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Université de Montréal

Liberation From Below: The Caribbean Conference Committee of Montreal and the
Global New Left

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Liberation From Below: The Caribbean Conference Committee of Montreal and the
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Résumé

Au milieu des années 1960, un groupe de personnes d'origine caraïbénne a constitué le Comité pour la conférence sur les Caraïbes (CCC). Se penchant sur la vie culturelle, économique et politique des Caraïbes, le groupe basé à Montréal a organisé une série d'événements qui ont joué un grand rôle dans le développement de la conscience politique chez les personnes d'origine caraïbénne et les membres de la société plus large. La CCC fait partie des organisations de la vague de la Nouvelle Gauche qui sont apparues à travers le monde. Le groupe a non seulement eu un impact important en Amérique du Nord, mais ses membres ont profondément influencé l'évolution politique dans les Caraïbes à la fin des années 1960 et dans les années 1970. Malgré son importance, le CCC a été négligé dans l'historiographie. Dans cette mémoire, je voudrais démontrer que le CCC était un groupe important de la "Nouvelle Gauche" Caraïbénne / Noire qui a eu un impact important au Canada et a joué un rôle crucial dans l'émergence de la Nouvelle Gauche dans les Caraïbes anglophones. Je vais aussi montrer que sous l'influence du marxiste trinitadien, C.L.R. James, et ses idées sur l'auto-organisation spontanée, le CCC a fait d'importantes contributions à la compréhension des changements sociaux et de la dynamique de la libération, par l'analyse des développements importants dans les années soixante comme la Révolution cubaine, la France en 1968 et la guerre du Vietnam.

Mots-clés : Caraïbénne, Nouvelle Gauche, Noir, Canada

Abstract

In the mid-1960s a group of West Indians formed the Caribbean Conference Committee (CCC). Dedicated to the cultural, economic, and political transformation of the Caribbean, the Montreal-based group organized a series of events that played a major role in raising the political consciousness of West Indians and members of the wider society. The CCC was part of the wave of New Left organizations that emerged across the globe and the group not only had a significant impact in North America, but its members profoundly influenced political developments in the Caribbean in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. Despite its importance, the CCC has been neglected in the historiography. In this thesis I will argue that the CCC was an important Caribbean/Black New Left group that had a significant impact in Canada and played a crucial role in the emergence of the New Left in the Anglophone Caribbean. I will also argue that, influenced by the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James's ideas of spontaneous self-organization, the CCC made significant contributions to understanding social change and the dynamics of liberation by analyzing important sixties developments as the Cuban Revolution, France in 1968, and the Vietnam War.

Keywords: Caribbean, New Left, Black, Canada

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INTRODUCTION

The 1960s was a period of social and political upheaval and intellectual ferment. Decolonization movements swept through Africa and Asia, and in the process, inspired North America and Europe's New Left. Meanwhile, the ideas of anti-colonial thinkers such as Aimé Césaire, Che Guevara, Mao Tse-Teung, Amilcar Cabral, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi, and Frantz Fanon inspired social movements and anti-colonial struggles around the world.¹ Fanon's analysis of colonialism, nationalism, and violence was particularly appealing during this period while, in the minds of many, the Cuban Revolution demonstrated the viability of armed liberation campaigns.² But although some parts of the Third World were involved in violent confrontations with colonial regimes, independence in the Anglophone Caribbean was a relatively peaceful process. Following the collapse of the West Indian federation – the Anglophone Caribbean's first concerted attempt to bring economic and political unity to the region – Jamaica and Trinidad opted

¹ Here the meaning of the term Third World is adopted from Vijay Prashad who argues that the Third World was not simply a place but an anti-colonial project in which the people of the Asia, Africa, and Latin America imagined and worked towards creating a new world. See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), xv. For an analysis of the impact of Third World movements on the New Left see Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of the New Left* (London: Verso, 1993), Cynthia Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of the Third World Left* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); and Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). For a discussion on various thinkers that influenced the New Left see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005), 107-110 and 223 and Young, *Soul Power*, 3-4 and 9.

² See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, particularly chapter one, "On Violence" (New York: Grove Press, 1968 [1961]). For an analysis of Fanon's ideas see Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996). For a discussion of the influence of the Cuban Revolution on the African American struggle in the 1960s see Young, *Soul Power*, 18-53.

for independence in 1960. And when Guyana and Barbados became independent six years later, the movement towards West Indian sovereignty was well under way.³

After centuries of slavery and colonialism, independence proffered hope that West Indians could shape their destinies. But it soon became clear that independence was not the panacea West Indians imagined it to be, and questions were raised about the region's political leadership. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon launched a scathing critique of nationalist leaders in the Third World, arguing that, once in power, they betrayed the aspirations of the mass of the population. Fanon also described Third World independence as an empty shell in which its leaders adopt new flags, anthems, and other nationalist paraphernalia without transforming the social and economic structures from their pre-independence form.⁴ Fanon's observations were largely based on his political experience in Africa as a representative of Algeria's Front de libération nationale, but in 1962, another West Indian, C.L.R. James, arrived at similar conclusions, based on his experience in the Caribbean.

By 1962, C.L.R. James had close to thirty years of political experience behind him. Born in Trinidad in 1901, James migrated to England in 1932 where he became a leading socialist who – along with fellow Trinidadian George Padmore, Amy Ashwood Garvey of Jamaica, and Ras Mokonnen of British Guyana – worked with several Africans – Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, I.T.A. Wallace Johnson of Sierra Leone, later to be joined by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana – who would later play central roles in the African

³ The West Indian Federation failed when Jamaica opted out of the process in 1960. When Trinidad pulled out of the federation the same year the initiative collapsed. For a detailed account of the rise and fall of the West Indian Federation see F.A. Hoyos, *Grantley Adams and the Social Revolution* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974) and C.L.R. James, *Federation: "We Failed Miserably", How and Why* (San Juan: Vedic Enterprises Ltd., 1962).

⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 176.

independence movement. James also collaborated with Leon Trotsky in 1938 and co-founded the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a U.S.-based Marxist organization that made important contributions to revolutionary theory in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵ James returned to the Caribbean in 1958 where he served as Secretary for the West Indian Labour Party, the leading proponent of West Indian federation, and editor of the *Nation*, the weekly newspaper of the People's National Movement (PNM). Trinidad's premier and PNM leader, Eric Williams, invited James to edit the party's newspaper and Williams and James collaborated for two years. But by 1960, political differences caused a rift between the two politicians and James left the PNM. It was following his departure from the party that he wrote *Party Politics in the West Indies*.⁶

Party Politics in the West Indies represents C.L.R. James's assessment of Caribbean politics in the early stages of West Indian independence. His main concern was with the failure of Caribbean politicians to develop a clear vision of socio-economic development for the region and, like Fanon, he draws attention to the limitations of nationalism. According to James,

Today nationalism is under fire and every people has to consider to what extent its nationalism has to be mitigated by international considerations. Of this[,] as of so much else[,] the West Indian middle class is innocent. What happens after independence? For all you can hear from them, independence is a dead end. Apart from the extended opportunities of jobs

⁵ See Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997) and Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁶ For an examination of James's involvement in Caribbean politics and his relationship to Eric Williams see Walton Look Lai, "C.L.R. James and Trinidadian Nationalism," in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.), *C.L.R. James's Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 174-209. Look Lai argues that the split between Williams and James was the result of Williams's failure to protect James from conservative PNM members who were concerned about his influence on Williams.

with the government, independence is as great an abstraction as was federation. We achieve independence and they continue to govern.⁷

Only two West Indian countries were independent when James raised these issues, but as the initial euphoria surrounding the first wave of independence gave way to skepticism and doubt, more and more West Indians took notice of his views. Some of his keenest followers were West Indian university students who formed political and artist groups and study circles in the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora. One such group was the Caribbean Conference Committee (CCC), which read James's books and pamphlets, organized a North American lecture for him and, inspired by his ideas, developed their own analyses of Caribbean and global politics.

Caribbean Conference Committee

Unlike Great Britain, Canada seems an unlikely home for Caribbean organizations. After the devastation of the Second World War, West Indians were encouraged to emigrate to England to assist in the country's post-war recovery. They filled a variety of jobs and helped rebuild Britain, but as their numbers swelled, several prominent politicians called for a re-evaluation of the U.K.'s immigration policies.⁸ While the immigration debate was being waged in Britain, Caribbean governments successfully pressured Canadian authorities to retract its "climate unsuitability" clause and other regulations that restricted immigration on the basis of "nationality, citizenship, ethnic group, occupation, class or geographical area of origin." As a result, barriers to

⁷ C.L.R. James, *Party Politics in the West Indies* (San Juan, Trinidad: Vedic Enterprises Ltd., 1962), 135.

⁸ See Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Brookfield, VT: Gower Publishing Company, 1987), 251-252 and 442.

entering the country were lifted and thousands of West Indians emigrated to Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, and other Canadian cities between 1960 and 1967.⁹

At the time, Montreal was Canada's industrial and cultural capital, which made it particularly attractive to West Indians. Estimates for Montreal's Black population vary between 7,000 residents in 1961 and 50,000 in 1968 (the latter figure is believed to be a serious overestimation).¹⁰ Many Caribbean women entered Canada under the domestic labour scheme which permitted them to work in Canadian homes. Others came to study, and while elite students preferred the more established McGill University, Sir George Williams University also appealed to West Indians because it accommodated daytime workers by offering evening courses, and had a more open admissions policy.¹¹

Many West Indians abroad were driven by the idea of returning home to participate in the Caribbean's social and economic development. This was certainly true of Robert Hill, Anthony Hill, Alvin Johnson, Anne Cools, Hugh O'Neile, and Rosie Douglas when they formed the CCC in 1965. The CCC was not the only Caribbean group based in Montreal. Several members of the influential Caribbean-based New World Group, including one of its founders, Lloyd Best, actually lived in Montreal and worked alongside Canadian economist Kari Polanyi Levitt at one stage. The Montreal New World Group paralleled and complemented the work of the CCC and several of its

⁹ Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen University Press, 1997 [1971]), 438 and Dorothy Williams's *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 105.

¹⁰Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 65.

¹¹ Ibid., 119-120.

members were also involved in CCC activities.¹² While *New World* was comprised primarily of academics and intellectuals whose work consisted of research and social and economic analyses, the Caribbean Conference Committee was largely made up of students oriented towards transforming the Caribbean from the bottom up. Between 1965 and 1967, the group organized a series of annual conferences that brought many of the Caribbean's leading thinkers and artists to the city.¹³ The conferences were attended by West Indians living in Canada, the United States, Britain, and the West Indies and raised awareness about social, cultural, and political developments in the Caribbean. Nothing like these conferences had ever occurred in Canada and Barbadian writer George Lamming believed that the inaugural meeting was the first of its kind anywhere.¹⁴

The group's political core – Robert Hill, Franklyn Harvey, Anne Cools, Alfie Roberts, and Tim Hector – formed the nucleus of the C.L.R. James Study Circle, a CCC sub-group dedicated to studying James's work. The group also adopted James's notion of self-organization – the idea that workers and the underclass can organize itself for change without being guided by political parties or elite leaders. As we shall see, this idea became central to the CCC's analysis of global political events such as the Cuban Revolution, France 1968, and the Vietnam War. Moreover, working with the Detroit-

¹² See Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 62. For a general account of *New World*'s activities see Denis Benn, *The Caribbean: An Intellectual History, 1774-2003* (Kingston and Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 122-151.

