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"A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain": C.L.R. James and the Caribbean Labour Rebellions of the 1930s

Christian Høgsbjerg

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 import and impact 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. Its 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.[1]

Yet whenever historians have tried to piece together strands of 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 what he has called "an extraordinary silence".

[1] Stuart Hall, "Breaking Bread with History: C.L.R. James and *The Black Jacobins*; Stuart Hall interviewed by Bill Schwarz," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 46 (Autumn 1998): 20-21.

> 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 rebellions 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, "why did he, of all people, prove so reticent in making the connections between the political present and the historical past?"[2] This essay will not engage in a full discussion of the many issues raised by Schwarz's own thought-provoking and imaginative answer to that question, a question previously raised in the pages of this journal.[3] Rather, we will aim to interrogate the question itself, through an historical exploration of James's actual relationship to these upheavals. 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

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[2] Bill Schwarz, "Not Even Past Yet," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 57 (Spring 2004): 104-5.

[3] Bill Schwarz, "C.L.R. James and George Lamming: The measure of historical time," *Small Axe*, no. 14 (September 2003): 39-70. James's *A History of Negro Revolt* ended with discussing anticolonial resistance in not only Africa but also Trinidad. Yet James explained there why he felt the 1935 Copperbelt mineworkers' strike in what is now Zambia but was then Northern Rhodesia (with which he also ended *The Black Jacobins*) was of such potential significance, indeed "of more importance" than the revolt in Trinidad "a small island in the West Indies". The Copperbelt mineworkers' strike gave "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. C.L.R. James, *A History of Negro Revolt* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), 80.

writings of C.L.R. James as helping to stir up the people."[4] The chief culprit here was James's "political biography" of Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) leader Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani. James had written *The Life of Captain Cipriani*; *An Account of British Government in the West Indies* before leaving colonial Trinidad for Britain in early 1932 and it had been published that September 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".[5] In his lucid and unaffected style, James, with a penetrating and impeccable logic, also subjected the official intellectual arguments put forward to justify mass black political disenfranchisement 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, Reginald Coupland, Beit Professor of Colonial History at Oxford University, 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

[4] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963; repr., London: Hutchinson, 1969), 124. For a personal account of the Trinidad strikes, together with much other factual background information, see Marika Sherwood, ed., *Ernest Bowen and printers' unions in British Guiana and Trinidad, 1927-1941* (London: Savannah Press, 1999). For a useful overview of the impact of the rebellions on British colonial elites, see 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, nos. 1-2 (1996): 1-27. See also O. Nigel Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 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, no. 3 (September 1978): 256-312.

[5] C.L.R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Nelson: Coulton, 1932), 1.

> and ideas, our beliefs and practices, our virtues and vices, all our ways of life have been brought up against the native ways.[6]

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".[7] 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 of trade union activity as had happened in Guyana and Jamaica, there had been minor constitutional reform.[8] 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 three hundred thousand.[9] For James, the success and rapid growth during the 1920s of the TWA, 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

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[6] 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: Clarendon Press, 1991), 53-55, and Eric Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies* (New York: A & B Books, 1994), 154-60.

[7] Reginald Coupland, "The British Commonwealth and Colonial Empire: Trusteeship for Backward Peoples," *Port of Spain Gazette*, 11 October 1936.

[8] 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: Macmillan Caribbean, 1988), 57.

[9] Selwyn D. Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 33-34. Algernon Aspinall, *The Handbook of the British West Indies* (London: The West India Committee, 1926), 25, 27.

touch with African civilisation. As a result, James argued that West Indians were a profoundly modern people 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.[10]

While forcefully putting the case for West Indian self-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 British 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."[11]

James later noted that *The Life of Captain Cipriani* was "a grand success" when it was sent back to the West Indies in September 1932.[12] 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".[13] It certainly received high praise at the time in reviews in papers from across the Caribbean, including British Guiana and Barbados.[14] In Trinidad itself, where the

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[10] For James, the Indo-Caribbean and in particular the large Indo-Trinidadian population did not essentially stand in contradiction to his wider argument. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, 10, 16.

[11] James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, 107.

