopia. See TNA: KV/2/1824/1z. James even interviewed a Russian aristocratic émigré opera singer, Madame Zorina, soon after arriving in Britain. See 'Colourful Personality', *Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 December 1935, Appendix E.

<sup>34</sup> James, 'Africans and Afro-Caribbeans', Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, pp. 129, 136, 140, Webb, *Not Without Love*, p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> 'James came to Sheffield and spoke to a large crowd some hundreds strong. Many of the workers have asked for another visit from him.' 'The Life of the League', *Fight*, Second Series, 1/4. (August, 1938).

<sup>36</sup> James, 'Abyssinia and the Imperialists', p. 66.

It is worth once again reminding ourselves of the dramatic nature of James's transformation during the crisis of the 1930s from an Arnoldian liberal humanist into one of the most able and important Marxists in Britain during the Great Depression. To take just one register of this, when James arrived in 1932, as he later told Stuart Hall, he was 'not at all' a Marxist. Although 'I had read a lot of history' and 'had been concerned about the ordinary person', 'I had not read one line of Marx. All I knew was that in the history books of those days you'd see that in 1848 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had written *The Communist Manifesto*.'<sup>37</sup> In early 1932, James admitted he had read about Lenin and Trotsky and thought their political accomplishments highlighted 'the futility of most of the big men in English public life', but for him 'Bolshevik Russia' was simply a matter for abstract intellectual speculation, alongside 'D.H. Lawrence', 'sex', 'the Indian question', 'British Imperialism', 'Abyssinia', 'coloured students in London' and 'the English people'.<sup>38</sup> Six years later, by the time he left for America, he was on the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International, 'World Party of Socialist Revolution', and had won a mandate from that organisation to 'work out a program on the Colonial question' and begin the work of inaugurating an 'International Colonial Bureau' to co-ordinate putting such a program into practice.<sup>39</sup> Within six months of leaving Britain in late 1938, James would be meeting Trotsky himself in Mexico for discussions on the history of the Communist International and strategies for black liberation in the United States.<sup>40</sup>

James himself would always register the critical importance of his political and personal relationship working alongside his boyhood friend and compatriot George Padmore. Together, James once recalled in tribute to Padmore, they led from the front as ideological agitators in the fight against British imperialist mythology and propaganda during the 1930s. 'Traditional England was under fire. And it was the regular habit of a number of us colonials to go to public lectures and meetings of some of the most celebrated lecturers and speakers in England and at question time

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<sup>37</sup> Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James', p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, pp. 97, 117.

<sup>39</sup> Reisner (ed.), *Documents of the Fourth International*, pp. 300, 302.

<sup>40</sup> See my brief discussion in Christian Høgsbjerg, 'The prophet and Black Power: Trotsky on race in the US', *International Socialism*, 121, (2008).

and during discussion tear them to pieces.’<sup>41</sup> The extent to which ‘traditional England’ ever felt seriously ‘under fire’ from either Marxist or Pan-Africanist criticism during the 1930s may be doubted, yet the political partnership of James and Padmore during this period remains remarkable and was more mutually beneficial for both than might appear at first sight. James remembers that when Padmore turned up at the door of his flat out of the blue in 1935 after his break with the Communist International that ‘as a Trotskyist, full-fledged by this time, the Kremlin betrayal was no surprise to me. But I listened with a great deal of sympathy to all that George had to say’, and the slanderous accusations made against Padmore by the official Communists ‘gave me a first hand inside glimpse of Stalinism’.<sup>42</sup> One article in the Communist *Negro Worker* from 1934 had been titled ‘The Rise and Fall of Padmore’, and in 1937 James struck back on his friend’s behalf, and with the help of Padmore’s partner Dorothy Pizer as typist and secretary, published ‘The Rise and Fall of the Communist International’, *World Revolution*.<sup>43</sup>

It would not have been at all surprising if Padmore had become so disillusioned after being vilified by the Stalinists to have dropped out of political activity altogether and retreat from politics into the British Museum or, worse, into liberal anti-Communism. Here, the importance of his friendship with James came into play in encouraging him to indefatigably continue putting his inestimable talents and organisational skills to the service of colonial liberation. If it must have helped James’s research to have someone like Padmore - incredibly knowledgeable about liberation struggles across the African diaspora and a former leading official of the Comintern who had met leading members of the Stalinist bureaucracy, including Stalin himself - to hand, equally, as James recalled, ‘The play about a successful Negro revolution [*Toussaint Louverture*], the full scale attack on Stalinism [*World Revolution*], must have been very helpful to George’.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> James, ‘Dr. Eric Williams’, p. 335.

<sup>42</sup> James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Helen Davies, ‘The Rise and Fall of Padmore’, *Negro Worker*, (August 1934). Wicks, *Keeping My Head*, p. 180. See Dorothy Pizer’s review of James’s *Black Jacobins*, ‘A Lesson in Revolution’, *Controversy*, 28, (January, 1939).

<sup>44</sup> James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, p. 29.

Yet if Padmore's Pan-Africanism now came to the fore of his politics, his disgust at the betrayals of Stalinism did not lead him closer to James politically.<sup>45</sup> Incidentally, Padmore, like James was not only under surveillance as a threat to imperial 'security' by the British state at this time - and indeed also James alleges by German Nazi agents operating in Britain as well - but was also being monitored by agents sent from Stalinist Russia.<sup>46</sup> In 1939, Soviet agents described Padmore as a 'Trotskyite' whose activities in the I.L.P. and N.C.L.C. had apparently enabled him 'to penetrate more successfully into the ranks of the British working class, to corrupt and stupefy it'.<sup>47</sup> However, the reality was, as James recalled, that while Padmore 'would spend time ferreting out and denouncing the perpetual treachery of the Stalinists' and 'attended all the Trotskyist meetings, clearing up his mind on Stalinism I suppose ... [he] never said a word about my Trotskyism'.<sup>48</sup>

James's support for Trotsky in one sense make his cultural accomplishments during this period such as the play and his cricket commentary even more remarkable, given the dark clouds of reaction that gathered over Europe as fascism, Stalinist terror and war plunged the continent into what the great Belgian-Russian revolutionary novelist Victor Serge termed 'Midnight in the Century'. The greater the defeats suffered by the international working class movement after the Great War, the greater the number of triumphs of fascist and counter-revolutionary dictatorships across Europe, the greater the desperate illusions among many on the Left in the Soviet Union under Stalin, himself deified as the new 'Lenin'. In the 1930s, the

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<sup>45</sup> There is an intriguing letter dated 29 June 1938 from Ajit Roy to Padmore that was intercepted by Special Branch, which invited Padmore to a meeting on 2 July 1938 at James and Roy's flat on Boundary Road of 'certain colonial Marxists' to try and investigate the possibility of forming a 'Colonial Marxist League'. TNA: KV/2/1824/28a. A 'Colonial Marxist League' around Roy was eventually set up in the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party (R.C.P.), though more research is necessary to try and establish Padmore's relationship to Roy and the R.C.P. during the Second World War and after. See the Jock Haston papers at the University of Hull, DJH/12/1.

<sup>46</sup> James alleges the Gestapo 'had agents who used to take photographs of all of us who spoke in Hyde Park: they were preparing to arrest us as soon as they had conquered England'. James, 'Notes on the Life of George Padmore', p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> Yevgeny Sergeev, 'The Communist International and a "Trotskyite menace" to the British Communist movement on the eve of World War II', in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International* (Manchester, 1998), p. 89.

<sup>48</sup> James, 'Notes on the Life of George Padmore', pp. 29, 31a. In late July 1937, the Marxist Group apparently tried to organize a meeting on 'Stalinism and the Colonial Struggle' with James and Padmore speaking. See letter from the secretary of the Marxist Group to the Militant Group, dated 28 July 1937, in the file 'Inter-group relations', Denzil Dean Harber Papers, University of Hull.

Soviet Union seemed to represent for many not only the last serious bulwark remaining against fascism but a ‘new civilisation’, the sole society free from unemployment and exploitation amid the greatest economic crisis in the history of world capitalism. Few socialists were willing to face up to the awful truth that the Soviet Union was no longer the land of the October Revolution but was in the midst of a bloody counter-revolution waged by a brutal new ruling Stalinist bureaucracy, and waged in part against that bureaucracy to discipline it into complete subservience to Stalin. Yet as Serge noted in 1936 in his classic work *From Lenin to Stalin*, ‘in the struggle between socialism and fascism, socialism will only conquer if it brings greater comfort and dignity to human life’.

It is this aspect which is most prejudiced by the bureaucratic reaction in the U.S.S.R. If we can force this bureaucratic reaction one step backward, if we can prevent it from committing one single crime by showing it as it is, we shall be restoring to socialism and revolution a little of their true grandeur and consequently of their ability to conquer.<sup>49</sup>

In the midst of Stalin’s Great Terror and despite what Serge called the ‘loudspeakers crying out falsehoods, and vast agencies of intellectuals paid to cram people’s heads full of lies’, James was one of those few socialist intellectuals, like Serge and George Orwell, clear-sighted and brave enough to tell the truth about the crimes and betrayals of the Stalinist bureaucracy and Communist International without retreating into liberal anti-Communism.<sup>50</sup> As James put it in 1937, the Communist International now represented an ‘enormous factory for lies and slander’ and ‘Stalinist lies and falsification have spread a miasma over the intellectual life of Europe and America’. ‘For suppression, evasion and hard lying the documents of the Soviet Union and the Third International today form, along with British colonial

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<sup>49</sup> Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin* (New York, 1937), p. 112. In the pages of *Fight*, James praised Victor Serge, ‘a life-long revolutionary worker’, for his *From Lenin to Stalin*, a ‘brilliant study of the degeneration of the Comintern’. See ‘The Apothesis’, *Fight*, 1/9, (August, 1937). For a superb recent discussion of Serge, see Ian Birchall, ‘Review: *Victor Serge* by Susan Weissman’, *Historical Materialism*, 11/3, (2003).

<sup>50</sup> Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin*, p. 56.

propaganda and fascist demagoguery, a trilogy which future historians will contemplate with wonder.<sup>51</sup>

Yet though as Serge insisted ‘our foremost weapon is the truth’, it was futile for intellectuals to simply ‘tell the truth to power’ given the powerful already essentially knew the awful truth about themselves.<sup>52</sup> As Orwell noted in 1938, ‘at a moment like the present’, a period of exceptional urgency, ‘writing books is not enough. The tempo of events is quickening; the dangers which once seemed a generation distant are staring us in the face. One has got to be actively a Socialist’.<sup>53</sup> Like Orwell, James believed that an individual revolutionary socialist, no matter how intellectually brilliant or courageous, is, in Serge’s words, ‘nothing if not backed up by an active group which has faith in him and in which he has faith: in other words, a party. Given a party, an intellect, a will, history will be made.’ For Serge, as for James (if never quite for Orwell) the best hope for building such a collective intellect and will in the 1930s lay with Trotsky, ‘a revolutionary soul, a brilliant pen’ and surrounded by a movement ‘willing to go throw fire with him’. The Trotskyist movement, Serge noted, was ‘still weak, still in the process of birth, and yet a ferment to be feared’ by Stalinist bureaucrat and bourgeois alike as it had a chance of ‘becoming the germ or one of the germs of a new Bolshevism, in the greatest sense of the word’.<sup>54</sup> Stalin, as an Old Bolshevik who had lived through the period of Zimmerwald during the Great War, knew only too well that such a nucleus of a revolutionaries, given the right conditions, could grow and potentially become significant. Stalin’s frantic attempt to destroy such a nucleus forming in the period

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<sup>51</sup> C.L.R. James, ‘The Struggle for the Fourth International’, *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937), James, *World Revolution*, pp. 16, 208.