¹³ Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 76. Guests included George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Jan Carew, Norman Girvan, Austin Clarke, Orlando Patterson, Lloyd Best, Richard B. Moore, M.G. Smith, and calypso singer The Mighty Sparrow.

¹⁴ George Lamming, "West Indian People," *New World*, vol. II, no. 2, 1966, 63. This edition of *New World* also includes a resume of the October 1965 conference.

based group Facing Reality, the CCC distributed James's various books and pamphlets and helped publish one of his most important works, *Notes on Dialectics*.¹⁵

The CCC also produced its own publications, including three bulletins – *Caribbean Symposium: The West Indian Nation in Exile*, *Caribbean Conference Bulletin*, *Caribbean Conference* – and, under its new name, Caribbean Nation, the journal *Caribbean International Opinion*.¹⁶ While the bulletins chronicled CCC events and printed short articles, *Caribbean International Opinion* situated the Caribbean within a global context through its historical essays on the French Revolution and slavery, as well as articles on contemporary issues such as racism in Canada, France in 1968, and the Vietnam War. In addition to two articles written by C.L.R. James, other articles in the journal reflect James's influence on the CCC, the group's interest in global events, and its analysis of what it described as the dynamics of liberation.¹⁷

The CCC also attempted to influence official Caribbean politics. In 1966 it presented a brief to Caribbean heads of government during the Canada-Commonwealth Caribbean Conference in Ottawa and, according to a CCC report, the paper was well received by Caribbean delegates to the conference.¹⁸ Furthermore, the group's influence

¹⁵ Robert Hill to Franklyn Harvey, 11 January 1970, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute. For James's opinion on *Notes on Dialectics* see C.L.R. James, "Interview," in *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* Paul Buhle (ed.), (London: Allison and Busby, 1986), 164.

¹⁶ *Caribbean Symposium: The West Indian Nation in Exile*, (6-8 October 1967); *Caribbean Conference Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 2, September 1967; and *Caribbean Conference*, (October 1967), Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹⁷ *Caribbean International Opinion: The Dynamics of Liberation* (October 1968). CCC members also published in the *Speak Out*, Facing Reality's weekly paper, and circulated several unpublished documents that they wrote.

¹⁸ See Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs, "Policy Proposals for Caribbean Development: A Brief Submitted on the Occasion of the Commonwealth Caribbean-Canada, Ottawa July 6-8, 1966," n.d. and Franklyn Harvey, "Report to the Group on Our Conference Activities," (July 1966), 5, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute. The CCC also presented "Resolution to the Head of Government on the Occasion of the Commonwealth Caribbean-Canada Conference, July 6-8," (July 1966)," Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

extended beyond its immediate activities. Former CCC members played key roles in two watershed events in the history of Blacks in Canada – the Congress of Black Writers (1968) and the Sir George Williams Affair (1969) – and played an indirect role in the establishment of Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS).¹⁹ They were also instrumental in establishing several important New Left groups in Jamaica, Antigua, and Trinidad and played a crucial role in the early stages of the Grenada Revolution. In short, the CCC played a significant role in the most noteworthy events in the history of the Canadian and Anglophone Caribbean New Left. But despite its importance, the CCC is generally neglected in the historiography. And while former CCC members are acknowledged in assessments of the Caribbean left, their link to the CCC is generally overlooked in these studies. This may in part be due to the fact that the emigration of West Indians to Canada has not registered among intellectuals who are accustomed to looking to former colonial metropolises for groups like the CCC.²⁰ Perhaps, too, the traditional separation in the historiography between the New Left, on the one hand, and

¹⁹ A federal inquiry into the activities of a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) agent who spied on former CCC member Rosie Douglas in the 1970s recommended the separation of police work from national security and intelligence, thus giving rise to CSIS. See Linda McQuaig, “The Man with the Guns,” *The Gazette: Today Magazine*, 13 June 1981, 8-13 and Tim Riordan Raaflaub “Civilian Oversight of the RCMP’s National Security Functions,” Library of Parliament, 11 January 2006, 1.

²⁰ It is important to note that there is a long tradition of West Indian groups in Canada. Malcolm X’s mother, Louise Langdon, and her uncle Edgerton Langdon played a prominent role in the Montreal chapter of Marcus Garvey’s UNIA. The UNIA in Montreal evolved out of another, lesser known, organization – the Association of Universal Loyal Negroes – which focused on the repatriation of Blacks to former German colonies in Africa after the First World War. See Jan Carew, *Ghosts in Our Blood: With Malcolm X in Africa, England and the Caribbean* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Press, 1994), 131. For information on this little known group consult Robert Hill, lecture on “The West Indian Road to Africa,” Montreal, 21 September 1997, Alfie Roberts Institute. See also Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1997 [1971]), 414.