[12] James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 122. The *Port of Spain Gazette* on 18 September 1932 carried the following advert: "Life of Captain Cipriani by CLR James. 'A book to read and keep' price 1/6. 107 pages".

[13] Fraser, "The Twilight of Colonial Rule in the British West Indies": 10-11.

[14] 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

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 skin.[15] 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".[16]

There was also wide-ranging and detailed critical discussion of the book in *The Beacon*.[17] The young black Trinidadian Ralph Mentor noted "it will be widely

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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.

[15] 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 Albert Gomes, "Editorial Commentaries", *The Beacon*, 2, no. 5 (September 1932), 7. 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. For probable background to this story, see James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, 56.

[16] *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.

[17] 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

read in these parts. To be candid, it deserves to be." Mentor declared James was right to link white supremacy to colonial rule, telling critics 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 "Mr James seems to cherish the notion that Crown Colony rule is responsible for the prevalence of race prejudice in the West Indies. He is entirely wrong … It is a barbaric relic of slavery days."[18]

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.[19]

However, the title itself may have limited James's book from winning a wider appeal, for Cipriani was becoming increasingly eclipsed as the self-declared "champion of the barefooted man" in Trinidad. In 1932, the TWA had finally persuaded the colonial governor to introduce legislation enabling legal trade union activity (albeit without the authorisation of peaceful picketing or the protection of

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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". Gomes, "Editorial Commentaries": 1, 6-7. A black Barbadian, Joshua E. Ward, however, thought James was far too militant and too racially conscious. Joshua E. Ward, "One Negro to Another," *The Beacon*, 2, no. 5 (September 1932): 16-18.

[18] Ralph Mentor, "A Study of Mr. James' Political Biography," *The Beacon*, 2, no. 6 (October-November 1932): 15-16. It seems Mentor emerged as an important labour leader and representative of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union during the mass strikes of 1937. See Bolland, *On the March*, 99, 105, 198.

[19] James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 124.

actions in tort). Yet rather than now register the TWA as a trade union and try and build the organisation up through struggle on that basis, Cipriani, on the advice of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), 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 (TLP) in 1934.[20] 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.[21] In 1934, the colonial government had been forced to censor the performance of Calypso, a medium which had become a popular means of expressing working-class discontent at social and economic injustice.[22] In March 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.[23] Cipriani disavowed both the "unconstitutional" demonstration and Butler himself, despite the agitator's membership of the TLP.[24] The Trinidadian novelist Ralph de Boissière, in his literary representation of the class struggle in 1930s colonial Trinidad, *Crown Jewel*, vividly 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.[25]

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[20] Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, 37, 39. In 1934, the TLP had some 130,000 supporters.

[21] Hart, "Origin and development of the working class in the English-speaking Caribbean area 1897-1937," 57, 65, 75.

[22] 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: Oxford University Press, 2004), 332-33.

[23] Daniel Guérin, *The West Indies and their future* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1961), 130.

[24] W. Richard Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest in Trinidad: The Strikes and Disturbances of 1937," *Caribbean Studies*, 17, nos. 1-2 (April-July 1977): 18.

[25] There is even a mention of the "Negro schoolteacher" 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: Allison & Busby, 1981), 293. For James's review of *Crown Jewel*, see C.L.R. James, "Trinidad society," *New Society*, 11 June 1981.

In late 1936, Butler severed relations with Cipriani's TLP 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.[26] 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."[27] As Daniel Guérin later noted, "following the American-style sit-down strike, the strikers' action included occupying one of the oil properties".[28] Or to quote James again, "the stay-in strike in Trinidad in 1937 was directly inspired by the sit-down strikes in America which ushered in the C.I.O. [Congress of Industrial Organizations]. The British, blind as only the doomed are blind, fought to retain all possible political power."[29] 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.[30] 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.[31]

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[26] Richard Hart, *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean Region Colonies* (Ceredigion: Caribbean Labour Solidarity, 2002), 14.

[27] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; repr., London: Penguin, 2001), 316.

[28] Guérin, *The West Indies and their future*, 131.

[29] 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: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 124.

[30] *Port of Spain Gazette*, 23 June 1927.

[31] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 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*, 45.

