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The Marxian Populism of C. L. R. James

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ABSTRACT: This paper summarizes a critique of C.L.R. James' work which the author is in the process of developing. If it can provoke a response in the direction of greater clarification of James' writings as a whole and what significance they deserve in Caribbean Social Thought, then it would have come close to achieving one of its objectives.

KEYWORDS: Marxian dialectics, C. L. R. James, political culture, social transformation.

Introduction

This paper is meant to be a working document.[1] It summarizes a critique of C.L.R. James' work which the author is in the process of developing. If it can provoke a response in the direction of greater clarification of James' writings as a whole and what significance they deserve in Caribbean Social Thought, then it would have come close to achieving one of its objectives.

At the outset, a brief comment will be made on some assumptions and definitions which are used in the discussion. First, I assume that one can speak of a general accumulation of thoughts or insights on various aspects of human existence as comprising an 'intellectual tradition'. As much as one readily recognizes Western or European intellectual traditions with various philosophical currents with attempts to explain sources of knowledge or the relation between mind and matter or the nature of social relations, so too one can think of a Caribbean intellectual tradition. This implies a body of knowledge or an accumulated tradition of thoughts by persons from a geographical area, called the Caribbean, dealing with various aspects of human existence as lived out in that environment.

Second, an intellectual tradition is comprised, if even not systematically, of inputs of various writers who traffic in ideas. The formulation of their ideas can change over time in the sense that either the themes addressed, the core concepts of analysis, or vocabularies can be depicted as essentially distinct from one period to another. This implies it is possible to periodize the inputs of a writer and select out some central idea or set of ideas that can characterize the dominant concerns of their writing at a particular time.

Third, in my view, Marxism can be seen as a continuation of what is most forward-looking in the human intellectual tradition. Marxian social science is not to be associated merely with what came out

1 This paper was first circulated in the Working Papers on Caribbean Society, a series produced by the Department of Sociology, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

from Marx. It had inputs from German philosophy that culminates in Hegel; so too it benefited from emancipatory themes and democratic ideas of the Enlightenment which found expression in the French Revolution.

Next, a Marxian tradition is not the same as a party dogma nor is it to be transposed uncritically to situations fundamentally different from the merging industrial capitalist social order against which Marx and Engels directed their critique. The influence of central Marxian notions such as 'contradictions', 'alienation', 'class struggle' and 'social formations' on social science since the nineteenth century is a necessary pre-requisite for any comprehensive and scientific appraisal of social relations. An essential criterion of any intellectual input in the general area of social science explanations will then be its relation to the Marxian tradition and its uses of Marxian categories of analysis. Both the method and conceptions of the Marxian tradition are basic premises against which I will attempt to appraise the "development" of James' writings.

There are several methodological limitations in this appraisal. I rely principally on the works of James himself. While it may be satisfactory and telling us what he said or how he perceives a given situation, the extent to which 'thoughts' and 'ideas' were put into practice and the empirical conditions which fashioned what he says or why ideas were not successfully put into practice have not been sufficiently scrutinized. Methodologically, this appraisal relies on a conceptual analysis of his writings and to overcome this would require cross-checking with a variety of persons, collaborators, colleagues, and opponents which had to be deferred for the moment.

Objectives

The scope and breadth of James' writings as well as his ideological orientation and political praxis in the struggle for the advancement of human civilization defy a neat classification. Any attempt to be comprehensive in the short space of this paper will be a disservice to the richness of a prophetic literary career spanning nearly fifty years.

Given such a range of intellectual pursuits to which James' imaginative and original mind has been directed, I think that one can approach his work from the standpoint of a general question. This would entail something to the effect of asking what significance does his writing hold for human self-consciousness and social transformation? In this sense I am concerned with an attempt to characterize James' social thought as a whole. It is that type of general problem that we are addressing now.

This treatment therefore is of necessity selective but will hopefully speak to three specific questions. Broadly stated, these are the following:

A. What can one identify as a central notion that consistently typifies the structure of his thought?

B. In what sense is James to be understood as a Marxist?

C. What areas of social thought are opened that can lead to fruitful expansions in Caribbean social science?

Selected Literature on James

The evolution of James' thought had been previously described in the work of La Guerre (1968; 1972) and Benn (1973). To the former, central attention is paid to James as a representative of the "colonial intelligentsia" in the sense that the political program advanced was preoccupied with "the usual pleas on behalf of free debate and criticism of notions of responsibility of orderly change and the potential of the West Indian people" (La Guerre, 1972, 5). The stature of James as a creative Marxist scholar and a forceful instrument for the diffusion of Marxism in the Caribbean is highlighted in Benn's treatment. The issue of self-determination and its ramifications for the liberation of Africa were highlighted by Singham (1970).