Black, immigrant, and nationalist groups, on the other, explains the neglect of the CCC, which does not fit neatly into any category.²¹

Review of Historiography

Recent historiography has begun to address the divisions between these categories. In *Rethinking the New Left*, Historian Van Gosse argues against limiting the New Left to the activities of Students for a Democratic Society or the “youth in revolt” stereotype. Instead, he calls for a broader and more inclusive definition of the New Left that encompasses “all of the struggles for fundamental change from the early 1950s roughly to 1975.” For Gosse, this definition accounts for the overlap between various sixties struggles and how, for example, the Civil Rights movement in the south influenced White radicals who eventually played leading roles in the U.S. anti-Vietnam War and women’s movements.²² Another recent work, *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, edited by Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, also calls for a more inclusive history of the sixties. By bringing together histories of Haitian, Polish, Greek, Ukrainian, Arab, and Latin American immigrant groups, Buhle and Georgakas counter what they describe as

²¹ Elizabeth Martinez makes a similar point in relation to Latino groups in the U.S. After reviewing two dozen books about the sixties, Martinez was astonished to discover what she describes as “a spectacular level of straight, white middle-class, male centrism.” As a specialist in Latin American studies, Martinez finds the omission of Latino movements particularly egregious given their “size and multifaceted nature” and argues that these oversights have been an obstacle to grassroots organizing across racial and national lines. See Elizabeth Martinez, *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century* (Cambridge (MA): South End Press, 1998), 22-23 and 28.

²² Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5. For an analysis of the impact of the Vietnam War in the U.S. see Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

“the exhaustion of traditional Left perspectives” that have hindered studies on the impact of immigrant left groups in their communities, countries, and the world.²³

While the Caribbean is generally ignored in U.S. and international studies of the New Left, Canadian historiography does not fare much better.²⁴ Robin Winks’s *The Blacks in Canada* was the first major study of African Canadians and occupies an important place in the historiography. The book was published in 1971 at a time when relations between African American and African Canadian Black Power advocates were coming to a crescendo. It also appeared only two years after the single-most important manifestation of Black Power in Canada – the Sir George Williams Affair, a Black-led student occupation at present-day Concordia University and the most costly (to a university) student revolt of the time.²⁵ As the anthology *Let the Niggers Burn!* illustrates, the Sir George Williams Affair was linked to other New Left political events in Montreal, and although the book doesn’t mention the CCC by name, it does acknowledge the role that its activities played in galvanizing Blacks in Montreal.²⁶ But while *The Blacks in Canada* mentions the Sir George William affair, it contains no significant account of the protest, and no connection is made between the incident and the work of the CCC. In fact, the Sir George is almost reduced to a footnote at the end of the

²³ Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1996), 4-5.

²⁴For example, Mark Kurlansky’s *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* – arguably the most comprehensive assessment of the global 1960s – does not treat a single Anglophone Caribbean group or movement and, with the exception of “Trudeaumania” and a few fleeting references to Quebec, Canada is not mentioned. Kurlansky, *1968*, 351.

²⁵ In her journalistic account of the incident, author Dorothy Eber quotes the damage to the university at \$2, 000 000, twice the amount of a previous student rebellion in Tokyo, Japan. See *The Computer Centre Party: Canada Meets Black Power: That Sir George Williams Affair* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1969), 8. Although Eber refers to Rosie Douglas and Anne Cools as ringleaders of the Sir George Williams Affair, she also appears to be unaware that Douglas and Cools were former CCC members.

²⁶ Denis Forsythe (ed.), *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams Affair and Its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montreal: Black Rose Books—Our Generation Press, 1971), 10 and 58.

book, to what Winks describes as the “thoughtless, needless, and frustrated destruction of the twentieth century’s symbol of quantification, the ultimate equality – Sir George Williams University’s computer center,” adding that the event “set off extensive Black Power rioting in Trinidad.”²⁷

In her study of the Canadian New Left, *Long Way from Home*, Myrna Kostash describes the activities of a number of Canadian New Left groups, but fails to mention one Caribbean of Black organization.²⁸ For example, Kostash notes that over a thousand students boycotted classes at the University of Regina in February 1969, but completely ignores the Sir George Williams Affair which occurred the same month.²⁹ And despite chronicling several events that took place in the fall-winter of 1968, she does not mention the October 1968 Congress of Black Writers, another event inspired by the CCC’s work and which received national and international media attention.³⁰

Like *Long Way from Home*, Ian McKay’s important study of the Canadian left – *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* does not discuss a single New Left Black/Caribbean organization.³¹ Nor does Louis Fournier’s seminal study of the Front de liberation du Québec (FLQ), *FLQ: Histoire d’un mouvement clandestin*. The book’s focus is on the emergence of the Quebec New Left and the Front de libération du Québec, yet it is noteworthy that, although the book is littered with references to Frantz

²⁷ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 478-479.

²⁸ Myrna Kostash, *Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1980), 11-12. The same is true of Pierre Berton’s popular history, *1967: The Last Good Year* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1997).

²⁹ Kostash, *Long Way from Home*, 95.

³⁰ Kostash does mention that Stokely Carmichael made reference to Nova Scotia’s Black community and that Black Panthers visited Montreal and Halifax in 1968 and met with “local militants.” *Ibid.*, 92 and 149.

³¹ Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005).

Fanon and the U.S. Black Power movement, he appears to be unaware of Caribbean and Black political activity in Montreal.³²

Despite the existence of more recent studies on the subject, Ronald Walter's *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements* is perhaps the most comprehensive book on Pan African political organizations. Walters surveys numerous African diasporic movements and the book is one of the few Pan African studies to even mention the Black and Caribbean population in Canada. Yet the three paragraphs he allocates to Canada seem well out of proportion to the CCC's role in the emergence of the Caribbean New Left. Referring to the group, Walters writes: "This group, poised in white dominant Canada, established linkages with the U.S. Black Power and Pan-African movements and played a basic role in internationalizing political support for the liberation movements in Africa. In fact, the Canadian group was the international wing of the African Liberation Support Committee, founded...by African-American activists.... [I]t was no accident that the Black movement in Montreal would seek to utilize... [Black Power/Pan African] concepts in its struggle against racism at Sir George Williams University."³³ Although he acknowledges that the Sir George Williams Affair was a response to Canadian racism, in focusing on the CCC's links with Black Power groups in the U.S. and its African solidarity work, Walters seems intent on demonstrating its U.S. roots.³⁴ But as historian Dorothy Williams suggests, Black left politics in the 1960s was rooted in the CCC's work and to "assume that only the American model influenced black Canadian political activism would be

³² See *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestine* (Montreal: Québec/Amerique, 1982).