<sup>52</sup> Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin*, p. 110. For one recent Marxist discussion of intellectuals, see Rick Kuhn, ‘Economic Crisis, Henryk Grossman and the Responsibility of Socialists’, *Historical Materialism*, 17/2, (2009).

<sup>53</sup> George Orwell, ‘Why I Joined the Independent Labour Party’, in Patrick Deane (ed.), *History in Our Hands; A Critical Anthology of Writings on Literature, Culture and Politics from the 1930s* (London, 1998), p. 384.

<sup>54</sup> Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin*, pp. 10, 104-105. In February 1939, Serge would develop this metaphor, famously noting in the *New Internationalist* that ‘it is often said that “the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning”. Well, I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism also contained many other germs - a mass of other germs - and those who lived through the enthusiasm of the first years of the first victorious revolution ought not to forget it. To judge the living man by the death germs which the autopsy reveals in a corpse - and which he may have carried in him since his birth - is this very sensible?’ Quoted in Peter Sedgwick, ‘Introduction’, to Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941* (London, 1967), pp. xv-xvi.

preceding another great imperialist war in part explains the sheer level of slander and terror his agents directed at Trotsky and his friends, family and comrades during the 1930s.<sup>55</sup>

If one might be permitted a metaphor from his beloved world of cricket, then James represented one of the great ‘opening batsmen’ of the international Trotskyist movement. The veteran Harry Wicks, with customary generosity, certainly declared his friend and comrade ‘the outstanding British Trotskyist of the 1930s’.

Not only was he a good speaker, but his speeches evidenced wide culture and deep reading. Above all, he could think mightily for himself. The Brockways and Maxtons could hardly dismiss him as a scruffy Trotskyist.<sup>56</sup>

Taken together with his other intellectual and political achievements outside of organised revolutionary Marxist politics, this period of James’s life in 1930s Britain remains remarkable. Timothy Brennan has gone as far as to declare it James’s ‘prolific *anni mirabili*’, the period ‘where his best work had been written’.<sup>57</sup> This is not to say that for all its strengths, James’s early Marxism was without its limitations, perhaps inevitably given his training in the persecuted and miniscule early Trotskyist movement.<sup>58</sup> Trotsky’s brilliant analysis of the resistible rise of fascism in Germany and his pioneering attempt to understand Stalinist Russia aside, in the main

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<sup>55</sup> The ‘Zimmerwald mentality’ equally gave (with hindsight, sadly unjustified) confidence to the Trotskyist movement, and enabled the likes of James and Serge, despite everything, to retain their optimism about the future. As James put it in slightly messianic fashion in 1937, ‘a few hundred of us can face the future with enormous confidence. Once we get a strong nucleus we shall grow automatically’. James, ‘The Struggle for the Fourth International’.

<sup>56</sup> Wicks, *Keeping My Head*, p. 182. Indeed, according to Logie Barrow, Wicks once even declared James ‘the greatest Marxist of the 1930s’. Logie Barrow, ‘Harry Wicks 1905-1989’, *History Workshop*, 31, (1991), p. 235.

<sup>57</sup> Brennan, *At Home in the World*, p. 222.

<sup>58</sup> Indeed, James acknowledged many of the Trotskyist movement’s limitations at the time. As he wrote in 1937, ‘The Trotskyists have committed serious errors. Our isolation, leading us to sectarianism, the polemical character of our propaganda and agitation, lack of contact with the mass movement, leading to bitter internal quarrels and splits, the imitation of Trotsky’s faults by followers incapable of imitating his virtues, these and other grave errors no serious Bolshevik-Leninist would deny. But where was there ever a movement which did not carry the defect of its virtues? Today our political line is a thousand times justified.’ *Fight*, 1/11, (November, 1937).

Trotskyism in the 1930s has been seen by historians as a *defensive* phenomenon.<sup>59</sup> In general, Trotskyists were not attempting to develop Marxist theory in the manner accomplished in this period by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, but were simply trying to defend Leninist orthodoxy from Stalinist revisionism. While understanding that Lenin ‘was neither God nor Stalin’, at times James nonetheless perhaps over-relied on the letter of Lenin’s writings when conceptualising politics in the 1930s.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, with respect to British left-wing politics in particular, as John Archer noted, James ‘had no occasion to study seriously the British workers movement and its peculiarities, or the experience of the Communist movement in this country, and he seems to have tended to rely on what he picked up and on his own fertility of mind’.<sup>61</sup>

Yet, as we have seen in our discussion of *World Revolution*, relying ‘on what he picked up and on his own fertility of mind’ proved a highly fruitful methodology as James not only ably defended the tradition of classical Bolshevism from the Stalinist perversion during this period but also went on the offensive theoretically, daring to ‘think mightily for himself’ in an open fashion about the class nature of the Soviet Union and the question of revolutionary organisation. Moreover, in *The Black Jacobins* and *A History of Negro Revolt* James applied the Marxist theory of permanent revolution and ‘the law of uneven and combined development’ to the past and present of the African diaspora with great originality and imagination.<sup>62</sup> James’s

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<sup>59</sup> As Trotsky himself put it in the mid-1930s, ‘the ideas I am defending ... are not really my ideas but those of Marx, Engels and Lenin. I have made it my task to protect these ideas from complete discredit by the Soviet bureaucracy and to analyse the newest developments by the methods of Marx.’ Quoted in John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism; Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> James, ‘Trotskyism’. See for example James’s discussion of Lenin’s vision of peasant soviets with respect to colonial Africa, or his reliance in a review of Padmore’s *How Britain Rules Africa* on Lenin’s concept of a ‘labour aristocracy’ as set out in *Imperialism* (and used by Padmore) to explain how profits from gold mines in South Africa flow back to Britain and help ensure ‘good wages to certain workers who create a firm support for Citrine, Attlee, Bevin, Morrison, Lansbury and Co., and thus, in the last analysis, keep the great millions of British workers in firm subjection’ to the British Empire. James, “‘Civilising’ the ‘Blacks’”. For a pioneering 1957 Marxist critique of Lenin’s theory of the labour aristocracy, see Tony Cliff, ‘Economic roots of reformism’, in Tony Cliff, *Marxist Theory After Trotsky; Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (London, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Archer, ‘C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38’, p. 62. That said, it is perhaps telling that two of the last works James read in Britain before leaving for America in 1938 were A.L. Morton’s *A People’s History of England* (1938) and G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate’s *The Common People* (1938). See Young, *The World of C.L.R. James*, p. 66 and James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 157.

<sup>62</sup> According to Special Branch reports dated April 1938, James was then working on ‘compiling a study of Trotsky’s part in the rise to power of Lenin’. TNA: KV/2/1824/22a. ‘He continues to devote the whole of his time and energies to the Trotskyist cause and has of late been attending the reading

Marxism was from the first imbued with the revolutionary democratic spirit of 'socialism from below', to use Hal Draper's term, as evident from his discussion of 'Lenin and Socialism' in *World Revolution*.

The creative capacity of the masses - he [Lenin] believed in it as no other leader of the workers ever did. That creative capacity had hitherto been seen only in revolution. The Soviet system based on the masses in the factories was to organise this creativeness not only for purpose of government but also for production, linking the two closer and closer together until ultimately the all-embracing nature of production by the whole of society rendered the State superfluous.<sup>63</sup>

As a result of his Marxism, James the West Indian intellectual and 'class struggle Pan-Africanist' did more than achieve merely the intellectual conquest of imperial Britain. As Robert Hill eloquently noted, James only spent 'slightly more than six and a half years' in Britain, but in those few years 'he added significantly to the emancipation and understanding of the human condition'.<sup>64</sup>

In October 1938, James went to America, but as he remembered 'with the intention of coming back. I was well established in Britain.' Aside from his commitment to covering the 1939 cricket season for the *Glasgow Herald* James was also ready to go 'underground' in Britain and to prepare the Trotskyist movement for conditions of illegality in case of war.<sup>65</sup> James of course ended up staying in America for fifteen years, in which time he transcended many of the limitations of orthodox Trotskyism, and creatively and imaginatively attempted to develop

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room of the British Museum daily, for the purpose of collecting data for a book he is writing on Marxism and Trotskyism'. TNA: KV/2/1824/22b. See also TNA: KV/2/1824/34a, a report dated 12 September 1938 which reports that on 10 August 1938 'James was reported to be collaborating with [fellow Trotskyist] Dr. R.L. Worrall, in writing a book entitled "African and West Indian History".'

<sup>63</sup> James, *World Revolution*, p. 123. Indeed, James's attempt to understand society 'from below', from the point of the view of the worker at the point of production, meant that *Fight* attempted to carry a regular series entitled 'On the Job' in 1937, featuring for example 'The Building Worker' by Arthur Ballard, and then 'From the Engineer's Bench' by a member of the engineers union, the A.E.U. *Fight*, 1/3, (January, 1937) and *Fight*, 1/4, (February, 1937). Hal Draper, *The Two Souls of Socialism* (London, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> Hill, 'In England', p. 80.

<sup>65</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *War and the International*, p. 46.

revolutionary Marxist theory to face the new realities of the post-war world.<sup>66</sup> Yet some have still viewed James's 'American years' with a tinge of sadness, and Timothy Brennan has even suggested that 'never after the 1930s was the grace and brilliance of his early writing equalled', before speculating about why James seemingly failed to 'rekindle the fire of his brilliantly productive life in Britain', suggesting among other reasons that 'he needed social movement to write, and this he did not have in the United States'.<sup>67</sup> James himself would never regret his first extended American sojourn, as he felt the work he carried out there made him 'a world citizen', yet he also noted that 'I know that where I could work most concretely would have been *British* politics; the literature, the traditions of Britain are in my bones. I grew up on them.'<sup>68</sup>

Overall, many writers on James's life and work have either consciously or unconsciously echoed Eric Williams's later casual dismissal of his Marxist belief in 'the absurdities of world revolution'.<sup>69</sup> This dissertation has tried to show how there was nothing 'absurd' about James's orientation towards revolutionary Marxism during the 1930s, given the anger he felt at both colonialism and a capitalist system in crisis and apparently descending into the barbarism of fascism and imperialist war. If today, despite the contemporary ecological, economic, political and ideological crisis, it still seems 'absurd' to talk of world revolution, it is arguably only because, as James once put it, 'Western civilisation has forgotten or learnt to distrust the revolutionary temper, the revolutionary spirit, the revolutionary personality built on

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<sup>66</sup> For brief critical discussions of James's mature Marxism, see for example Le Blanc, 'Introduction: C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism' and Callinicos, *Trotskyism*, pp. 61-66.

<sup>67</sup> Brennan, *At Home in the World*, pp. 223, 225.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in McLemee, 'Afterword: American Civilization and World Revolution', p. 226. It is impossible but interesting nonetheless to speculate about how James's career in revolutionary politics might have turned out had he returned to Britain in 1939 and made his home in London. My sense is that the British Trotskyist movement would have been overall strengthened considerably with an intellectual leader of the calibre and flexibility of James, who would have also have been a figure of real authority among the growing black population in Britain after the Second World War. He may indeed have been elected the first 'Trotskyist' M.P. given the entire British Trotskyist movement 'entered' the Labour Party for a period during the 1950s. Moreover, his influence alongside Padmore in the Pan-Africanist movement in Britain may have helped ensure one or two of the national liberation movements in Africa and the Caribbean after the Second World War maintained more of a clear focus on socialism and working class struggle than they subsequently did. For another speculation about what might have happened, see Howe, 'C.L.R. James'. For my brief discussion of James's return to Britain in the 1950s and attempt to build a new 'Marxist Group', see Christian Høgsbjerg, 'Beyond the Boundary of Leninism? C.L.R. James and 1956', *Revolutionary History*, 9/3. (2006).