In his commentary on James' *Black Jacobins* (1938, 1963), the capacity and obligation of West Indians to "wrest control of their own destiny" is for Singham (1970, 83) one of its major contemporary connotations. In addition, the theoretical significance of James was also to be found in his contribution to "one of the greatest debates taking place in the 1930s, the nature of the socialist state" (Singham, 1970, 83). Also of importance was "the problem of coming to terms theoretically with fascism." Seen in the manner that Singham approaches James' work, one might

sense immediately that these are not all problems of the 1930s but pressing issues of the 1980s. To these topics I shall return later; now it will be beneficial to describe the sociocultural and philosophical context in which James' thought developed.

Periodization of James's Thought

Helpful as the commentators are, James himself provides a simplified description of stages and bases for his thinking. Briefly put, he acknowledges a threefold transition from anti-colonial rebel to Trotskyist to independent Marxist. These in turn can be placed in relation to distinct periods in his writings. For instance, his initial literary pursuits and association with Albert Mendes in the founding of *The Beacon* (1931) gave expression to a sense of outrage against injustice that had been enkindled in the blatant racial oppression of the colonial society in which he was educated. He was particularly sensitive to the ways in which racial discrimination was evident in the sphere of sport.

Beyond sport, the structure of racism was evident to James in the political culture of the colonial West Indies. While great preoccupation was centered on giving lectures, writing short stories or commentaries on West Indian history and "on Wordsworth, English drama and poetry as criticism of life" (1963, 71), *The Beacon* radicals were building the foundations of Creole nationalism and launching an anti-colonial and nationalist struggle. Its basis was racial resentment rather than class conflict and one of its most articulate statements was to be James's *The Life of Captain Cipriani* (1932). Along with his *Minty Alley*, the manuscript of which was almost completed in late 1932 when he left Trinidad for England, these are, in my view, the two most important sociopolitical works of his pre-Marxist formulations.

They contain, however, several seminal notions that, with elaboration, would have become integral to James' Marxian synthesis and suggest that Marxism is not some lifeless ideology or foreign importation in analyzing Caribbean social structure. The point here is that without explicit systematization of his thoughts, several notions emerged in an embryonic form that held no antipathy to formal Marxian categories. To these he intentionally directed his mode of analysis in a subsequent period.

The Popular Leader: Charisma not Class

The political figure of Cipriani, veteran of World War One and a native Trinidadian of Corsican descent, attracted the attention of James on account of the appeal Cipriani had with the laboring masses. In a sense, the fact that Cipriani represented the "barefooted" man made him have, in James' view, a popular base, a grounding among masses of people and, for this reason, Cipriani was accorded political, i.e. popular, significance. As a representative and a leader of people, not on account of education primarily, or correctness and purity of ideology, James seems to say, one must place politically legitimation.

Quite clearly one can question whether such a conception is little more than a vague populism or at worst an endorsement of the demagogue as an ideal type of political personification. More pertinent in James' work is the resonance this conception will have as the embodiment of the popular will in several instances of political charisma. Many similarities reveal themselves in the way in which James so consistently identifies charisma and popular leadership for his political analyses. Cipriani on the West Indian self-government, Toussaint and the San Domingo revolution, Fidel and the Cuba revolution, and Nkrumah and Ghana are some examples of the pervasive interest given to personality and leadership as integral to the realization of the aspirations that a populace embodies.

One infers that it is charisma rather than class that James leans in his earliest politics. The centrality of the mass leader lays the foundations for the populist orientation in his thought. Furthermore, it obscures the significance of the structural ties in group and class relations at the expense of pre-eminence to psychological qualities. James later saw these errors:

> There is a serious misunderstanding in *The Life of Captain Cipriani*. I do not make it clear that the mulatto middle class was what it was because it had been deliberately created by the white plantation owners."