³³ Ronald W. Walters, *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 302.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 303.

incorrect because there was a natural evolution towards a new consciousness of race that emerged in Montreal's black organizations in the late sixties."³⁵

Whereas Ronald Walters at least alludes to the work of the CCC, historian Robin Kelley's broad synthesis of Black radicalism, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, does not mention West Indians or Blacks in Canada at all. This omission is all the more striking because, in his otherwise imaginative analysis of twentieth century radical political movements, he refers to CCC co-founder Robert Hill in relation to his academic work on Marcus Garvey, and to C.L.R. James's place within Black radical politics, but is seemingly unaware of the CCC and its connection to James.³⁶

In *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought*, political scientist Rupert Lewis examines the life of Guyanese historian Walter Rodney, one of the Caribbean's most important New Left figures. Rodney was the author of *Groundings with My Brothers, A History of the Upper Guinea Coast: 1545-1800*, and *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. In 1968 he was a lecturer at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica and one of the key participants in the Montreal Congress of Black Writers, a historic gathering of many of the leading Black Power and Pan African thinkers and activist of the period.³⁷ Following his participation in the Congress, Rodney was expelled from Jamaica as a threat to the country's national security, accused by the Jamaican government of engaging in subversive activity. His expulsion sparked days of rioting and protest in Jamaica and inspired the founding of Abeng, a political organization based in

³⁵ Williams, *The Road to Now*, 118.

³⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002). Robert Hill is presently C.L.R. James's Literary Executor, the culmination of a relationship with James that dates back to Canada in the 1960s.

³⁷ Guest at the Congress of Black Writers included Stokely Carmichael, James Forman, Harry Edwards, Richard B. Moore, Richard Small, and C.L.R. James.

Kingston, the country's capital.³⁸ CCC co-founder Robert Hill worked closely with Rodney in Jamaica after completing his studies in Canada, and was involved in the political activity that resulted in Rodney's expulsion. This work and Hill's later involvement in Abeng was, in many ways, a continuation of the CCC's work; and while Rupert Lewis's focus is on Rodney's life and work, not the Caribbean New Left, he does refer to the CCC, implying a connection between its work in Canada and the Caribbean events that he describes.³⁹

Perry Mars's *Ideology and Change: The Transformation of the Caribbean Left* makes several references to Abeng's newspaper, which was edited by Robert Hill. Mars also mentions other important Caribbean New Left groups that were linked to the CCC such as the New Beginning Movement (Trinidad, Canada, and the U.S.) and Movement for the Assemblies of the People (Grenada), both of which were co-founded by former CCC member Franklyn Harvey; and the Antiguan Caribbean Liberation Movement (ACLM), led by Tim Hector, another former CCC member.⁴⁰ But although he groups

³⁸ Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 100 and 123. Political scientist Brian Meeks argues that the events following the "Rodney Riots" sparked the Anglophone Caribbean's Black Power movements and the resurgence of the left in the West Indies which, beginning with Abeng, culminated with the Grenada Revolution in 1979. But in linking Abeng to the New Left, Meeks too overlooks the connection between the CCC's work in Canada, Rodney, Hill's participation in Abeng, and the emergence of the Caribbean New Left. Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press of the University of the West Indies, 1996), 1-2.

³⁹ Fanon's Che Wilkins's "*In the Belly of the Beast*" is one of the few studies that connects the Caribbean Conference Committee to political developments in the Caribbean. Wilkins refers to Robert Hill's political activity in Jamaica and his collaboration with Walter Rodney. He also connects this to his work with the CCC and James while arguing that the Congress of Black Writers was inspired by the CCC's work. Fanon Che Wilkins, "*In the Belly of the Beast: Black Power, Anti-imperialism, and the African Liberation Solidarity Movement, 1968-1975*" (Ph.D. diss., N.Y. University May 2001), 19-21.

⁴⁰ Perry Mars, *Ideology and Change: The Transformation of the Caribbean Left* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 50-51. In *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory*, Brian Meeks describes C.L.R. James's influence on Movement for the Assemblies of the People but does not mention Franklyn Harvey. See Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: An Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993), 146.

these organizations with other Caribbean New Left groups, Mars does not link them to the CCC.

In “C.L.R. James and the Antiguan Left,” sociologist Paget Henry examines the evolution of Antigua’s New Left by focusing on the ACLM.⁴¹ The ACLM played a significant role in Antiguan politics and was an important part of the network of Caribbean New Left organizations. Henry describes how, having benefited from his political experience in Canada and his close association with James, Hector returned to Antigua and became an important political figure.⁴² But what is most interesting here is the direct connection he makes between Hector’s return to Antigua and the emergence of Black Power and the New Left in the Anglophone Caribbean. Like Henry, historian Paul Buhle also recognizes the CCC’s connection to the work its members undertook in the Caribbean. As the first full-length study of a CCC member, Buhle’s *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical’s Story* represents an important departure in Caribbean and New Left historiography. Although the sections dealing with Canada are small in proportion to its significance, he not only chronicles Hector’s involvement in the CCC, but as C.L.R. James’s first biographer, Buhle is also conscious of the role James played in shaping the group’s politics.⁴³