Rather than taking a lead, Cipriani's TLP 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, HMS Everest and HMS 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.[32] 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.[33] The British Colonial Secretary, under 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.[34] 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".[35]

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[32] Hart, *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean Region Colonies*, 14-15. See also Guérin, *The West Indies and their future*, 131. Butler was arrested and imprisoned for two years in September for sedition.

[33] 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*, 59.

[34] Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, 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. George Padmore, "Parliament Upset by West Indies", *The Crisis*, 45, no. 4 (April 1938): 110-111.

[35] Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, 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: Faber & Faber, 1952), 152.

C.L.R. James's response

Had James not left for Britain, or had he returned to Trinidad after only a few months staying with Learie Constantine and his family in Nelson, 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.[36] 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.[37] Initially James achieved recognition for his campaigning work around "The Case for West Indian Self-Government" and his cricket reports for the *Manchester Guardian*.[38] By June 1937, James was a revolutionary Marxist intellectual and activist, the author of a pioneering anti-Stalinist history of "the rise and fall of the Communist International", *World Revolution*, but with a public reputation that extended beyond the far left. James's 1934 play about the Haitian Revolution, *Toussaint Louverture*: *The story of the only successful slave revolt in history*, had been performed by the prestigious Stage Society on London's

[36] 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*, 269.

[37] Others included Marcus Garvey, W. Arthur Lewis, George Padmore, Eric Williams, Learie Constantine, Harold Moody, Ras T. Makonnen, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Sam Manning, Chris Braithwaite (who used the pseudonym "Jones"), Arnold Ward and Una Marson.

[38] James kept up commentary on the Caribbean in *The Keys*, journal of the League of Coloured Peoples, until April 1934, and commented on the "Commission on closer union between Transvaal, the Leeward and Windward islands," quoting Cipriani's critical judgment of it approvingly. See C.L.R. James, "West Indies Self-Government," *The Keys*, 1, no. 4 (April-June 1934): 72, 84.

West End in 1936 with Paul Robeson in the starring role.[39] "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. Fredric Warburg, of Secker & 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 later commented, "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".[40]

Already by 1933, James had become more strident in his arguments for self-government and not just autonomy for the West Indies within the British Empire. "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," he told an audience of the League of Coloured Peoples in March 1933 in an address on the "West Indian".[41] Within a year, the course of James's life would be set. Politically radicalising amidst the rise of fascism in Europe, James joined the tiny international Trotskyist movement and developed into a militant "class-struggle Pan-Africanist". Now living and working in London, in 1935, James would play a leading role building solidarity with the people of Ethiopia as Chair of the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) at the time of Mussolini's barbaric war.[42] In May 1937, the tiny Pan-Africanist movement in Britain formed a successor organisation to the IAFA under the leadership of James's boyhood friend, compatriot and comrade,

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[39] For more on James's play, 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): 38-54.

[40] Fredric Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 185, James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 124, and Stuart Hall, "A Conversation with C.L.R. James," in Grant Farred, ed., *Rethinking C.L.R. James* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 18. *Minty Alley* was reviewed in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31 October 1936.

[41] "Conference Report," *The Keys*, 1, no. 1 (July 1933): 5.

[42] The term "class struggle Pan-Africanist" originates with Kent Worcester. See Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James*: *A Political Biography* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 42. For my brief account of James's political and intellectual radicalisation during the early 1930s, see Christian Høgsbjerg, "C.L.R. James: The Revolutionary as Artist," *International Socialism*, no. 112 (October 2006): 163-182.

George Padmore, the "International African Service Bureau for the Defence of Africans and People of African Descent" (IASB).

It is sometimes claimed of the IASB that it "devoted most of its attention to African colonies" meaning "there was no ready-made machinery for action on the Caribbean crisis".[43] In fact, despite the difficulties resulting from press censorship about events at the oilfields in Trinidad, the organisation seems to have come into its own campaigning in solidarity with the Caribbean labour rebellions from its base in London. 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," with the following conclusion.