<sup>69</sup> Williams, *Inward Hunger*, p. 77, quoted in Buhle, *C.L.R. James*, p. 44.

the grand heroic scale'. Yet ever since his conversations with militant cotton textile workers in Nelson, Lancashire, James felt the 'revolutionary spirit' burns 'in Europe still in millions of ordinary people. If it did not, civilisation would be at an end, destroyed not by the hydrogen bomb explosions from without, but by the congealing from within.'<sup>70</sup> In the 1930s, in the midst of a massive economic crisis, James saw the 'congealing from within' in the form of fascism, and one does not have to look far to see the return of that threat today across Europe. Nor, given the militarism of the United States coupled with the continuing danger of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, can we forget about the possibility of civilisation being destroyed by 'bomb explosions from without'. However, if one just looked at the growth of barbarism in the world then one would surely fall into passivity and despair. James would instead doubtless point us to the massive mobilisations of the global anti-capitalist and anti-war movements in recent years, as well as signs of a growing revival of the class struggle itself after decades of defeat, as symbols of hope and proof that 'the revolutionary spirit' burns still. Those social movements and class struggles in turn could have few greater inspirations for the twenty-first century than C.L.R. James, a 'revolutionary personality built on the grand heroic scale' during the world-historic crisis of the 1930s.

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<sup>70</sup> James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, p. 120.

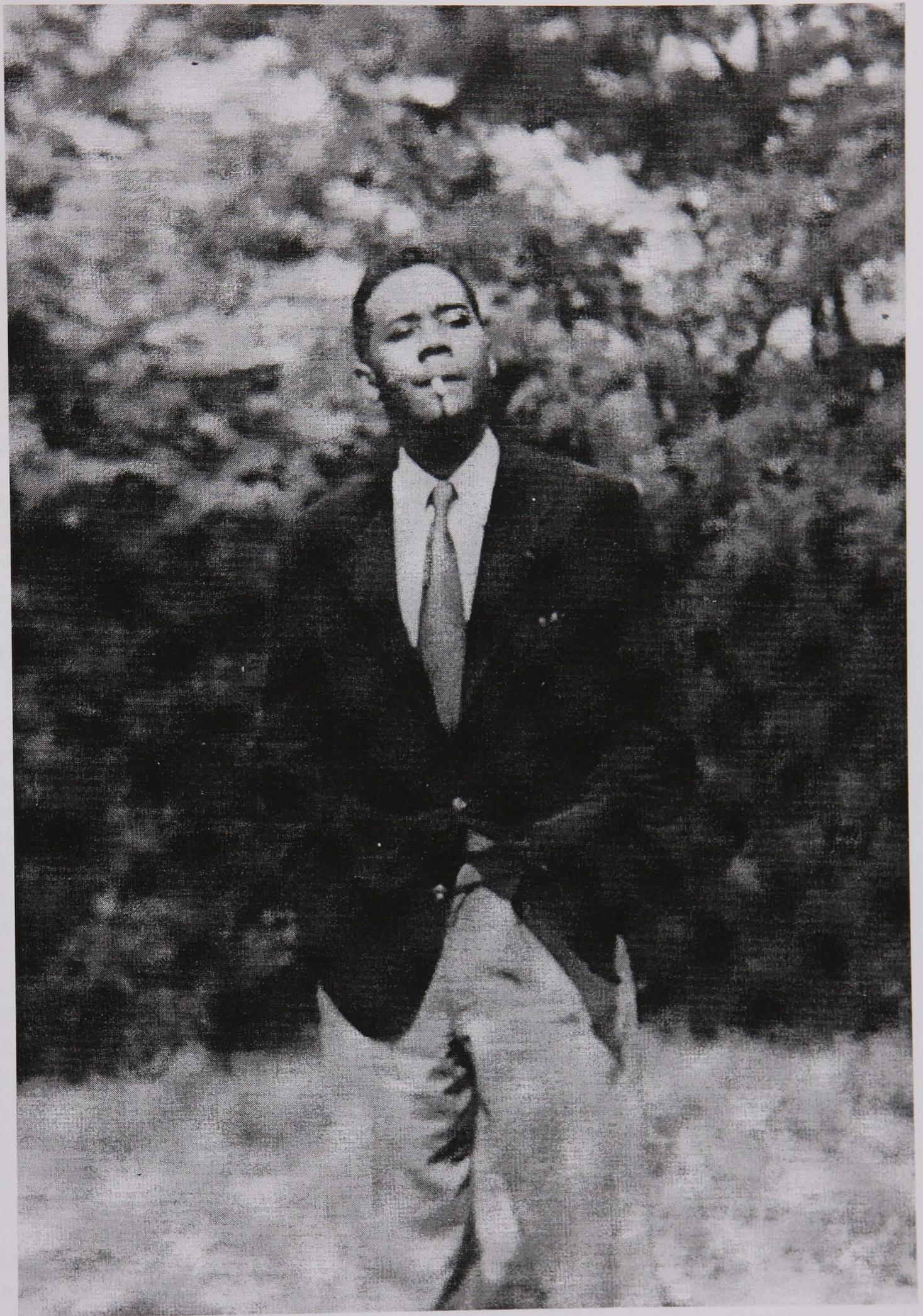


Plate 17. C.L.R. James, 1940s.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> [Photograph]. From James, *American Civilization*, p. i.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- A.F.L. – American Federation of Labour  
A.H.D.C – Africa House Defence Committee  
A.R.P.S. – Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society (Gold Coast)  
B.L.P.E.S. - British Library of Political and Economic Science  
B.U.F. – British Union of Fascists  
B.W.I.R. – British West India Regiment  
C.G.T. – General Confederation of Labour (France)  
C.I.O. – Committee of Industrial Organizations (America)  
C.P.G.B. – Communist Party of Great Britain  
E.C.C.I. – Executive Committee of the Communist International  
F.I. – Fourth International  
G.C.A.T.T. - Glasgow Caledonian University Archive of the Trotskyist Tradition  
I.A.F.A. – International African Friends of Abyssinia  
I.A.S.B. – International African Service Bureau  
I.C.S. - Institute of Commonwealth Studies  
I.L.P. – Independent Labour Party  
I.L.D. – International Labour Defence  
I.T.U.C. – N.W. – International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers  
L.A.I. – League Against Imperialism  
L.C.P. – League of Coloured Peoples  
L.D.R.N. - Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre (France)  
L.G.A.A. – London Group on African Affairs  
L.H.A. – Labour History Archive and Study Centre (Manchester)  
L.S.E. – London School of Economics  
M.O.P.R. – Russian Red Aid  
N.A.A.C.P. - National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (America)  
N.C.C.L. - National Council for Civil Liberties  
N.C.L.C. - National Council of Labour Colleges  
N.U.W.M. - National Unemployed Workers’ Movement  
N.W.A. – Negro Welfare Association  
P.O.U.M. - Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification (Spain)  
Q.R.C. – Queen’s Royal College  
R.C.P. – Revolutionary Communist Party  
R.I.L.U. – Red International of Labour Unions  
R.S.L. – Revolutionary Socialist League  
R.S.P. – Revolutionary Socialist Party  
S.F.I.O. – French Section of the Labour International – the official name of the French Socialist Party  
S.P.G.B. – Socialist Party of Great Britain  
S.W.P. – Socialist Workers’ Party (America)  
T.L.P. – Trinidad Labour Party  
T.N.A. – The National Archives  
T.U.C. – Trades Union Congress  
T.W.A. – Trinidad Workingmen’s Association  
U.D.C. – Union of Democratic Control

U.N.I.A. – Universal Negro Improvement Association  
U.S.S.R. – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  
W.A.Y.L. – West African Youth League  
W.A.S.U. – West African Students' Union  
W.E.A. – Workers' Education Association  
Y.C.L. – Young Communist League

## APPENDICES

- A. Proconsuls, Beware
- B. 'Coloured Peoples under British Rule'
- C. 'Racial Prejudice in England'
- D. I.L.P. Abyssinian Policy
- E. Colourful Personality [Madame Zorina]
- F. Bruce Wendell
- G. Introduction to *Red Spanish Notebook*
- H. The Voice of Africa [Jomo Kenyatta]
- I. Sir Stafford Cripps and "Trusteeship"
- J. Ethel Mannin's 'Trotskyists at Tea'
- K. Interview with Mildred Gordon, 2005

## A. Proconsuls, Beware: A Cautionary Tale

*Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 September 1932.

The Hon. Peter Delaney was happily married, he had a fine son, he made five thousand pounds a year, from his position as member of the Legislative Council he was invited to Government House for all official functions. If a ranking list had been made of the hundred thousand or so inhabitants of the West Indian island on which he lived, he would have been perhaps among the first three, certainly among the first half dozen. But the gods had placed the fly in his ointment, the grain of dust in his machine. Mr. Delaney was a coloured man.

He was a coloured man, coloured in the West Indian sense of the term, which is to say he is not black as a full blooded negro is black, but brown, halfway between black and white, so to speak. In another two or three generations the Delaneys would be all white. Mr. Delaney had married an Englishwoman. His son was much nearer white than he was. His son would repeat the process until the Delaneys would be able despise black people without any inward qualms. But for the Hon. Peter there was no hope. As he was, he would remain.

Socially he lived a sort of half and half existence, ashamed of keeping company with dark people and doing his best to get into the company of white people, who despised him for his snobbery, but feared and respected him for his power and ability in the legal and political world. The Hon. Peter was too intelligent not to be quite aware of all of this. But, nevertheless, men are men. As ignorance of the law is no excuse so often knowledge of the disease is no remedy.

But things had been improving of late. The political situation in the West Indies increasingly uncertain and disturbed, had made a great difference to the position of men like the Hon. Peter. As Governor, Colonial Secretary, and the higher officials felt the pressure of the people on them they realised that it would be just as well to have on their side a few whom they might with some plausibility refer to as representatives of the local people. The Hon. Peter found himself invited to tea, not tea with thirty or forty other people at a semi-official sort of function, but tea with a cosy party, the Colonial Secretary and wife, the Chief Justice and wife and the President of the Chamber of Commerce, without wife. His wife had refused to meet the Hon. Peter, but Peter did not know this and even if he had, it would have been compensated for by the fact his son Cecil, his only child, spent a weekend at a rather exclusive all white party.

These functions followed in fairly quick succession, and even the leaders of the democratic party had to agree that the Hon. Peter had never spoken so well as in the great speech defending the attitude of the Government in refusing to introduce the Workingmen's Compensation Act at this critical period in the industrial history of the island. The *Herald*, the paper of the merchants and supporters of the Government, in a leading article suggested that the time had come when the Government should recognise the services of local men; it looked forward to certain distinguished local figures appearing in the next Honours List.

The Hon. Peter Delaney's heart beat uncomfortably when he read this. He knew that the Colonial Secretary and the editor of the *Herald* worked hand in glove. They could not dare to offer him the O.B.E. He was too big a man for that. It would be knighthood or nothing. Cecil indeed was all a father could desire. And many who detested the father, liked the son by contrast for his own sake. He was a shy boy, with a charming smile, full of a carefully inculcated respect for authority. He was a

fine cricketer, and his fathers' cup overflowed when His Excellency after opening a bridge one morning, came on to lunch at the Hon. Peter Delaney's country estate and took part in a cricket match in the afternoon.