These remarks were made in 1977 (personal communication with author, February 15, 1977). They are of far-reaching significance not merely in identifying the transition of James' thinking but in providing a pedagogical contribution to social sciences in our

situation. James considers his presentation "a serious misunderstanding" in not making clear the nature and role of the then middle class of "a deliberate creation" of the ruling class in the plantation system. It is not necessary for us to ask today who the sociological and dialectical successors of that "mulatto class" are and the conditions of today's neocolonialism. The functions of a class in addition to the attributes of its representatives must be identified for an adequate grasp of group relations. This is an important and basic premise for the use of class theory in social analysis. To this James became clearly committed and so it was a development of his earlier perceptions. It is an explicit indication of Marxian influence on his thinking.

Even more important than referring to the nature and role of the middle class, James in *The Black Jacobins* discusses how the mulatto class in the plantation system was to be a bulwark against the black slave majority. In retrospect, the antagonist relations of classes are readily obvious to the James of 1977 but was far from so 40 years earlier. This is as reliable an indication of his movement from anti-colonial rebel to independent Marxist as one might find. The former was fertile ground for the latter and was evident in the notion of social estrangement that was instinctively a part of James' understanding of the division between the educated middle-class blacks and the black masses.

Alienation of Masses and the Petit Bourgeoisie

In his introduction to the second edition of *Minty Alley*, Ramchand was clearly aware of some of the aforementioned issues and made an explicit comment to that effect. "One of the novel's concerns is the mutually impoverishing alienation of the educated West Indian from the people" (Ramchand, 1971, 13). But it does not end there. In fact, a "growing involvement with and appreciation of" the urban proletariat affect the inner life and self-conception of the rising West Indian bourgeoisie as portrayed in a central character of the novel.

In James, the necessity of interaction between the young educated black man, Haynes, and the girl, Maisie, cannot be explained except in dialectical terms. He was not aware at that time, but this instinctive understanding and insight of group relations implied the notions both of separate/division and necessary interaction. This was in practice the use of the Hegelian dialectical method and would readily facilitate James' adoption of a Marxist worldview. The realization of this expressed itself in the now classic study he produced on the Haitian slave revolt and his interpretation of the Communist International from 1917 to 1936 under the title of *World Revolution* (1937).

Marxian Historian and Dialectician

These studies were a significant part of the extensive and perhaps his most creative writings. It is the period of *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (1936); *The Invading Socialist Society* (1947); *Notes on Dialectics* (1948); *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950 [1937]); *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (1953) along with numerous pamphlets, articles, lectures, debates and, most important, the active participation in the struggle of American workers and industry and the sharecropping farmers of Detroit and the Midwestern USA.

This is the period in which James' stature as a Marxist theoretician assumed its highest proportion and, while it in part coincided with the rise of his influence as a Pan-African advocate, it forced into the forefront of his thinking three problems of enormous importance for Marxian theory and practice. These are the natural evolution of state capitalism, spontaneity and class consciousness and the relation of the black American struggle to American socialism on the wider problems of international proletarianism. These were topics that covered intense debate and polemics which culminated in James's rejection of Trotskyism and laid the foundation for his present independent Marxism to which New Left thinking in the USA would be closely enamored.

Prior to examination of these issues, it will be beneficial to make a brief reference to some of the major highlights associated with *The Black Jacobins*. Caribbean readers are of course quite familiar with most of these but a reminder with a slightly different emphasis should do no harm. In my opinion, Singham (1970) has gone the furthest in extracting the theoretical and political significance of that book.

For instance, its appearance in 1938 was directly related to the upheavals in which "the former slaves of Saint Kitts, Jamaica, Trinidad and on the other islands were revolting against the plantation system continuing the struggle that their forefathers had begun in Haiti in 1789" (Singham 1970, 83).

Beyond this The Black Jacobins' thrust was directed against the colonial office propaganda that natives had to be "tutored" into self-government. James forcefully attacked this conception by showing that the slaves of Haiti, a century and a half before, not only waged a highly skillful military struggle but acquired and maintained power against formidable opposition. The failure of the revolution to lead to socioeconomic transformation was not "inadequate preparation for independence" but, as Singham (1970, 83) stated: "the continued dependence forced upon them by the international system and particularly economic dependence." Later he also identified the international factors which were so necessarily an essential component in maintaining the structures of dependency. For instance, Singham (1970) cited the complexity and "detailed matters of post-revolutionary reconstruction", the "enormous problem of working with the existing bureaucracy", an ideology and strategy to create new types of community relations. These of course are issues that not only emerge in the instance of Haiti but have a remarkable resemblance to us today in situations where independence was not won by armed struggle but granted by conference negotiation.