> It is the 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.[44]

In order to build solidarity in Britain with the workers of Trinidad and the wider Caribbean, the IASB 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 hear Marcus Garvey speak in Hyde Park, heckling him when he refused to declare his support for the Trinidad strikers on the grounds such struggles were "not the theme of his speech". As leading IASB member I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, secretary of the West African Youth League (WAYL) and a towering giant of African trade-unionism originally from Sierra Leone, remembered, Garvey "was challenged and made a public laughing-stock by Mr. C.L.R. James".[45] Solidarity with the workers of Trinidad and the Caribbean

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[43] Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 100, 103.

[44] "The Trinidad Strike," *Africa and the World*, 1, no. 1 (July 1937).

[45] I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, "Marcus Garvey and the International African Service Bureau," in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 10: *Africa for the Africans, 1923-1945* (London: University of California Press, 2006), 647, 650. Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* (London: Karia Press, 1987), 173, 268. Garvey was at one time apparently considered to be a suitable patron for the IASB, but Garvey's hostile position towards Haile Selassie during Italy's war on Ethiopia coupled with his then apparent critical support

more generally was however the theme of the speeches at the IASB rally in Trafalgar Square the next day, which successfully attracted hundreds of people.[46] 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.[47]

Other speakers included George Padmore and, from Barbados, which had also just been rocked by riots, Chris Braithwaite, leader of the Colonial Seamen's Association who used the pseudonym "Jones" to prevent victimisation.[48] The meeting adopted the following resolution, copies of which were sent to the Colonial Office, the Governor of Trinidad, and to the British TUC 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 9th, 1937, under the auspices of the INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN SERVICE BUREAU, sends

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for British imperialism against Hitler and Mussolini made this impossible. He did however donate ten shillings and six pence to the IASB when it was formed.

[46] "Strikes in West Indies," *Africa and the World*, 1, no. 3 (August 1937): 7.

[47] The National Archives, Kew, London: KV/2/1824/13a. See also Public Record Office, London: CO: 318/427/11, quoted in Schwarz, "C.L.R. James and George Lamming".

[48] "Activities of London Committee," *Africa and the World*, 1, no. 4, (September 1937). This was a "Special West Indian Edition" of *Africa and the World*. The IASB also noted it was preparing a pamphlet on the "West Indies Today," which was written by W. Arthur Lewis in 1939. See *The West Indies Today* (London: International African Service Bureau, 1939) and Carol Polsgrove, *Ending British rule in Africa: Writers in a common cause* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 33. For a brief introductory portrait of the neglected but critical figure of Braithwaite, see Christian Høgsbjerg, "Mariner, renegade and castaway: Chris Braithwaite, the Colonial Seamen's Association and class struggle Pan-Africanism in late imperial Britain," *Race & Class* (forthcoming).

> 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.[49]

Marika Sherwood has explored some of the networks that existed around George Padmore of the IASB in London and militants at the heart of the revolt in Trinidad itself, noting that the Trinidadian Federated Workers Trade Union "sent a report on conditions to the IASB, which took up the issues raised with the TUC and sympathetic MPs".[50] With this in hand and following their successful demonstration, an IASB delegation had submitted a memorandum for the Royal Commission set up to inquire into the "disturbances" in Trinidad. "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 IASB claims that the future of Trinidad and other West Indian islands should be decided by the people themselves". In particular, the memorandum noted:

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.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Sherwood, ed., *Ernest Bowen and printers' unions in British Guiana and Trinidad*, 68, 79. See also Marjorie Nicholson, *The TUC Overseas: The Roots of Policy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 193.

The IASB 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.[51]

One person who was less than impressed by all this IASB activity, 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 him 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" IASB, a tiny organisation not even six months old, and barely known in London, let alone the West Indies.[52] 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 oil companies in Trinidad, in a widely reported speech in the House of Lords on 28 July 1937.[53] 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

[51] "Activities of London Committee". The Royal Commission had ruled that it would not accept verbal evidence from groups such as the IASB. According to Ras Makonnen, the IASB circulated their memorandum "to the trade union movements in Guyana, Trinidad, [and] Jamaica". See Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 161. *Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances 1937; Report of Commission*, Cmd. 5641 (London: HMSO, 1938), 96.

[52] Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 271. 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.