Cecil made fifty-eight delightful runs that day. But the chief impression made on his mind was the vast preparation, the carpet from the street to the house, the number of white people and important officials, the champagne, the expense. Nor did he ever forget the sight of the Governor walking about the pavilion with an equerry hopping frog-fashion on each side, putting on His Excellency's pads.

"You see, my boy" said the Hon. Peter as he talked it over with Cecil afterwards. "The Governor is the representative of His Majesty, the King. It has cost a lot of money, I admit, but still, you can never do too much for anyone in such an exalted position. Remember that..." Cecil remembered that. He was a good boy who remembered most things that his father told him. In the September he left for England to study law. Before he left he and his father and mother dined out at Government House with the Auditor General and the Collector of Customs (and wife), the conversation dwelt largely on England.

Cecil came to London and lived an exemplary life. There were students who read subversive books and declaimed against Imperialism. Cecil had nothing to do with them. When he passed his first examination, his father wrote to say that both the Excellencies sent to congratulate him.

One night, Cecil went to see Hamlet at the Old Vic. It lasted a long time and when he came out, he was feeling rather hungry. Unlike most London students, he took his meals at regular hours and usually ate at home. But tonight, he stood in the queue which had lined up before a rather disreputable looking coffee stall. In front of him was a workman with his trousers tied below the knee, a real neckerchief, a pipe turned upside down and a habit of spitting after every puff. Cecil almost felt like leaving but decided to stay. He paid for his coffee and a sandwich, and began to stir his cup, casting his eyes casually over the crowd. Then suddenly he dropped his spoon, turned around and walked off rapidly. He shared a bedroom with the son of the household, some relations of his mothers. Dick noted as soon as Cecil came in that something was wrong. But Cecil for once when spoken to was almost rude in reply. Dick went to sleep but got up later and found Cecil still up. And smoking. What in the name of heaven was wrong?

And then in the small hours of the morning, Cecil sobbed out his difficulty on Dick's shoulder. In the dirty crowd around the coffee stall, waiting their turn with Tom, Dick and Mrs. Harry he had seen His Excellency, the Governor and his wife. Cecil never recovered from the shock, and his fall from grace has been rapid. He joined societies, became a great drinker of beer and smoker of pipes. He now wears a red tie, has contributed to the *Daily Worker*, and the latest heard of him is that he contemplates speaking in Hyde Park on the evils of British Colonial Government. The opposition papers at home make much of it. His mother is slimming after many years of fruitless effort. His father is grey. At the official dinner of welcome to His Excellency on his return from leave, the Hon. Peter was treated with marked coldness, the knighthood seems further off than ever. Even the despised O.B.E.

## MORAL

When Proconsuls forsake the chicken and champagne and other burdens of Colonial Government for the ancestral sausages and mashed pint of bitter, let them do so with a due regard for their former exalted position and the fierce light which beats upon a throne.

**B. "Coloured Peoples under British Rule." Fine lecture at Nelson.**

*Nelson Leader*, 27 January 1933.

A fairly good audience turned up at the I.L.P. rooms on Sunday evening to hear Mr. James, the West Indian, who is a good friend of Constantine's, speak on the above subject. His audience were rewarded by the manner in which the speaker dealt with the subject, and also for the sympathy which he had for the exploited people under British rule, in their demands for independence.

At the outset of his address, he stated that there was no hope of Labour's ideals being realised in this country unless the colonial peoples under British rule were granted independence. Mr. James then went on to deal with three sorts of coloured people who were subject to British rule, i.e. the people in Kenya, Burma and the West Indies.

Dealing with Kenya, he said that thirty two years ago the natives were untouched by British rule and white civilisation. They could be classed like European rural districts today. Then the white settlers came, and in order to live, the natives had to pay a poll tax to the settlers. This meant that they had to have money, and in order to get money they had to work for the white settlers. Failing to pay the poll tax, they were punished and subject to criminal law. The natives of Kenya were keenly up against this imposition.

The speaker then went on to deal with Burma, which was taken over by the British Government fifty years ago. The people of Burma had been very dissatisfied with British control for some time, and in 1932 a conference was held to discuss a new constitution for them. The conference suggested that they could have self-government, with the exception of the control of currency, the army and the payment of pensions. These recommendations Mr. James referred to ironically, and said they were only the shadow and not the substance of self-government. Six weeks ago, the Burmese people were allowed to vote on the recommendations, and to the great surprise of Britain, they voted in favour of being under an Indian constitution in preference to the British Governor's suggested constitution.

Mr. James then finally dealt with his native country, the West Indies. He said the position there was becoming serious, as the West Indians were becoming very impatient about self-government. He said eighty percent of the professional men in that country were West Indians. He cited Jamaica as having the lowest percentage of crime and pauperism in the whole world. Britain, however, would not concede self-government to the West Indian people. Mr. James also went on to deal with the Legislative Assembly in which seven out of twenty-seven were delegates elected by the Governor General of the British Government. The position, Mr. James contended, was becoming farcical, as they could not get representatives to stand for the Assembly, because when they were elected they had no power.

The speaker finished by saying that the West Indians would be friendly to Britain if home rule were granted, as they had got accustomed to British people, and in many ways the ripe experience of Britain had contributed to certain improvements in West Indian life, despite the disadvantages on the other hand, which the West Indian people had been subjected to as a Colonial Unit responsible to Britain. There were many questions at the close, and there was no doubt that the audience very much appreciated the striking and interesting way in which the address was presented.

**C. Racial Prejudice in England. Coloured Lecturer and Effect of British Rule. "Negro moral code might have been an example to the world."**

*Nelson Leader*, 16 March 1934.

*'Racial prejudice in England is much stronger today than it was a hundred years ago,' said Mr. C.L.R. James, the West Indian author, in the course of his address on 'The Negro,' in the Grand Cinema, on Sunday evening, under the auspices of the Nelson Sunday Lecture Society. 'While in other European countries there is a steadily-growing appreciation of the Negro, there has been a change in the opposite direction in this land of the so-called sentimental English. You used to call the negro a man and a brother, but now your scientists are trying to prove that he is mentally subnormal.'*

The chairman, Mr. L. N. Constantine, the Nelson cricket professional, said it was difficult to introduce someone who was already well-known. Mr. James had come to England to pursue his studies in literature and law, and a good many people had either met him socially or heard him speak.

'We all know,' he added, 'that the coloured man is often misunderstood quite a lot in this country, and we must thank the Lecture Society for giving us this opportunity of saying something which will help you to understand us a little better. If, when Mr. James has finished, you have a little better idea of our aims and ambitions, then I am sure this lecture will have fulfilled a useful purpose.'

Mr. James, in the first place, asked his hearers to imagine themselves as having no knowledge about the negro. When they looked at his black face, they got the impression that he was a rather strange individual; but after speaking to him, without prejudice, they would come to the conclusion that he was quite a normal being. Unfortunately the opposite view was still held in this country. In the 1884 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, it was stated that the negro was definitely less intelligent than members of other races, the reason given for this being that the construction of the head was such that mental development beyond a certain point was impossible. In 1911 the same authority said that the negro, although less intelligent than other races, must not be considered to be too much so. Evidently scientists in 1911 were not quite as sure as they were in 1884 that further mental development was impossible beyond a certain point. The latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* went so far as to say that scientists had discovered that there was no lack of intelligence in the negro, and therefore the old idea had gone by the board. Some people even today would say: 'Oh yes, the negro is quite intelligent, but his brain has not had the same opportunities of development as the European brain.' This remark was based on the assumption that mental superiority was the result of centuries of intensive intellectual growth; but this was not scientifically true, for there was no reason whatsoever to believe that characteristics acquired by any human or animal being were transferred to their offspring. There was substantial evidence against that theory. The average human brain was the average human brain; and there was no evidence to show that generations spent in one environment were more effective than generations spent in another environment.

**'An unpleasant story.'**

The story of the negro in British South Africa was a bitter and unpleasant one, continued the lecturer: yet British administration in Africa was the best in all

English speaking countries. In British South Africa there were about 5,500,000 negroes and 1,500,000 Europeans, the latter owning about 85 percent of the land. In view of these facts, it was easy to understand the difference between the two races under these circumstances, for in taking the land from the negro they not only deprived him of his means of livelihood, but also destroyed his whole construction of life. The Boer or English farmer must have labour on the lowest possible terms, and the negro, having been driven off his land, had got to pay taxes to the Government. In order to get this money for taxes, he had to come out of his reserve and work, accepting labour at whatever terms his employer offered. Furthermore, the African native, being of fine physique, measures had to be introduced to keep him in his proper place, and he must carry a pass showing where he was employed, another one entitling him to indulge in intoxicants; another if he wished to be out after nine o'clock, and so on. Sometimes he had as many as twelve of these passes in his possession, and natives were often fined or sent to gaol for failing to produce their passes at the request of a policeman. It was easy to imagine the moral effect upon persons who suffered under these conditions. Furthermore, the African native had no prospects; in fact his position had gone steadily worse since the war. In 1926 they passed the Colour Bar Act, which stated that no negro must attempt any skilled labour. He must remain, in the Biblical phrase, 'a hewer of wood and a drawer of water,' and he had no means of raising his family to a higher social plane. There was going to be a tremendous revolt in Africa someday.

Europeans had been in South Africa for about 300 years, and the natives had no prospects after 300 years. Europeans went into Kenya thirty or forty years ago, and the natives had only had their land taken from them since the war. A good deal had appeared in the newspapers of late concerning Kenya, but this was due not so much to the economic importance of the country as the fact that a good many aristocratic and influential English people had gone to settle there. In the first place the natives were driven off the land; but although a settler might have land, money and the best intentions, he cannot work the land without labour, and the natives, being attracted by the wonderful civilisation which the settler had introduced into their country, went to work for him. After a few months, however, the negro's interest reverted to his native village, and he returned home to enjoy the companionship of his family and participate in the tribal ceremonies. But the settler must have labour or face ruin, the result being that people with money and power had got behind the Government, and got it to pass the same legislation as in South Africa. The native had now to sign a contract with his master, and if he broke it he went to prison. He had also hut taxes to pay for every adult person in his village; and consequently during the past few years the position had become terrible. The native had to go to work, this sometimes involving the walking of hundreds of miles. This was not only a question of economic pressure, but it also entailed the breaking up of his own civilisation, Kenya being one of the sorest spots in regard to the position of the native. The lecturer did not lay the blame on individuals, but on the system which permitted these things to happen. It was an economic question, and the Japs were doing the same thing in Korea. That did not alter the fact that the African native was in a much worse position than he was before the days of Western interference, and he was amazed at the atrocities committed by Englishmen who had the opportunities of education and upbringing, and who ought to know better. Conditions were even worse in the French and Belgian states, and between 1911 and 1926 3,250,000 natives died in French Equatorial Africa. Big holes were dug and the natives were thrown into them and blown up with dynamite.