Presentation of Sources and Chapters

From the foregoing survey, it is evident that, despite the group’s importance, very little has been written about the CCC. As this essay will demonstrate, despite its

⁴¹ Paget Henry, “C.L.R. James and the Antiguan Left,” Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.) *C.L.R. James Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 240-241.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical’s Story* (Jackson: The Press of University of Mississippi, 2006), 137.

exclusion from the historiography, the CCC was part of the wave of New Left groups that emerged across the globe, and arguably the group most responsible for the emergence of the Caribbean's New Left. This study will also argue that the CCC made significant contributions to the understanding of social change in the Caribbean and, drawing on C.L.R. James, raised critical questions about the Cuban Revolution, France 1968, and Vietnam, all of which were important New Left preoccupations. Furthermore, in examining the particularities of these global events, their work provided insight into the dynamics of liberation as a whole.

Chapter one of this essay traces the origins of the Caribbean Conference Committee to Robert Hill's involvement in Jamaica's Young Socialist League in the early 1960s. This chapter also introduces the CCC's core members and examines the group's founding documents, "The Coming Struggle for Liberation" and "A Proposal for a C.L.R. James Study Circle." Both documents emphasize what became a defining characteristic of the CCC's work: the role of the underclass in shaping society.

Chapter two examines the relationship between the CCC, C.L.R. James and his Detroit-based group, Facing Reality (FR). As we will see, James and FR were central to the CCC's political development. CCC and FR members corresponded with one another and studied James's work, and in the process, James's ideas became a component part of the CCC's political outlook.

Chapter three illustrates the direct influence of James's ideas on the CCC by examining a 1966-1967 debate between CCC members Tim Hector and Alfie Roberts. The debate centers on the political nature of the Cuban Revolution and represents one of

their efforts to articulate a vision of a liberated society. The debate also demonstrates how CCC members engaged and challenged each other.

Picking up where chapter three left off, chapter four assesses essays written by Tim Hector and Franklyn Harvey for *Caribbean International Opinion*. Their essays on Vietnam and France 1968 focus on the role of the underclass in changing society and by critically analyzing two events that helped to define the global New Left, Hector and Harvey firmly planted themselves within the New Left tradition.

The concluding chapter shifts from the CCC's activities and theoretical contributions to an examination of its political legacy in the Caribbean and Canada. This chapter illustrates the CCC's influence on important events as the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair in Canada, and demonstrates how these events impacted the Caribbean. It also describes the work former CCC members undertook when they returned to the Caribbean, arguing that it is impossible to understand either the Anglophone Caribbean or Black New Left in Canada and the New Left within the Caribbean without examining how events in the West Indies and Canada intersected with each other in this period.

The research for this thesis was conducted at the Alfie Roberts Institute in Montreal and the in the Glaberman Collection of the Walter Reuther Library at Wayne State University in Detroit. The Alfie Roberts Institute possesses the most complete set of primary material dealing with the CCC, including its internal correspondence and its correspondence with C.L.R. James, Martin Glaberman, and other individuals and institutions.

The Glaberman Collection at Wayne State University includes correspondence between Martin Glaberman and members of the CCC and C.L.R. and Selma James. Both collections furnished the bulk of primary material with which this thesis has been constructed – correspondence, published and unpublished CCC bulletins, reports, articles, and briefs. The correspondence has been particularly useful in so far as it highlights the unspoken in CCC publications, namely its members' reactions to various ideas and events, as well as their internal debates, tensions and disagreements. Generally speaking, the letters permitted them to convey their ideas in a relatively unrestrained and creative manner without fear of offending allies or the general public.

At present, the archives at the Alfie Roberts Institute are loosely classified and filed in boxes without folder numbers. In the case of the Glaberman Collection, my research relied primarily on boxes seven, eight, and twenty-one, each of which contained key correspondence between Glaberman and CCC members. Other primary material cited in the thesis includes C.L.R. James's Montreal lectures, which were originally recorded in 1966 and 1967. The recordings were entrusted to me by Alfie Roberts in 1995 and I am currently in the process of editing them for a 2009 publication.

I have also had the opportunity to survey documents at the National Archives of Canada, particularly Clarence Bayne's papers. Dr. Bayne was the last chair of the CCC and his papers represents an important resource for anyone interested in the CCC's work.

In terms of secondary sources, I have attempted where possible to situate the CCC's ideas within the context of the global New Left and to contrast their thoughts with those of other 1960s left groups. To this end, I have drawn on recent New Left historiography, the volume of which suggests renewed interest in the 1960s and New Left

history. Among the books worth noting here are Kristin Ross's *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (2002); Cynthia Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of the Third World* (2006); Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (2005); and although it is not solely about the New Left, Ian McKay's concise history – *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (2005) – was also very useful. So too was Paul Buhle's *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical's Story* (2006), despite the fact that the sections dealing with Tim Hector's involvement in the CCC do not draw on available archival material. This study is heavily indebted to Alfie Roberts's posthumous *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (2005), a small book which, nonetheless, represents the first significant account of the work of a former CCC member.