[53] *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."

anticommunist tirade, "such views suited the right-wing and the colonial authorities" and the *Trinidad Guardian* made the interview front page news.[54]

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. Garvey's conservative position did not exactly endear him to many of the workers in Trinidad, and even the local Port of Spain branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) had to distance themselves from his views. Their President, E.M. Mitchell, thought Garvey had made an "unjustified, a serious blunder … due to misinformation and ignorance of local conditions". Garvey's speeches while in Trinidad in October 1937 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, suggesting instead that it was "the mind of man that keeps him down". This led to further disillusionment with Garvey among many militant workers. Back in London, Wallace-Johnson responded to Garvey's comments on behalf of the IASB by insisting that while once the UNIA had been an important "stepping stone" for the developing Pan-African movement, now Garvey had "outlived his usefulness".[55]

Yet Garvey was not mistaken about the revolutionary politics of some in the IASB leadership, and in the British left-wing press, both James and Padmore subsequently expanded on their view of the significance of the Caribbean revolts.[56] In the Trotskyist paper, *Fight*, which James edited, for example, a fiercely written article suggesting "A Revolutionary Policy for the British Workers" in November 1937 noted that:

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[54] Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 270-71. At least one figure associated with the *Trinidad Guardian*, Sir George Huggins, chair of the Associated West Indian Chambers of Commerce was also of the opinion that the "riots" were due to "Bolshevik propaganda" rather than low wages. See Sherwood, ed., *Ernest Bowen and printers' unions in British Guiana and Trinidad*, 68.

[55] Lewis, *Marcus Garvey*, 269, 272. Wallace-Johnson, "Marcus Garvey and the International African Service Bureau," 646, 648. This article appeared in the *West Indian Crusader*, published in St Lucia, on 27 November 1937.

[56] For Padmore's analysis, see for example George Padmore, "Fascism in the Colonies," *Controversy* no. 17 (February 1938): 94-97, and George Padmore, "An Outrageous Report," *Controversy* no. 18 (March 1938): 103-104. Padmore also wrote regularly on colonial matters for the Independent Labour Party (ILP) paper, *New Leader*, as well addressing ILP meetings. See the report of Padmore's speech for the ILP 1938 summer school, "Why workers of the W.I. Revolt," *Port of Spain Gazette*, 25 November 1938.

> In India, South Africa, Palestine, Egypt and Trinadad [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. To do this we must have a movement with its roots in every part of the Empire.[57]

It was with the Trinidad events still very much in mind then 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 short study, *A History of Negro Revolt*.[58] In this latter work, James devoted a section of his final chapter to spelling out the significance of the Trinidadian revolt through a discussion of how the Marxist theory of "uneven and combined development" had given the Trinidadian working class, and above all the oilfield workers, tremendous power.

> 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.[59]

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[57] "A Revolutionary Policy for the British Workers," *Fight*, 1, no. 11 (November 1937): 15.

[58] "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*, 80.

[59] James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, 76-77. On "uneven and combined development," see Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 26-28.

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.[60]

Even though two cruisers were sent, the general strike in Trinidad continued until the Governor intervened and attempted conciliation. James insisted that "what is important, however, is the political awakening which it has crystallized".

> 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.[61]

There was little 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

[60] James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, 78.

[61] James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, 79.

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".[62] 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.[63]

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 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.[64]

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[62] James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, 74, 80.

[63] James, *A History of Negro Revolt*, 80.

[64] "May Day in the West Indies," *International African Opinion*, 1, no. 1 (July 1938): 13. 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*, 110.

May 1938 marked the start of a strike wave in Jamaica, triggering another labour rebellion there. The IASB again organised a protest meeting in Trafalgar Square on Sunday 26 June 1938, with James, Padmore and Braithwaite among the speakers. The crowd "enthusiastically and unanimously passed a resolution sending 'greetings of solidarity to the West Indian workers…in their struggle for economic, political, and social advancement'". The resolution demanded "the immediate release of Uriah Butler and James Barrett in Trinidad, and Ulric Grant in Barbados, and specific reforms for the consideration of the Royal Commission were enumerated".[65] In the midst of this upheaval, Sir Leonard Lyle, President of Tate and Lyle, wrote to *The Times*, asserting 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.[66]

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.'"[67] Indeed, to a greater extent than

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[65] "Activities of the Bureau," *International African Opinion*, 1. no. 2 (August 1938): 16. James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 53.