### **The American Situation.**

Negroes began to dribble into America about 400 years ago, and slavery began about the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Mr. James said he did not want to talk about slavery; everyone had heard enough about that – he wanted to look forward. In America slavery was abolished in 1867, and the negro fought as magnificently for his freedom as any European. Lincoln himself had said that the North did not fight the South for the sake of the negro, as was commonly believed. The negro was taken to America, and did not go there of his own accord, and therefore he was entitled to his place in American civilisation. There were about 15,000,000 negroes in America today, and they had followed splendidly the methods of progress. In fact it was impossible to discountenance the fact that the negro in America had made more progress during recent years than any other race. But the fact remained that the position of the masses of negroes in the Southern States was just as precarious as it was in the days of slavery. Everybody had heard of the lynchings which had taken place in recent years. One of the most regrettable features of these unpleasant incidents was the common practice of newspapers to announce the time and place, so that people could congregate to see such-and-such a man burned to death. Sometimes negroes who were doing well in business were told they were going too far, and very often they were dealt with. In the South they said that a negro could not be trusted where white women were concerned, and there had been 7,300 lynchings in the past thirty years. Even when white juries had acquitted negroes on these charges, the white community had taken upon themselves to deal with the accused by means of barbarous methods. Not long ago a crowd danced round a prison in which a negro was burning and sang ‘Happy days are here again!’

The average person in England did not understand the negro. They saw him only dancing and kicking his heels like a half-crazy lunatic; the screen always presented him in an unfair position. People could not get away from the idea that he was fit for nothing better than the role of shoe-black or railroad porter, whereas actually there were thousands and thousands of negroes in the skilled professions. A black regiment formed in America during the Great War fought so well in France that it was given the honour of leading the French troops into foreign territory. In the West Indies 90 per cent of the posts of the Civil Service were occupied by natives, and 80 percent of the men in the professions were negroes.

If hearers went across the Channel and investigated conditions in France, Mr. James said they would find negroes in the French Cabinet, in the ranks of retired naval and army men, in the professions, universities and colleges. France had already disregarded scientific theories, and judged the negro on results. There was a vast difference in England; and it was not only a question of Anglo-Saxon prejudice. An Englishman preferred to sit and watch, while a negro was always walking about and talking, and the two did not get on together very well. Racial prejudice in England was much stronger today than it was 100 years ago. Since the expansion of the Empire, the makers of the Empire in outside parts had found themselves a small community living by force of arms, and their hostile attitude towards coloured men had been imitated in England. In the days of Nelson, the British Navy consisted of negroes to the extent of thirty or forty percent. There was not a single one today. While in other European countries there had been a steadily growing appreciation of the negro; there had been a change in the opposite direction in the land of the so-called sentimental English. They used to say that the negro was a man and a brother:

but times had changed, and one found that scientists were trying to prove that he was subnormal.

### **Cannibalism outcome of slavery.**

People who had been to Africa during the past 100 years had brought back a lot of tales, most of which were lies; but certain honest people had reported that what they had seen there had disgusted them. When slave traders began their activities on the coasts, they often subsidised the stronger tribes in order that they would bring out the weaker tribes as slaves, and consequently only the strong and ruthless could survive. Cannibalism, human sacrifice and whatever immorality existed today in Africa were the result of the kind of life the natives had to live under slavery. Fortunately, Africa was a large continent, and certain tribes were driven together. These people established themselves right in the centre of Africa, and, having formed a kingdom, were able to resist all encroachments. The result was they had formed a civilisation which showed what Africa would have been able to achieve had it remained free from foreign interference. In fact their moral code might have served as an example to the rest of the world.

‘I have spoken seriously because it is a serious question,’ said Mr. James in conclusion. ‘Although it is a racial question on the surface, it is a political and economic question below. I have spoken without hostility because some of the truest friends of the negro are white men. I don’t think you can do very much; the forces that control these things are far more powerful than you are, but the situation is not entirely hopeless. I think everyone here will realise that we are living on the eve of great changes. This is a transition period, and great things must come out of it, and it is possible that the negro may look forward to receiving better treatment than he has had in the past. It would be bad for both Negroes and Europeans if these changes had to be brought about by warfare.’

## **D. I.L.P. Abyssinian Policy**

*Controversy; Internal Discussion Organ of the I.L.P.*, (October 1935).

The I.L.P. has declared against a policy of sanctions. The Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress are for sanctions, even if it means war. Loudly and clearly the social-democratic leaders have sounded the trumpet. The Trade Unions in France are for sanctions, but not to the extent of war. There for the time being they stop. The parties of the Third International in Moscow and out of it are for sanctions. In Britain it is difficult to say where they are, except that they are for sanctions. To the average worker there seems a bewildering (and disheartening) confusion in these diverse reactions of the parties to the first great war crisis that faces the international working class movement. Yet it is here that the materialistic method, particularly as developed by Lenin, proves its worth. The confusion is only superficial. Behind it can be clearly discerned the rails laid down in advance, along which classes and different sections of classes were fore-ordained to travel, to be driven from them, if at all, only by the accumulating pressure of great historical events, and the chaos ends in revolution...

The political analysis of our era has been familiar for thirty years, at the very least since the Stuttgart Conference of 1907. Monopoly Capitalism, or, as it more familiarly known, Imperialism, demands a continuous expansion which the world, exploited already to the limit, can no longer satisfy. Imperialist war is the inevitable result. The proletariat must resist such wars, and never slacken in its efforts to end Imperialism, for only with the end of Imperialism can there be any possibility of permanent peace. It may seem superfluous to re-state these elementary principles in a journal like *Controversy*. But one has to re-state them when implicitly, and even explicitly, they are challenged on every side. The war of 1914-1918, the peace that followed, the history of succeeding years, prove these main principles without a shadow of doubt. But these events showed also certain class relations and methods of action which had not been clear before 1914. It is the great merit of Lenin that he not only saw them early but crystallised them into simple and basic formulae, showed in the Russian Revolution how these formulae could be made into principles of action, and formed the Third International to be the guiding organisation of those sections of the proletariat which were to be leaders in the overthrow of Imperialism. For the failure of the Second International to make even a gesture in 1914 was seen by Lenin to be not a historical accident or an outcome of the weakness of individual personalities, but the inevitable reaction of a certain section of the organised workers, worker in name, but in social content and therefore in political outlook essentially bourgeois, ready always in a moment of crisis such as war or proletarian revolution to side with its own bourgeoisie.

In every country of modern Europe the great masses of the workers are disorganised. Among those who are organised we have as a rule the most prosperous sections of the working class; and centering around the trade union organisations, the Party press and the official labour parties, holding all the organs of power, publicity and finance; are not only the bureaucrats themselves, but a substantial mass of workers whose standard of life and security are intimately bound up with the continuance of the bourgeois regime, that is to say, with Imperialism. Lenin saw this was and to a large extent always would be so. Hence the formation of the Third International of revolutionary workers – an international existing for the overthrow of Imperialism by civil war between the proletariat of every country and its own

bourgeoisie, an international whose strategy and tactics of political action we know, but whose ideology it is worth-while re-calling today.

“The necessary distance was kept up in the party by a vigilant irreconcilability, whose inspirer was Lenin. Lenin never tired of working with his lancet – cutting off those bonds which a petty-bourgeois environment creates between the party and official social opinion ... Thus the Bolshevik Party created not only a political but a moral medium of its own independent of bourgeois social opinion and implacably opposed to it.”

(Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, III, p. 166.)

When after the war France and Britain grabbed Germany's colonies and then formed the League of Nations, Lenin kept the International sharply away from any truck with it. “Thieves' kitchen” he dubbed Geneva and warned the masses against any illusions about peace being established through the League. He and the International knew the League for what it was, a cloak for the machinations of Imperialism which needed some protection against the wide-spread horror of war and the distrust of Imperialism engendered by the war. A short view of the Third International, particularly of its recent history, will show us how inevitably the various parties in the world today have reacted to the Abyssinian crisis and indeed had no other road open to them.

After 1922 the International received defeat after defeat, ending in the rout of the German workers in February 1933. Yet, up to October 1933, even after Germany had left the League, the rulers of Russia who control the International, were still speaking of Geneva in Leninist terms (See *I.P.C.*, Oct. 20<sup>th</sup> 1933, p. 1005). At the Soviet Congress of December 1933, however, we find Litvinov telling the Russian workers that there has been a great change in the League as an instrument of peace. The reason for this criminal nonsense was the fact that the negotiations for the Franco-Russian alliance were under way, and France was determined to bring Russia into the League. That Russia had to make an alliance with a bourgeois state and enter the bourgeois League was unfortunate. That is not the point here and now. We have to accept such historical facts, and while we have to be clear about causes, Russia at least is there and likely to remain there. Russia's being in the League would entail Litvinov's having to make certain statements with certain mental reservations. What is unpardonable and has had such catastrophic effects is the fact that Litvinov and the Soviet rulers not only made these statements at Geneva, but have consistently switched the whole policy of the international proletariat round to support of the League of Nations idea. It was not only that Stalin signed the communiqué with Laval and thus saddled the French proletariat with the doctrine of National Defence. Three weeks before the communiqué was issued he sent the Secretary of the Young Communist International, Chemodanov, to France who told the French Youth: “If war occurs against the U.S.S.R. and you make your revolution you will be traitors”. In other words, in a war against Germany if the Soviet Union is on the side of France you must fight side by side with your own bourgeoisie. In *L'Humanité* of May 24<sup>th</sup> there was reproduced a speech by Thorez of the French C.P.: “And now I answer a question that has been put to me: ‘In case of such a war launched by Hitler against the U.S.S.R., would you apply your slogan Transform the Imperialist War into the Civil War?’ Well, no! Because in such a war it is not an imperialist war that is involved, a war between two imperialist gangs, it is a war against the Soviet Union”.

As if France would be fighting against Germany for any other purpose than the same old imperialist purpose of the redivision of markets and important centres of production. The old parallel of Lenin making pacts with the Imperialists is brought in to justify the policy that the C.I. lays down for the workers in France. The analogy is so obviously false and empty that it only proves the emptiness of the C.I. case. Lenin was prepared to make a pact with the Imperialists, utilising the divisions between them. But weak as the Soviet Union was then, far weaker than it is today, Lenin did not at the same time cease to urge all workers to implacable struggle with the bourgeoisie. *It is not what Lenin said to the bourgeoisie that matters. It is what he said to the workers.*

All this may seem a far cry from sanctions and Abyssinia. It is not, but indispensable to a true understanding of the various policies. We have not only to oppose them, but to know where they spring from and, most important for the British workers, where they are leading to.

When Italian Imperialism, threatened by internal difficulties, came to terms with France over Austria and launched the attack on Abyssinia, British Imperialism encouraged it. Up to June Eden was still bargaining with Mussolini as to how much Britain could get out of it. (See *New Statesman and Nation* pamphlet on Abyssinia, page 14). But Mussolini proved intractable. And when British Imperialism realised how dangerous the situation was for British interests in East Africa, it turned to the League. But first it made one last effort. In the Paris talks in August it offered Mussolini the whole of the economic exploitation of Abyssinia, if only he would allow an international police force instead of an Italian army in Abyssinia. That they would not have. When Mussolini refused the British turned nasty. They manipulated the proposals of the Committee of Five which put Abyssinia into their hands, and still hiding behind the League, showed Mussolini that they were not going to let him get away with it. At the present time of writing France is the determining factor. France will not come in unless she gets a promise from Britain about Hitler and Austria, and Britain hesitates. She wants to watch and see how the conflict goes. But the British army is mobilised, the Fleet in position, the naval reserves called in. British Imperialism is ready. It does not want war. Who *wants* war? But it will manoeuvre, and if Mussolini insists, and sanctions do not stop him, then the British Government will fight as anybody in their place would.

Now let us see how the various parties react.