Chapter One: The Coming Struggle for Liberation

In October 1965, the celebrated Barbadian novelist George Lamming addressed an audience in the Université de Montréal Social Science Center as the keynote speaker at the Caribbean Conference Committee's (CCC) inaugural meeting. The subject of his talk was "The Shaping of the Future of the West Indies" and he began his presentation with the following remarks: "I don't know whether you realize what a very significant honour it is for me to be here in these circumstances because[,] although I have done a great deal of traveling in the last 15 years[,] both in Africa and North America, this is actually the first time in my career as a writer that I have ever been the guest of a West Indian organisation." Lamming went on to say, "I would like also to let you know that what you are doing here tonight has many echoes in London and for many of your compatriots who work in various activities throughout Africa. You are in a sense operating on a world scale." Finally, Lamming congratulated the organizers for what he believed was "the first conference of this kind" anywhere and expressed his sincere hope that the Committee "achieve another first by seeing to it that the next is held on Caribbean soil."⁴⁴

Lamming's praise for the CCC's work reflects the enthusiasm with which the conference was met by West Indians. It was the first of its kinds and marked the beginning of a series of events and activities organized by the CCC that would influence social and political developments in North America and culminate in the emergence of

⁴⁴ See George Lamming, "The Shaping of the Future of the West Indies", *New World*, vol. II, no. 2, 1966, 63. This edition of *New World* also includes a resume of the October 1965 conference itself. Lamming's speech was also published by the CCC in their October 1967 Caribbean Conference bulletin.

the Caribbean's New Left. In this chapter I will explore the origins of the CCC and situate it within the context of its Caribbean roots by reviewing its founding documents, "The Coming Struggle for Liberation" and "A Proposal for a C.L.R. James Study Circle." These texts center the CCC within the context of the Caribbean and mark the group's entry into the wave of global left movements that emerged in the 1960s. They also reflect what would become the group's characteristic preoccupation with the underclass and the capacity of the dispossessed to transform society for the better.

The Coming Struggle

The Caribbean Conference Committee's roots go back to Robert Hill's involvement in Jamaica's Young Socialist League (YSL). The YSL was spawned by the People's National Party's (PNP) planning committee in Jamaica in 1963 as part its process of rethinking socialism in light of the collapse of the West Indian federation and the party's subsequent loss in Jamaica's general election.⁴⁵ The YSL quickly became an active political entity of its own with close ties to Jamaica's workers and underclass. Hill was encouraged to participate in the YSL by fellow Jamaican and future CCC member Norman Girvan, who was part of its policy-planning group, and soon Hill was addressing YSL meetings in Kingston, Jamaica's capital, and neighbouring Spanish Town.⁴⁶ During the 1964 YSL national conference Hill presented a paper entitled "The Struggle for Freedom and Socialism" in which he argued that the YSL had to decide whether it would

⁴⁵ David Scott, "The Archaeology of Black Memory: An Interview with Robert A. Hill," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* vol. 3, no. 1, 1999, 94-95. For a detailed account of the rise and fall of the West Indian Federation see F.A. Hoyos, *Grantley Adams and the Social Revolution* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974) and C.L.R. James, *Federation: "We Failed Miserably", How and Why* (San Juan: Vedic Enterprises Ltd., 1962).

⁴⁶ Scott, "The Archaeology of Black Memory: An Interview with Robert A. Hill," 96.

remain tied to the PNP or become an independent body. As the YSL's popularity and stature grew among ordinary Jamaicans, Hill identified what he believed to be a contradiction within the organization. Although the YSL was, in many ways, meant to be an alternative to the existing political structure, for Hill it was evident that the PNP was not an effective outlet through which the pent-up energies of the population could be channeled.⁴⁷ Jamaicans yearned for cultural and political expression, but as long as the YSL remained linked to the PNP (the public was generally unaware of the YSL's connection to the party), the YSL could not be a vehicle for a genuine mass movement.⁴⁸

The YSL leadership balked at Hill's reasoning and, shortly after, he left to pursue his studies in Canada. But although he had left Jamaica, Hill felt compelled to draft a statement that would draw lessons from his differences with the YSL's leadership which revolved around a central question: what role would the YSL play in the political struggle when Jamaica's masses attempt to seize power, as he believed they inevitably would?⁴⁹ In 1965, Hill re-crafted and enlarged the statement he presented at the YSL convention under a new title: "The Coming Struggle for Liberation." Viewed as one of the CCC's foundational statements, the essay links both Hill and, through him, the political core of the CCC, to an early socialist experiment in the Caribbean.

The central argument in "The Coming Struggle for Liberation" is that Jamaica has reached a political crossroads in its history and for Jamaicans to attain genuine freedom, "a totally new concept of our people's struggle must be established, its formation under the specific historical conditions of the Jamaican people, its development and final

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid and Robert Hill and Alfie Roberts, discussion, audio recording, 24 August 1995. Alfie Roberts Institute.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

victory as the victory of our only history, our only experience in life.” This new conception must be stripped of the “slogans and forms of the European socialist movement” because the “dynamic for liberation must be found in ourselves.”⁵⁰ Hill’s repudiation of European socialism echoes the writing of Martiniquan theorist Frantz Fanon who challenged Marxism’s universality when he wrote that, while some have attempted to break with the political chauvinism that has characterized the European and North American left, unfortunately, “the workers of Europe have not replied to these calls; for the workers believe, too, that they are part of the prodigious adventure of the European spirit.”⁵¹ Consequently, Fanon arrived at the conclusion that the Third World has only itself to turn to for guidance; that “Humanity is waiting for something from us other than...imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature.”⁵² In essence, “The Coming Struggle” attempts to provide Jamaicans and the Caribbean with a new conception of liberation, and in the document Hill lists the ingredients he believes necessary for a successful liberation struggle. Genuine liberation “can only be won when the people establish themselves into a mighty human force, sweeping everything before them. This struggle occurs,” according to Hill, “only in great moments in history, in the greatest hour of the people, and that hour is now approaching.”⁵³ National liberation was once the political goal in the Caribbean. But as Caribbean territories gained their independence in the 1960s, it became clear that this goal was insufficient; independence represented only a partial freedom which did not enfranchise the vast majority of the population. With this reality in mind, Hill argues that the West Indian “nationalist

⁵⁰ Robert Hill, “The Coming Struggle for Liberation,” (unpublished), n.d., 1. Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

⁵¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968 [1961]), p. 313.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 315.