James in 1938 identified the underlying economic basis of neocolonial dependence and today we experience the full force of this exploitation in all Caribbean societies except Cuba, where both successful revolution and economic transformation have been won by a popular struggle. The Black Jacobins and Cipriani's constituency reveal continuity and differences. Both are equivocally on the capacity and readiness for West Indian self-determination. They are palpable evidence of James agitating for West Indian independence and furthering the cause of Caribbean nationhood long before any of today's petty rulers in the region had made their first electioneering speech.

One can also see in *The Black Jacobins* lucid analysis of the economic and political importance of the role that mulattoes occupied in plantation society. Here is a new departure over the earlier study of Cipriani. This perspective allows us to see the connection and persistence in the meditating economic and political function of mulattoes of that time, and today's comprador bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois bureaucrats who are conduits in the same structure of dependency on the development in Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados at the moment.

If, by 1938, James' perspective is explicitly Marxian, there are still pervasive strands of his former populist orientation. These features are evident in the way he attempted to include psychological factors, particularly those of the revolutionary leadership, into the historical and cultural aspects of Haiti's revolutionary mass movement. It is worthwhile to pursue James' treatment of this problem area since it is clear that some conceptual difficulties remain unsolved on these issues, and they continue to exercise an important part and of James' thought as a whole.

Leadership and Popular Democracy

What role was to be accorded individual leadership or the outstanding personality and the transformation of the "trembling slaves" into an organized revolutionary force was an underlying question being addressed in James' study. He claimed to have demonstrated the extent to which "this unique achievement was almost entirely the work of a single man Toussaint L'Ouverture" (James, 1989, ix). Hence *The Black Jacobins* subtitle was intentional and logical: *Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo revolution*. In James's words:

> The history of the San Domingo revolution will therefore largely be a record of his achievements and his political personality… [and] the narrative will prove, that between 1789 and 1815, with the single exception of Bonaparte himself, no single figure appeared on the historical stage more greatly gifted than this negro, a slave until he was 45. Yet Toussaint did not make the revolution. It was a revolution that made Toussaint. And even that is not the whole truth (1989, x).

Analyzing Toussaint's political personality as a significant dimension of the revolutionary transformation, James showed himself sensitive to the in-

terplay of character on social structure and shaping events (and decisions) and their ultimate outcome. The material is presented to avoid a psychological reductionism, though delicately analyzing a wide range of psychological attributes: vacillation or reluctance to join the first uprising or declare war of independence, a conciliatory attitude to whites or mulattoes, a sudden rupture of intimate friendship, the depth of his loyalty to France, on integrity demanding the execution of his nephew or betraying the Spanish allies – all the many psychological factors are never unrelated to the forces in the social structure. His background occupation as a slave, his reading of French liberal thought, particularly Raynal, the social significance of his blackness on the wider intrigue and revelry of European missions for wealth and power provide the context for an explanation of Toussaint's personality and character. Leadership seems to be defined in relational terms and not as an autonomous or independent entity. Certainly, for James, to lead authentically implies organic ties with the "led."

The text could warrant a full-scale study on the social psychology of revolutionary leadership. Neither space nor present purposes would allow for even a brief outline here. But a particularly important hypothesis is treated by James and to this it will be worthwhile to attend. The decay of leadership on the part of Toussaint is noted by James and he attributes this to the limitations of his political conceptions. Such limitations on the part of the leader are however not shared by the masses. A particular important feature of James' general conception is that the masses of people are the repository of revolutionary consciousness and action.