British Imperialism knows that its own interests are the ones at stake. In the last resort it will have to fight for them, and immediately the Labour leaders line up. They always have, and they always will, except when the masses are at boiling point, when they will oppose only to sell them out as Russia between March and October 1917 and in England in 1926. It does not matter what they passed at Brighton in 1933 or at Southport in 1934. In 1914 they were pledged to resist. But they must line up or take the revolutionary road. That road they will not take. And so nervous are they about the strong anti-war feeling in the country that they shout war even before the Government does so, most probably after having a hint or two from the Foreign Office. Baldwin thanks them in his Bournemouth speech for passing the resolution on sanctions. That disposes of the fallacy that Labour is urging the Government. As if Baldwin would mobilise the army and call in the naval reserves and send the fleet to the Mediterranean under pressure from workers. The hypocrisy of people who say this passes all reasonable expectation, as if workers could ever urge Imperialists into sanctions, if even sanctions mean war. These leaders are insuring themselves in advance. If war does come through sanctions, then they, having supported sanctions,

will be taken into the Cabinet. As in 1931 some will be formal heads, and once more a "united Nation" goes into the slaughter.

The I.L.P., owing to the general turn of the party away from social-opportunism to revolution, has cut itself away from this fatal policy and, while supporting Abyssinia as Lenin supported Afghanistan against Britain, will not allow itself to be caught in the Imperialist trap, as many sincere workers have been, or rush gladly in as their leaders are doing.

Let us now look at France. There, French interests are not directly threatened. There is more room for diversity. Laval on the right wants to keep out. Herriot, the Radical, however is afraid of Fascism in France and would like to take this opportunity and drive out Laval. But though he will do more than Laval, he does not want actually to fight. It is easy therefore to understand the French Labour leaders. As usual they line up directly behind the bourgeoisie and, in cases of confusion, that section nearest to them. Sanctions by all means, they say, but no war. If, however, war does come, and war under Herriot, they will come in, we need have no fear. On the extreme Left in France is the group of Bolshevik-Leninists, the Trotskyists, whose position is similar to that of the I.L.P. They will fight this collaboration with the bourgeoisie to the end and try to turn Imperialist war into Civil war. Where are the Communists and the Third International? They also follow that line. Soviet Russia is at the League fighting for sanctions and hoping that by being firm in this alliance, when the time comes, she will get support against Germany from France, Czechoslovakia and possibly Britain. Germany is not in the League, but the Franco-Soviet alliance is an alliance against Germany. Hence, long months ago, the Soviet Union had the C.P. in France lined up with the Trade Unions, and of course they are shouting sanctions as loudly as the rest, and if France is led into war the C.P. will support and, if necessary, take part, as Andrew Rothstein informed an I.L.P. meeting some time ago. He spoke of a probable war between France and Russia, on the one hand, and Germany on the other. But the French bourgeoisie are not fools. The C.P. is tied up with large sections of them in the Popular Front, and if there is going to be any sort of war they are going to see that the C.P. is firmly enmeshed in it. There should be no surprise therefore that the C.P. in Britain and most of their fractions in other parties are for sanctions. Sometimes they say sanctions mean war, at other times it may mean war; they talk about fascism, about "forcing" the National Government and "exposing" it at the same time as you demand, etc. To any true Marxist all that means just nothing. Soviet Russia is hoping to keep in with Britain and France at the League for fear of Germany, and the word has gone forth to the parties: follow us and support sanctions and all the League trickery. That is the beginning and end of the policy of the C.P.

There is no earthly use in trying to follow the rationalisation by which these various parties seek to prove that "sanctions" is the correct policy for the working class. All the blather about Fascism to be fought by Democracy etc, etc., as if in a war there is anything to choose between Fascist Imperialism and Democratic Imperialism. It is not surprising nor bewildering, though somewhat nauseating at times. They are merely following out the laws of the political groups to which they belong and have to find some reasons. They have a hard job. We propose one query of many to any revolutionary socialist. It is this: If you are for sanctions, you are closing the Suez Canal. That can be done only by warships. You therefore must tell the sailors of the Fleet that you as a revolutionary are in support of this action. But Mussolini may attack. From start to finish he has never been bluffing, and it is madness to think that he will climb down now. The moment he attacks, war begins.

How is the sanctionist now to make propoganda to the Fleet and tell the sailors to turn Imperialist war into Civil war? No true Marxist can play these games with the proletariat. There are too many ties already between the bourgeoisie and the masses for revolutionaries in the grave crisis of a war to go adding to them.

So much for the present. The danger for the I.L.P. is in the future. Certain elements are against the "sanctions" policy now. They talk about turning Imperialist war into Civil war. But there are indications that they are not true Leninists. If an Imperialist War between Germany and Russia should break out and by any chance Britain is drawn in on the same side as the Soviet Union, then those who are against sanctions now and against any sort of collaboration with their own bourgeoisie will begin to shout for supporting its own Government "while exposing it". That way lies disaster. The true revolutionaries in the I.L.P, must be on guard; whatever the circumstances, the enemy is our own bourgeoisie, and in war time more than any other time, whatever the war; for every war in which an imperialist bourgeoisie takes part is an Imperialist war. The circumstances of modern war are such that any prolonged struggle will bring the masses into the streets. They will want leadership. The I.L.P. must be ready. And it will be all the stronger if it remains always and through every temptation, in peace time as in war, the implacable enemy of its own bourgeoisie.

## **E. Colourful Personality**

*Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 December 1935.

From the moment one catches sight of her tall, marvellously beautiful figure, hears her laugh and talk in her vibrating voice, each word tumbling over the last in her eagerness to recapture an impression, or draw with vivid word and gesture a picture of the amazing life behind her - one is fascinated by Madame Zorina.

In her, one sees all the beauty and reckless dissipation of energy and artistry that marked the last days of the Russian Imperial sway. And yet unlike so many of her order, she has had the power, the determination, to rebuild life again on that firmest of foundation - artistic endeavour.

Zorina has had many triumphs on the stage, but the greatest and most dramatic triumph was when she sang to a mass of Russian revolutionary soldiers, with only her voice between them and the destruction of a famous St Petersburg building, the Army and Navy Palace. It is the most thrilling episode of her life, and an artistic experience of which few or any of her colleagues on the operatic stage have ever heard. She tells the story herself with a vividness that is at once a tribute to her gifts as an actress and the indelible impression which such an incident would leave on the mind and personality.

In March 1917 the first revolution saw the downfall of the Czar, and after a few months Kerensky ruled in Russia. When the revolution broke out I was living in the Army and Navy Palace said Madame. 'One day there came a band of revolutionary soldiers threatening to blow the Palace up. There was no arguing with them. Hastily I gathered together a deputation of wounded and crippled officers and went with them to Kerensky. I pleaded with him to save the building and the lives of 600 wounded officers who had fought for their country. He replied that he could do nothing; were he to take active steps on our behalf he would be branded by the masses as a counter-revolutionary.

'I was consumed with sorrow. The Army and Navy Palace was the most wonderful concert hall in St Petersburg perfect in acoustics and ideal in every way, specially built indeed, to give St Petersburg a hall worthy of that great city. I had often sung there, and none of us on the staff would feel its destruction as I would. When we got back to the palace the soldiers were thicker than before. Half desperate I jumped on to the platform and appealed to them; as a woman, as a sister of the Red Cross, as the widow of an officer killed at the front. They were adamant; they would not hear me. For the first and, I hope, the last time in my life I was shouted down.

'And then, standing on the platform with memories of the marvellous artistes I had seen there, inspiration came to me. There is a Spirit of Music, and he was in the Army and Navy Palace that afternoon. I faced them once more:

"You wish to destroy this beautiful building, where your Chaliapin has sung, the hall in which you might hear so much more that is beautiful. Very well. Let me sing for you the last song."

'There was a confused silence; they had not expected this. And straight away I began singing "Dear Hall of Song" from Tannhauser. Ah! Did ever a soprano sing for such a reward? They listened - many of them had never heard such music in their lives before - I do not think I ever shall again. There are heights in one's art that one reaches once. When I finished they were quiet for a moment, and they surged round me lifted me in their arms and carried me through the palace. And then after a speech by one of their leaders they went away, leaving us in peace.

‘That was the beginning of the new Russia. Before, in the days of my youth I remember many interesting figures - Andreyev, Kamensky, who named me as the inspiration of his ‘Leda,’ at one time the most discussed story in Russia. Duels were fought over me - one was between my fiancé and Prince Narishkin. Am I vain to recall these things? Perhaps. But those were the days of romance, and they are past.

Before we parted, Madame sang for me Ukrainian Folk songs, which I shall never tire of hearing. I knew that hers was a personality which could never be crushed, not even by the greatest war and the greatest revolution in history.

## F. Bruce Wendell

*Port of Spain Gazette*, 14 December 1935.<sup>1</sup>

‘Whenever you go to England be sure and meet Bruce Wendell.’ That was the burden of all my friends who came back from Europe. He was a classical scholar, he was a charming fellow and he was an organist, a pianist, above all a pianist, had given recitals at the great concert halls in London, and had been well received by the critics. Time passed and I got more interested in music. An old Cambridge man, born in the West Indies, told me of the hours he had spent in England listening to Bruce Wendell, pipe in mouth playing interminably Chopin, Beethoven, Bach; you called out the names and he just reeled them off, and played them again if you wished to hear them as you often did, an inexhaustible fund of good nature and willingness to give pleasure by music.

As soon as I had secured my first ‘diggings’ in London, therefore, I set out to find Bruce Wendell. The first group of persons I asked all knew him, and the second Sunday after I was in London I found myself at his flat in Maida Vale with the precious grand piano and the rows and rows of music. I remember every detail of that afternoon as clearly today as if it had taken place yesterday and not four long years ago. With that absence of exaggerated movement and with the singular grace of style which so distinguishes him at the instrument he played every thing I wished for. If he didn’t have it at his fingertips he brought the music out and played it at sight. I remembered particularly an astonishingly brilliant performance of the Italian concerto (and his wife smilingly remonstrated that she thought he had again played it too fast). I remember also prelude after prelude and fugues of Bach, one of the opus ? sonatas of Beethoven...we were at it from about half past four in the afternoon till near eleven when I and another guest sought buses.

Since that time his piano and his home have been one of my few permanencies in the constantly changing occupations and attractions of a great city. There is an intimacy, a graciousness with which Bruce Wendell pervades all that he plays which I have not heard from any other player. He is not one of your romantic players whose interpretations are always dripping treacle. He is a classicist in the truest sense of the word, his style based on an almost reverent approach to Bach and Beethoven. But when you know him well, not as a musician, but as a man, you will find that the same charm of manner, the same whimsical and infectious gaiety, the ready smile and sympathy and warmth of heart which distinguishes him in his relations with his fellow men are transformed somehow to his music. The musical style here is the man. I had for a long time thought that this particular atmosphere was due to the fact that I was listening to him in his own home.

Then one evening I heard him playing a selection of organ pieces to an audience of some two thousand people. Before he played he said a few words and to my astonishment I realised by the burst of applause which followed, before he had begun to play that the audience had taken him to its heart. He finished to the accompaniment of the heartiest applause of the evening.

The same thing happened at another recital given at an international Club consisting of persons from all parts of the world. Once again with this unusual audience, his success was immediate and overwhelming. I had asked the musical critic of my newspaper, a very distinguished critic indeed, to come to the recital and

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<sup>1</sup> See also James’s reference to this meeting in Laughlin (ed.), *Letters from London*, p. 81. For a photo of Wendell, see *The Keys*, 1/3, (January, 1934).

hear him play. The three of us had a few minutes conversation afterwards, and the critic asked me to arrange a meeting.