[66] Sir Leonard Lyle's comments appeared in a letter to *The Times* (London, England) 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 the Present; Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (London: Allison & Busby, 1977), 86-88. 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.

[67] James, "On *The Negro in the Caribbean* by Eric Williams," 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

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 imperial 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.[68] 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."[69]

Yet the influence of the Caribbean labour rebellions also touched *The Black Jacobins* in a more profound manner. For James, the Trinidadian oil-workers' strike in 1937 in particular, with its modern demands and advanced tactics, was not simply inspiring in its own right but also represented a vindication of revolutionary Marxist theory. Part of the reason James had initially been so deeply impressed by reading Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* while in Nelson in 1932 must have been because Trotsky's discussion of "the law of uneven and combined development" and how it gave rise to an "amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms" in "backward" societies illuminated James's experiences of colonial modernity in Trinidad.[70] As we have seen, 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. Reading Trotsky's *History* had allowed the author of *The Life of Captain*

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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." 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: Allison & Busby, 1986), 55.

[68] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 3, 194.

[69] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 185.

[70] Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 27-28.

Cipriani to more fully make sense of his life so far growing up in what he later described as the "heterogenous jumble" of colonial 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. While James had grown up something of a "country bumpkin," the Marxist theory of permanent revolution explained why a "modern" labour movement around the nationalist TWA 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.[71]

The Caribbean labour rebellions represented a timely reminder of the applicability of the theories of "uneven and combined development" and permanent revolution to anticolonial struggles in the age of socialist revolution, and came just as James was in the final stages of writing up *The Black Jacobins*, his pioneering and outstanding demonstration of how the theories also illuminated the antislavery liberation struggle in the age of "bourgeois-democratic" revolution.[72] Without the concrete example of the Trinidadian oil-field workers' glorious entrance onto the stage of Caribbean and world history in particular, it seems uncertain that James would have brought out the "proto-proletarian," modern nature of the black enslaved people's experience and resistance on colonial Saint-Domingue with the degree of acuity he accomplished. If the plantations, James famously wrote, were "huge sugar-factories," the slaves accordingly were "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 the enslaved rose as "revolutionary labourers" and set fire to the plantations, James compared them to "the Luddite wreckers".[73] Vindicated in his views about the essential modernity of the West Indian working class by the recent labour rebellions, James would hail 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".[74]

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[71] James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 31, 34.

[72] For more on how Marxist theory frames James's work, see Christian Høgsbjerg, "C.L.R. James and the Black Jacobins," *International Socialism*, no. 126 (April 2010): 95-120.

[73] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 69, 71, 73.

[74] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 224.

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 Archie Singham once noted, "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".[75] *The Black Jacobins* was then designed in part to ideologically arm the people of the Caribbean for the fire next time, the coming struggle for colonial liberation, and to simultaneously attempt to win working people in Britain to an understanding of the need to demonstrate moral and material 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.[76]

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

[75] A. W. Singham, "C.L.R. James on the Black Jacobin Revolution in San Domingo - Notes Toward a Theory of Black Politics," *Savacou*, 1, no. 1 (June 1970): 83.

[76] For more on James and Padmore's attempt to help infuse the national liberation struggle in the Caribbean with revolutionary politics, see 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: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009).

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.[77]

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 and 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* saluted 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…but to expose the Empire for what it really is".[78]

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[77] Richard Hart, *Rise and Organise: The Birth of the Workers and National Movements in Jamaica (1936-1939)* (London: Karia Press, 1989), 12, 16, 46, 123-24. On Hart, see also David Scott, "Memories of the Left: An Interview with Richard Hart," *Small Axe*, no. 3 (March 1998): 65-114.

[78] Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), 404, 432. Post suggests the author was possibly Wilfred A. Domingo, a Jamaican radical in contact with Hart's group. There is a 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 Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). See Hart, *Rise and Organise*, 147-48. When Ben Bradley, a CPGB member in London, read the article praising the Trotskyist James, who was soon to be meeting Leon Trotsky himself in Mexico to discuss perspectives for the struggle for black liberation in America, 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 17th 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 1st 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 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."

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