Perception and Class

In Toussaint, James sees vacillation and a conciliatory weakness towards the local whites at the expense of the true source of his strength, the black masses. "Toussaint could not believe that the French ruling-class would be so depraved, so lost to all sense of decency, as to try to restore slavery" (James, 1989, 282). To perceive a ruling class in terms, other than it is, constituted an inaccurate perception on the part of the mulatto leader. Here, if anywhere, James' sociology of knowledge is dead on target, and is as perceptive a portrayal as Marx himself, or Mannheim or Berger or Stark could express. Reality is perceived in relation to class position. This is the basic contribution of Marx to the sociology of knowledge. James implicitly uses this and hence the 'false' conception of Toussaint. So based on this misconception, James could claim that

> it was in method, and not in principle, that Toussaint failed. 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… the black laborers saw only the old slave owning whites. These would accept the new regime, but never to the extent of fighting for it against a French army. (1989, 283)

Then James in crypt, inimitable poignancy emphasized his point: "and the masses knew this" (1989, 283). The masses "see" or "know" without false conceptions become the critical implication of James' comment.

Projecting self-doubt among the base of his support, remaining hopeful that there would be no reason for fighting even after the expedition had set sail for Saint Domingo, leaving his generals in the dark, Toussaint's policy was self-defeating, his leadership therefore disadvantaged obtaining the mobilization of the masses without which the ultimate acquisition of independence and de facto transformation of the colony would have been impossible. The leadership of Toussaint had the key relation to the movement of the masses and it was from them, that the new leadership would arise in the person of Dessalines.

Toussaint's error sprung from the very qualities that made him what he was. It is easy to see today, as his generals saw after he was dead, where he had erred. It does not mean that they or any of us would have done better in his place. If Dessalines could see so clearly and simply, it was because the ties that bound us uneducated soldiers of French civilization were of the slenderest, he saw what was under his nose so well because he saw no further. Toussaint's failure was the failure of enlightenment, not of darkness. (James 1989, 288).

Although James' hypothesis on the relations between a leader and a movement remains an illu-

minating insight, its formulation is little more than suggestive. We hardly receive clear definitions of the conditions under which new leadership persists, even though dysfunctional to the originally defined goals of the movement. What specific factors, if any, can account for the collective awareness of the masses and under what conditions can such awareness successfully overcome bureaucratic and authoritarian leadership? Questions of this kind remain unanswered by James, thus indicating a merely preliminary formulation of his ideas. They, however, possess a distinct quality which in elaboration might be informative on questions about the decay of the nationalist leadership in third world societies. This was a critical issue at the Sixth Pan-African Congress in 1974. It continues to be our most pertinent element and perpetuates the dependency of the Caribbean. Decadent leadership is also now acutely responsible for the present recolonization in societies such as Trinidad under the aegis of 'joint-venturism' with multinational corporations such as Amoco, Texaco, and W. R. Grace.

State Bureaucracy and Mass Spontaneity

From Black Jacobins and Toussaint one can turn to Soviet Marxism and Stalin, which James addressed in his other major work of that period. *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937) as a study of the Third International, was very much a fierce attack on Stalin's policies in what James considered to be a betrayal of the 1917 Revolution. The doctrine of "socialism in one country" was rejected as chauvinistic and a contradiction of international proletarianism. James considered it paramount that the party bureaucracy in the Stalinist regime was a denial of popular participation in achieving an effective socialization of the means of production. What he directed his mind to was, and has remained, an area of Marxian theory that was insufficiently developed. It concerned the general problem of the State, its nature and role, in the transition to Socialism. James based his arguments on the Trotskyite notion of "permanent revolution." This implied that the transition from capitalism to socialism had to be seen, particularly in such a "backward" country as Russia, as nothing short of continuous socio-economic and political confrontation, which were stages in the establishment of an international classless and stateless society. He opposed the doctrine of "socialism in one country" and considered the stringent party control under Stalin as a bureaucratic and anti-working-class institution imposed from "above."

James' claim was that his critique was grounded on Leninist principles in which working-class control of the economy was seen to be the only objective basis on which true democracy in society was possible. Instead, he noted that in this period a "flight from the deepening of the revolutionary involvement of the populace accelerated" after the Civil War, and it marked "the birth of modern state capital ... that throttle the very notion of mass revolutionary initiative" (see *Radical America*, 5 Nov/Dec. 1971, 18).

A synthesis of several layers in James' thought appeared in this context. The fundamental populist character of his earlier years is carried over and expressed as the notion of "mass revolutionary initiative." Two dimensions of a definition of 'populism' as applicable to James are evident. One refers to it as an ideological feature around popular legitimacy for radical democracy. Then there is a dialectical aspect which is expressed in the notion of a revolutionary initiative. The key word being 'initiative'. It echoes the concept of 'spontaneity' as an inevitable, logical movement on the part of any oppressed individual or group.