He was anxious not only to hear more of Wendell, but to talk to him. After some careful thought I believe I have discovered what so distinguishes Bruce from other musicians. Far more than anyone else I have ever met he lives for music. He is of the type that will prefer five hundred pounds a year and music to five thousand pounds a year and no music.

I know the temptations he has had in difficult days to leave the classical and 'cash in' on his personality by playing jazz. He has refused, always, and I doubt if he should be given such credit for his refusal. I doubt if he was even tempted. And his whole life being so devoted to music, constantly playing music he has arrived at that mature stage when he can fully and completely express himself and the delightful human being that he is by means of the form that he has chosen. It is not only the pleasure which his music gives. One cannot separate music from the life that one lives. And over and over again I have felt in listening to Bruce Wendell, and hearing him talk to people and hearing people talk about him, that here was a representative West Indian, a man who by his personality and by his art brought credit not only on himself but to the country and the people who matured him.

## G. Introduction to Red Spanish Notebook

From Mary Low and Juan Breá, *Red Spanish Notebook; The First Six Months of the Revolution and the Civil War* (London, 1937), pp. v-vii.

Mary Low and Juan Breá did not go to Spain, notebook in hand, and having gathered enough material rush back to produce five shillings or seven and six penny worth of revolution, hot from the Press. Breá joined the P.O.U.M. militia, Mary Low joined the women's militia and edited the English edition of the P.O.U.M. publication, *The Spanish Revolution*. What they have done is to set down their experiences from day to day, the things they have helped to do, the people they met, the crowds at meetings and demonstrations, conversations heard in the streets, days in the trenches. Every line they have written is a record of experience lived for the sake of the revolution and written down afterwards because such rare and vital experience needs to be communicated.

The pulse of the revolution beats through every page. Many of the active revolutionaries are there, Nin and Gorkin of the P.O.U.M., McNair of the I.L.P., Rous, the Paris representative of the Fourth International, Benjamin Peret, the famous French poet (tenacious of his overalls even when calling on a minister), Miravittles, no longer Secretary of the anti-Fascist Militia Committee, but Minister for Propaganda, carefully putting on a record of Josephine Baker and holding the mouthpiece to it before he speaks to Paris on the telephone. From organising the massed strength of the workers to futile diplomatic manoeuvres of this sort, designed to impress the "democratic" countries, - that is the record of degeneration, beginning from the moment the Soviet Union demanded the democratic republic as its price for arms. When the bourgeois parties with this powerful aid had strangled the first phase of the Socialist revolution, Breá and Mary Low left Barcelona.

And yet this is not a depressing book. Far from it. Catalonia leads Spain, and for some few months at least the workers and peasants of Catalonia, politically inexperienced, thought that the new world had come. The flame has been lit and Fascism can pour on it the blood of thousands of workers, can stamp upon it, and even stifle it for a time. But it will burn underground, is imperishable, and will blaze again. For Breá and Mary Low, despite their eye for picturesque personalities, are proletarian revolutionaries, and their little book shows us the awakening of a people. The boot-black who good-humouredly but firmly refuses a tip, showing his union-cards; the peasant who will not be kept waiting as of old because equality exists now; the hundreds of women stealing away from their men to join the women's militia - and attend Marxist classes, throwing off the degrading subservience of centuries and grasping with both hands at the new life. They will conquer. They must. If not today, then tomorrow, by whatever tortuous and broken roads, despite the stumblings and the falls. There is no room for the democratic republic in Spain today. Either Spain must go back to a nightmare of reaction infinitely worse than the old feudalism, or on to the social revolution. And the guarantee of their victory is that for the eager thousands who march through these pages, smashing up the old and tumultuously beginning the new, worker's power emerged half-way from books, became something that they could touch and see, a concrete alternative to the old slavery. We, who know how important to the emancipation of Europe and to the regeneration of the Soviet Union is the ultimate victory of the Spanish workers, will read this book and keep it, and the layman will get here, better than all the spate of books on Spain, some idea of the new society that is struggling so desperately to be born.

## H. The Voice of Africa

*International African Opinion*, 1/2, (August, 1938).

If ever there was a book that students of Africa needed, this is it. (*Facing Mount Kenya*, by Jomo Kenyatta, with an introduction by B. Malinowski. Secker & Warburg. 12/6.) The book describes an African people, the Gikuyu, as they were forty years ago just before British imperialism descended on them. Similar books have been written before? Yes; but by white men chiefly, of varying intelligence and honesty. But even the best, like the late Emil Torday, wrote from the outside. Mr. Jomo Kenyatta is an unusual African. He is an anthropologist trained at London University, and even an unscientific reader can see the scrupulously scientific approach, the order, the method, the objectivity. But Mr. Kenyatta grew up not as a little missionary protégé but as a native African, with African ideas and African social ideals. He remains defiantly the same: his dedication is to the dispossessed youth of Africa "for perpetuation of communion with ancestral spirits...on the firm faith that the dead, the living, and the unborn will unite to rebuild the destroyed shrines." He is ideologically rooted in the social and religious ideals of the civilisation which is being so ruthlessly destroyed by the united front of settler, official and missionary. Politically, I believe that there are the seeds here of an immense confusion. Anthropologically, it is, in addition to Mr. Kenyatta's knowledge and method, the main source of his strength. Here, indeed, Africa speaks.

It would be futile to attempt to give any idea of what a book so packed with facts contains. The economic life of the Gikuyu, their system of education, their marriage laws, their religious life, their system of government, all are treated with the same intimate knowledge, sense of proportion, and illuminating detail. But behind the even tones of the exposition can be felt the fierce resentment of one who has been able to compare the old with the new, and who more than most can appreciate the fluent lies with which imperialism has sought to hide the traces of its bloody claws.

Take, for instance, education. The children were carefully given not only vocational training but were taught the history of the country by parents far more sensitive to child psychology than any European teacher up to twenty years ago. Mr. Kenyatta shows the economic necessity for polygamy. The sexual laws and conventions allowed the young people certain intimacies short of sexual intercourse, which was strictly forbidden, though the young people often slept in the same bed. After marriage, however, if men of the same tribal status (the age-group, to which both husband and wife belonged and all the members of which knew each other well), if male members of this group came from afar to visit the husband, custom permitted a wife to entertain one of them. Adultery under other circumstances could result in a divorce, though if there were children, the custom was to try and arrange a reconciliation. It was into this eminently sane and highly intelligent solution of what is always a complex problem that the missionary came, shouting his seventh commandment that he had got from Mount Sinai; foaming at the mouth because young people of different sexes slept in the same bed (for him that could only mean one thing); and calling on the bewildered husbands to abandon a second wife "in the name of Christianity."

The whole civilisation, however, not only industry, but social organisation and religious practices, rested on land tenure and the description of this is the most valuable part of Mr. Kenyatta's book. In taking the land away, the Europeans have done more than rob the native of his means of livelihood. They have disorganised his whole conception of life and substituted here and there a smattering of education and

Christianity, totally unfitted for the people, and as vicious in its own sphere as the fourpence a day and systematic exploitation of native labour.

What is the remedy? All friends of the African know the first necessity. They must have their land back. But for what? Are they to go back to the old life, merely selecting what they approve of in European civilisation? This seems to be Mr. Kenyatta's view. That religion and that life, vilely slandered as they have been and admirable as they are, rested on a certain method of industry. When the land is won the African will have to modernise his method of production, and his religion will inevitably follow. It is as well if his leaders recognise this frankly. This by no means implies bewildering the masses of the Gikuyu people with atheistic propaganda. But leaders must know where they stand. To an African listening to the elaborate tomfoolery of the Coronation ceremony, it will look as if the Europeans still carry on ancestor worship. But Mr. Kenyatta knows of the merciless greed of "Christian" imperialism. Does he consider his own the "true" religion? How does he see the future of a free Kenya? He must let us know, so that all of us, Africans and friends of Africa, can thrash the problem out. After so good a book as this what he says will carry enormous weight, not only among his own people but here in Europe as well.

## I. Sir Stafford Cripps and "Trusteeship"

*International African Opinion*, 1/3, (September 1938).

At the Peace and Empire Conference held at the Friends' House, Euston Road, London, on July 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> [1938], under the auspices of the India League, Sir Stafford Cripps stated what amounted to this: that while India was strong enough to have freedom now, Africa for some time would have to be governed by some sort of international mandate. He used the word "trusteeship." Sir Stafford Cripps, we may presume, envisaged a Socialist Britain. No intelligent man can conceive of a "free India" and a capitalist Britain, far less a free Africa. We presume also that the trustees will not include Fascism or any sort of capitalism. He has often told us that it is capitalism which is the basic evil of empire. The trustees will, therefore, be Socialist.

It is clear that Sir Stafford Cripps has the typical vice of many European Socialists, even revolutionaries. He conceives Africans as essentially passive recipients of freedom given to them by Europeans. Possibly Sir Stafford thinks that the British working class will gain freedom by the ballot-box and the speeches of Major Attlee and himself. Thinking Africans know that ultimately they will win their, arms in hand, or forever remain slaves. The Moors are fighting with Franco for their further enslavement. If the Spanish Loyalist Government had offered them their independence, they would have fought with it. But on one side or the other Africans will have to fight. They will organise themselves, create armies, develop leaders. We have an historic parallel. The half-brutish and degraded slaves in San Domingo in 1791 joined the French Revolution. In six years illiterate slaves were Generals of division and able administrators. Toussaint Louverture was Commander-in-Chief and Governor of an island as large as Ireland, appointed as such by the French Revolutionary Government, and he could not spell three words of French. The African slaves will do the same and more at the prospect of a new existence. Without them and the other colonial masses, the British worker can win at most only temporary success. Is it to leaders and people like these who have conquered their liberty in blood and sacrifice that Sir Stafford will offer his "trusteeship"? Sir Stafford thinks in stiff instead of fluid terms, a gross practice in any politician.

Sir Stafford is also a victim of one of the crudest of bourgeois sophistries. How comes it that such a man wants to transfer "trusteeship" to a new order? When and where has any people governed any other people as trustees? If one race employs the labour of another at 4d. a day and monopolises all products, then it has to terrorise the people, and talk about "trusteeship". Under those circumstances "trusteeship" is a fig-leaf. Under all others it is an impertinent stupidity. A Socialist Europe in its own interests will need to release and stimulate production in Africa. It will send engineering commissions, scientific agriculturists, teachers, etc. But why has it to govern? Even under capitalism Kenya natives have subscribed to send for black priests and teachers from America, striving to get away from the perpetual domination of whites. Africans will have their own leaders, will collaborate with international commissions, but will govern themselves. As time goes on, more and more the technical administration will be run by Africans. When the San Domingo blacks had won freedom they begged for France for teachers, skilled workmen, for trained administrators to assist them. But they did not want anyone to govern them. France sent an army to restore slavery. True Socialism will be different. But any sort of "trusteeship" will be needed only by exploitation. The European movement is

indeed backward when Sir Stafford can make these proposals without a protest being made.

Finally, we ask British workers to follow these tendencies to their logical conclusion. The capacity of the masses for truly Socialist self-government depends on their standard of living. In this regard the British workers are more favourably placed than most. But an important part of this struggle will rest with the subjective qualities of the leaders, their balance between individual leadership and the creative capacity of the masses. In backward communities like Africa, India, and China there is a danger of a huge native bureaucracy developing after freedom is achieved. A counter-balance to this will be a European working-class movement conscious and alive to the dangers, from the lessons of history and its own experience. But the surest way to lay up infinite trouble, not only for Africans but for Europeans, is to encourage reactionary ideas like trusteeship for backward peoples. The bureaucratic mentality which displays itself so blatantly in regard to people abroad can be trusted to show itself at home. It must be fought by Africans and European workers alike in their common interests.