This concept in James' work suggests a strong opposition or antithesis to the importance of revolutionary organization and is often a source of more confusion than clarity. But this need not be. Its usefulness is as a methodological device in the sense that one must consistently derive dialectical relations among social forces rather than impose fixed categories on the processes of social reality. Further, as James so fully grasped the Hegelian dialectic that Marx transformed, he was able to reject Trotskyism as being no longer Marxist in the Marxian and Leninist sense and come to his present position of "independent" Marxism. The arguments which James and his North American colleagues advanced as the "Johnson-Forest tendency" to reform the Trotskyist movement were published in various documents in the 1940s and early 1950s that testify to this transition.

Trotsky's Undialectical Approach and Black America

Already at the end of the 1937 study of *World Revolution*, James outlined a program for a "Fourth International" as the "only hope" against the likelihood of "imperialist war after imperialist war" (1937, 419, 421). To his mind, primacy was to be given to the working-class struggle on a world scale, and that of class struggle in Europe as a logical necessity for the survival and advancement of a socialist Russia. Uncritically he held to the view that the very nature of oppressed conditions established a consciousness and bond that transcended national boundaries. While arguing it convincingly in showing the "Paris masses" and then "black brothers in San Domingo" to be passionate allies, the outbreak of World War Two rather than national civil wars proved the questionable nature of this view.

These circumstances led James to look critically at the conditions of the black struggle in the USA. He argued that political autonomy should be granted the black movement on account of both theoretical and strategic reasons. Because of its "deep historical roots" and that it was in itself "a constituent part of the struggle for socialism", the real leadership of the black struggle was not to rest in the hands of organized labor or of the Marxist party.

In addition to the issues on the Black American struggle, James's ideological development and subsequent impact on New Left thinking in the USA were shaped by discussions on the nature of the Stalinist regime and the character of monopoly capitalism in America. The most important ideas of this period were influenced by James' participation in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and his final break with them, in 1951, resulted from dispute on the acute ideological issue of the relation between objective and subjective factors in organizing the international class struggle.

In *Notes on Dialectics*, James and colleagues identified the vital distinction between *forms* of revolutionary organization, which were transitional, and the *method* of dialectical reasoning. Based on this distinction and in light of the emergent state capital and what they considered to be the "tyranny" that the Communist Party had become under Stalin, it was argued that the vanguard party was not a central doctrine of Leninism but a concrete "aid" to the attainment of revolutionary power in the historical circumstances of a "backward" Russia.

The vanguard party as an instrument of liberation not being universally applicable constituted the new theoretical departure that James and his colleagues advanced. On this basis James had made himself a heretic to the world socialist revolutionary movement under the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Rejecting the vanguard party notion, the concept of mass-spontaneity was endorsed as of universal applicability. It was also seen as the pertinent focus by which class struggle could be continued both in the situation of "state capitalism" and of "advanced monopoly capitalism." This formulation remained unsubstantiated and, while one might concede the formal reasoning behind it, the basis on which the argument rests was not supported by adequate evidence.

To James and colleagues, it was their conviction, rather than convincing proof, that the proletariat had "come of age" as part of a natural process of historical development and had therefore acquired the capacity to transform its environment unaided. The examination of the labor process in Russia had indicated that central planning and "the nationalization of industry alone" were not sufficient in establishing a workers' state. Similarly, James' tendency argued that the fundamental antagonism of society was the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the social relations of production. Therefore, the resolution of this contradiction rested in "the reorganisation of the productive process by labour itself."

Moreover, the proletariat remained the driving force of the abolition of capitalism either in the form of monopoly or state capitalism with its "thieving bureaucracy" as an administrative caste system. It was control of the productive process and not mere ownership that constituted the material basis for socialist construction. This view James held onto unequivocally some 25 years ago and its importance has been recently highlighted in the work of critical supporters of the 'non-capitalist' thesis. For us in the Caribbean one can readily recognize a connection between the earlier work of James and the present concerns of C. Y. Thomas.

To focus therefore on the nature of production relations, as James correctly did, enabled the recognition that qualitative changes of class rule were only possible by objective, structural and material factors and not subjectivist, psychological qualities or empty postures by those who exercise power. As a consequence of his critique of state capitalism, James saw the negation of direct workers' control as a driving force in the continuation of class struggle towards the realization of a proletarian democratic state. It was on this basis that he claimed to have predicted the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and was not surprised by the Soviet "imperialist" invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. A decade later at the inaugural T. U. Butler Memorial Lecture in 1978 at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad and Tobago, James spoke commendably about strikes in Poland as further instances of the ongoing struggle for popular democracy within a socialist society. Helpful as James's critique was, it left too much that was vague and ambiguous to classify the continuation of class struggle in such divergent forms as the mass movement in Yugoslavia, uprisings in East Germany, a strike in Nantes, a general strike in Detroit, conflict of the Coventry workers (see his *Modern Politics*, 1960).

On the positive side, this period of his work was very insightful to the enlarged debate on "party democracy" in the transition and the nature of the state prior to its withering away. His limitations were much less narrowness of conception than a general underdevelopment of Marxist theory on the State and what were the kinds of institutional mechanisms for revolutionary struggle in conditions beyond those that Marx and Lenin had so painfully researched. Quite clearly, James hinted at, but did not elaborate, a consistent Marxist critique of bureaucratic relations, an area that is as important for Marxists in advanced capitalist societies as those under mixed or centrally planned economies.

The Independent Marxist and Caribbean Politics

By 1953 when he was deported from the USA during McCarthy's anti-communist purge, James' most important theoretical works had already been written, and the core concepts of his thought firmly established. Since then, it is difficult to find any major theoretical contribution or conceptual innovation that can be attributed to James' period as an "independent Marxist." Coming to the West Indies in 1958, he stayed for about two years and worked as editor of the People's National Movement's *The Nation*, which culminated in his renouncing the party's petit bourgeois nationalism as a betrayal of "the great movement for nationhood and democracy." Consistent to his "populist" orientation and advocating a non-aligned "Marxist" position, James rationalized his participation, one would suspect, on the grounds that the most significant force in the local situation was the fact that "the political temper of the West Indian masses" was at an extremely high pitch.

Looked at critically this was really a hasty conclusion and based on the evidence James found in the fact that "the masses assemble in numbers of 15-, 20-, 25-000 because they are aware of a profound change in their society and are looking for new foundations." If he was firmly grounded in the awareness that the logic of class struggle is an organic historical process, he would hardly have romanticized the situation at that time. Here, therefore, James was inconsistent to the dialectical method. The outcome of that episode and later, with the hastily constructed Workers and Farmers Party (WFP) of 1966, are substantial reasons why James's critics, both from the right and left dismiss his participation in Trinidad politics as burdened with ambivalent and problematic positions.

Aware of an ambiguity which was likely to follow from his rejection of the primary importance of a vanguard party in situations where the proletariat had "come of age", James held to the validity of a revolutionary party "adapted to local conditions...where industry and the proletariat" were not dominant (1960, 55). Here the contradiction between theory and practice in James is instructive. Convinced of the validity and critical significance of the revolutionary party for such situations as prevailed in the Caribbean, his efforts in building such a party were meagre. In neither of his two short-lived episodes, in 1958 – 1960 with the People's National Movement (PNM) or 1965 – 1966 with the WFP, were even the nucleus of such a party formed, nor did what exist consistently pursue a revolutionary Marxist position.

Neither with the PNM or WFP in which James participated, or now, more recently with the United Labour Front, have the consequences and demands of this position been consistently pursued. In this regard it seems reasonable to claim that here the importance of James remains pertinent and one major task will be to carry to their logical conclusions, insights, and issues to which he drew our attention. In this task discussion might fruitfully begin with clarification in at least four areas: 1. the dialectical method in social science; 2. a Marxian critique of bureaucratic theory and institutions; 3. the critical focal points of class struggle; and 4. a program for a revolutionary party based on Marxism-Leninism and with organic roots among the working people.

These issues need to be situated in the present Caribbean context as they are already part of the current struggle in every territory without exception. Our response and participation will hopefully help to emerge not merely a relevant political sociology for the region but critical social scientists. While, as I have attempted to show, several insights of James are pertinent to our struggle, the application and development of these remain unfulfilled. To pursue these tasks, deeper acquaintance with James, through direct contact with his writings, should prove more beneficial than this commentary.

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