The Executive Committee, *The International African Service Bureau.*

### J. Ethel Mannin's 'Trotskyists at Tea'

Ethel Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade; or, Low-Down on the Left* (London, 1947), pp. 133-35.

"I have an eminent Trotskyist coming to tea," Mary told Larry. "So you'd better be present and find out at first-hand what sort of animal it is."

"Sure," said Larry.

"You know, I suppose," said Mary, "that the Social Democrats – in this country the Labour Party – represent the Second International, and the Communists, that is to say the Comintern, the Third, and then Trotsky founded the Fourth International, which stands for World Revolution as opposed to Revolution in One Country? The Fascists would tell you there's yet another International – International Jewry, but that's just their peculiarity."

"Who would the Trotskyists be hating?"

"The Stalinists, of course – the enemies of the world revolution. In Spain they line up with the P.O.U.M. Is that clear?"

"Sure," said Larry. "But I'll be leavin' the talk to you, entirely."

But that is where he was wrong. The Trotskyists arrived punctually at four and they left punctually at five, and in that hour Mary uttered exactly twelve words.

The eminent Trotskyist was an extremely handsome young Negro. He arrived with two white friends.

Mary heard his voice as she went along the hall to the front door – a dark rich beautiful voice.

"The Permanent Revolution and International Socialism must form the basis of all revolutionary strategy. Take France-"

Mary opened the door, smiling.

"Hullo," she said, and shook hands with all three.

"How are you, my dear?" the Negro inquired, and without waiting for her reply continued, "Take France – on 2<sup>nd</sup> June *Humanité* announced that the Trade Unions were using all their strength to achieve a rapid and reasonable solution of the conflicts that are in progress."

In the sitting-room he broke off to nod to Larry, who turned to him from the window.

"This is Larry Lanaghan, from Ireland," Mary said. They shook hands, then the Negro flung himself on to the settee and his friends seated themselves on armchairs by the fireplace, and their leader went on: "Then we get the *Paris-Soir* of 7<sup>th</sup> June coming out with the declaration that the inspirers of The People's Front are acting as extinguishers to the revolutionary fire that has broken out. What, comrades, is the significance of that?"

He leaned forward, one fine hand beating in another as he emphasised his points.

"We get Blum hastily passing bills-"

"Sugar?" Mary inquired.

"Thank you, sister." The musical voice flowed on. "Blum...Daladier...Popular Front...French workers...Stalinist bureaucracy..."

She settled herself down to listen.

When she saw that his cup was empty she reached for it.

"More tea?"

He nodded. She filled his cup and the cups of the other two, who never took their eyes off him, hypnotised by the strong flow of his words. In another fifteen minutes he had reached Spain.

“The Third International continues to hold up the revolution. The United Front between Spanish Social Democracy, French Social Democracy, and the Soviet bureaucracy controlling the Third International, is established in defence of bourgeois democracy, i.e., Capitalism, in Spain...The Stalinist struggle for the League of Nations and Collective Security calculates on being able to ignore the Fourth International...workers can be led into the coming war for democracy and the defence of the U.S.S.R. and the Third International will assist the capitalists to crush colonial revolts...”

He paused for a sip of tea. Mary saw that the plates were empty of sandwiches and lifted a silver dish from the small table over which she presided.

“Cake?” she offered.

He helped himself and flowed on.

“Only the determined opposition of the capitalist bourgeoisie to forming or implementing a Soviet pact will prevent the Soviet democracy from this course, the traditional path of the Social Democracy.”

At a quarter to five he was dealing with Abyssinia, and ‘the real nature of Imperialism.’

At five o’clock he glanced up at the sun-ray clock over the door and compared it with the time as recorded on his wrist-watch and jumped up.

“We must go,” he said.

The others also rose and Mary accompanied them to the front door.

All the way down the stairs the rich dark voice flowed like music.

“What, then, is the position? We have the French Fascists lined up with the Communists in a United Front-”

Mary opened the front door. He broke off to shake hands with her.

“Bye-bye, sister. Thank you so much.”

It was then Mary said her twelfth and last word.

“Good-bye,” she said.’

## **K. Interview with Mildred Gordon.**

London, 9 September 2005.

[Mildred Gordon was married to Sam Gordon, a leading Trotskyist in the American Socialist Workers Party (S.W.P.) who knew James well. Mildred Gordon was herself involved in the British Trotskyist movement before becoming the Labour M.P. for Poplar and Canning from 1987-97. Many thanks to Mildred Gordon, for sharing her memories with me, Sheila Leslie (daughter of Charlie Lahr) and John McIlroy for helping to facilitate the interview, of which this is an edited transcript, and to Selma James for her comments and clarifications of my draft edited transcript.]

M.G.: 'I had heard about C.L.R. James from people older than me who had heard him speak in Hyde Park, and he was a brilliant speaker, before the war. Also from Bill Duncan, an old Trotskyist, who was in a group with him and I think Isaac Deutscher when Deutscher first came over and didn't speak much English and they produced a paper. Duncan was sometimes a bit rude about C.L.R., but anyway. Then when I went to America in 1948, I arrived just when there was an S.W.P. Conference ... I was [later] refused entry under the McCarren Act [1950] on the grounds that I associated with subversives. He [James] was at the S.W.P. Conference and he spoke there and I think they split shortly afterwards [in 1951] and had their own organisation. I found them quite interesting, not politically but socially because I was rather shocked when I first saw the S.W.P. because all the women were typing or they went to work to fund their husbands to be revolutionaries ... there were no women really in the leadership, it was very sexist. Whereas I noticed in James's organisation they had arrangements so that the men and women could attend meetings equally ... that I felt was a better way of operating ...

'We knew him quite well when I went there to marry Sam Gordon, he was married to someone else who he had been separated from for a long time and we went to Reno [Nevada] for him to get a divorce, and at the same time [August-November, 1948] C.L.R. James was in Reno because he had been married to a Chinese woman [Juanita] and he had got a Mexican [mail-order] divorce [in 1946]. He married Connie [Constance Webb], who was a highly intelligent beautiful woman, friend of Richard Wright ... and she also wrote very well and so his [1946] marriage, on the basis on which he was allowed to stay in America, wasn't valid because they didn't recognise the Mexican divorce. So he was in Reno getting a divorce and Reno was a Jim Crow town and he stayed out on Lake Pyramid [Pyramid Lake Ranch] on an Indian reserve and we went and visited him out there.<sup>2</sup> When Sam's divorce came through and we got married he couldn't come to the Town Hall to the wedding because it was Jim Crow and we had a meal with him in a black restaurant where everyone stared at us because we were white, before the wedding, which was very sad, so that was when I first got to know him well ...

'The S.W.P. had built a summer camp, which they called Mountain Spring Camp, they did it with their own hands a huge dining building, enormous, a huge room, and chalets, a swimming pool, a holiday place. I used to go and look after the children at this holiday camp, because I was restricted not being a citizen and it was difficult

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<sup>2</sup> See also Dennis Dworkin, 'C.L.R. James in Nevada,' *History Workshop Journal*, 63, (2007).

what with being watched, so that the members could go and collect signatures to get on the ballot. While I was down there, C.L.R. gave a series of lectures on the French Revolution and they were absolutely brilliant, it was though he took the people, the characters and shook them and brought them alive. He was a fabulous lecturer. The only speaker I ever heard who was better than him was Colvin de Silva, from Sri Lanka, he was a brilliant speaker. I've heard him speak on the Galle Face in Columbo to thousands of people, and then he'd take newspapers and sell them. He'd be the barrister in an international law case and after, stand outside the court and sell newspapers, he was quite a character, a very fun person ...

'One of the great things about C.L.R. was that he was a great listener. A lot of revolutionaries just talk and don't listen, and he was interested in everybody and whatever anybody had to tell him. He was interested in literature, he always wanted to write a book about Shakespeare and Lenin, but I don't think he ever did it. In the last years of his life, I don't think he wrote anything new, he just rehashed old things. Cricket was his love. He wrote a book about cricket, which was also about his life in the West Indies [*Beyond a Boundary*]. And he marked it out for me, because I wasn't interested in cricket, he marked out the passages which were interesting for people who didn't care about cricket, and someone stole it. He had written a novel, called *Minty Alley*, which he once asked me to turn into a play, and I never did. It was all dialogue, it could have been, I don't know if anyone else ever did... [Pearl Springer made a theatrical adaptation of *Minty Alley*, which was performed in 1978 and 1982]

'He taught literature and history, but he always respected people whose aptitude was for maths and science, and said that other English teachers used to say how astonishing that these 'duds' and 'deadheads' turned out to be alright when they grew up, because they never respected the aptitude for science. When my son was about five or six, James gave him a big illustrated copy of *Lamb's Tales From Shakespeare*. I said to him, he's too young for that, you need to be about twelve before you enjoy that. He said, you read the stories to him, and see whether I'm right or you are, and he was right. [Mildred's son] David was fascinated by them, so much so that I took him to see an amateur production of Twelfth Night. He was about five, and he said I wish I could play a trick like that, and I said, what trick, and he said the one with the crossed garters and yellow stockings of course. So C.L.R. knew what he was talking about...

'He [James] was interested in football, he considered football a very important social phenomenon, well I suppose it is really. I don't know if he watched games, but he talked about it a lot, and about the working class and how important football was to them, and how it was an important form of culture ...

'We lived in the Bronx at that time and so did he. Connie had a child, Robert ['Nobbie', born April 1949]. C.L.R. used to say my son is not going to read books about horses and carts and animals, he is going to read books about planes and machinery and [be a] real American. We didn't see a lot of him in America because of the split. We came to England because we had problems in the McCarthy period. We went to Asia, and when we came back my husband's passport was taken away from him and we stayed in England there for a bit as the others were there and so on, and I think it was in the 1950s we read that C.L.R. had been deported from America

and [in 1962] we traced him to Earl's Court by which time he was married to Selma and Connie stayed in America, she married someone else [Edward W Pearlstien].'

C.H.: 'So you didn't meet up with him again in Britain until later, about 1956?'

M.G.: "I can't remember if it was as late as that, it was in the fifties [for the record, this re-union did not take actually place until 1962 – personal information from Selma James, 18/12/2009]. He had moved from Earl's Court to [Staverton Road] Willesden, which is not far again. I became very good friends with his third wife, Selma.'

Sheila Leslie: 'He came to see my Dad [Charlie Lahr] in about '54, I remember that.'

M.G.: 'We saw a lot of him, because although my husband was loyal to the S.W.P. and he took a different line, they were very good friends, respected each other, we visited back and forth all the time and saw a great deal of each other. We went on excursions together, some of them didn't work out too well because we decided to take him to see Isaac Deutscher, who was living out of London in the country somewhere, beginning with a 'W'. First of all Gerry Healy took us to see Deutscher, and then it must have been later as my son was born in 1959 and I remember Deutscher on his hands and knees giving David piggy backs around the room, but whether we took C.L.R. and Selma down before or after that I don't know ...'

'We went down there and they clashed, they had a huge row. Sam [Gordon] and Deutscher always shouted at each other as well, but C.L.R. and Deutscher, well...'

C.H.: 'Had they met before?'

M.G.: 'They had never met before and they loathed each other. Deutscher took a very bad line, Deutscher said, I don't know if it was on that occasion, but he said Malcolm X was a "black fascist", he didn't understand what was then called 'the Negro question' at all. That meeting went very badly indeed.'

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