⁵³ Hill, “The Coming Struggle,” 1.

revolution stands exhausted, buffeted on all sides,” and then proceeds to provide a historical appraisal of the Caribbean’s nationalist phase.⁵⁴

Hill describes Jamaica as a product of slavery and the sugar-plantation economy, arguing that the entire society has suffered the “inhuman delineations of that period ever since,” and that, for this reason, analyses of the crisis in Jamaica must be rooted in an understanding of the past.⁵⁵ As he explains, while the slave-owners were fully compensated for their losses when slavery was abolished in 1834, the ex-slaves were never remunerated for what he describes as “the most hideous brutality ever inflicted upon a people.”⁵⁶ The descendants of Jamaica’s slaves are still waiting to be compensated, and as Hill warns, the price of this waiting is barbarism. And as his explanation reveals, the concept of barbarism characterizes the polarization between Jamaica’s ruling classes and the mass of the population, echoing the sentiments of the Martiniquan philosopher, poet, and playwright Aimé Césaire in *Discourse of Colonialism*.

Discourse on Colonialism was one of the most compelling anti-colonial statements of the twentieth century. Published in 1950 while Césaire was still a member of the French Communist Party, the word barbarism runs like a thread throughout the book. It also anticipates Frantz Fanon’s critique of Europe and Western civilization, but whereas Fanon directed his critique at both Europe’s bourgeoisie and working class, Césaire’s indictment of Europe and Western Civilization is restricted to the bourgeoisie.⁵⁷ Césaire declares Europe to be morally and spiritually indefensible and decries the falsity

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 313.

and hypocrisy of its *mission civilatrice*.⁵⁸ For Césaire, Europe's barbarism is surpassed only by that of the United States.⁵⁹ Baseness, corruption, and the systematic practice of torture and murder sink "deep into the soul of the European bourgeoisie," an accomplice to the barbarism inflicted on Europe by Hitler, a barbarism that was first tried and tested on the non-European people of the world.⁶⁰ It is this "dialectic of defeat," Europe's external barbarism turned inward, or what Césaire describes as the "law of *progressive dehumanization*," that ultimately leads to "violence, corruption, and barbarism" both within and without Europe.⁶¹

Hill and other members of the CCC were very familiar with Césaire's work. They were sufficiently moved by his writing to invite him to be the keynote speaker for their inaugural conference in 1965 (he was unable to attend) and they published his homage to Frantz Fanon in one of their bulletins.⁶² But while Césaire employs the word barbarism to characterize Europe's bourgeoisie, Hill applies the term to the political situation in Jamaica. Echoing what Césaire describes as Europe's "brainless elites and degraded masses,"⁶³ Hill inverts this meaning by applying it to Jamaica, and specifically to Jamaica's economically strapped and politically impoverished bourgeoisie, and what he describes as the mayhem and destitution that characterizes the historical situation of Jamaica's oppressed, the plight of its sorely neglected who lie "beneath the surface of

⁵⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1950]), 32.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48, 36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 68. (emphasis in original). The term dialectic of defeat is borrowed from David Scott's introduction to his interview with Rupert Lewis in the journal *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, vol. 5, no. 2, September 2001, 85.

⁶² Aimé Césaire, "Homage to Frantz Fanon," in *Caribbean Symposium: The West Indian Nation in Exile*, (6-8 October 1967), n.p., Alfie Roberts Institute.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 42.

rum, recklessness, illegitimacy...suffering the sight of their own deterioration.”⁶⁴ Coming of age in post-colonial Jamaica, Hill is more concerned with the role that Caribbean nationalist and post-colonial leaders play in eclipsing the life chances of the underclass and limiting its ability to reap the benefits from the opportunities that independence was supposed to afford them.

Hill’s notion of liberation or barbarism also bears an uncanny resemblance to Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of being and nothingness. Along with Herbert Marcuse, Albert Camus, and Frantz Fanon, Sartre was one of the most influential thinkers on the New Left.⁶⁵ His philosophy raised critical question about the nature of liberation, and his essays, books, and interviews on Vietnam, Algeria, Cuba, among other subjects, coming from one of the twentieth century’s most influential philosophers, lent support to a number of global struggles. He is credited with influencing a range of thinkers and movements, such as Césaire and Leopold Senghor and the Negritude movement, Frantz Fanon, and Che Guevara. But while V.Y. Mudimbe has labeled Sartre an African or “Negro philosopher” on account of his critical embrace of Negritude as a “philosophical criticism of colonialism,”⁶⁶ it must also be said that the Negritude philosophers had a significant impact on Sartre, as evidenced by the fact that he wrote about them and lent them critical support. CCC members read and critiqued Sartre alongside Fanon and

⁶⁴ Hill, “The Coming Struggle for Liberation,” 2.

⁶⁵ For a description of Sartre’s influence on the New Left see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005), 108 and 223 and Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005 [1987]), 193-197.

⁶⁶ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 86.

Malcolm X, and their engagement of his ideas is yet another factor that situates the group within the global New Left.⁶⁷

In his celebrated philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues that genuine freedom is a conscious act, or series of actions, which begin when the oppressed, submerged in a sea of desolation and wretchedness, become conscious of their oppressed predicament and see in the horizon the possibility of changing their condition. This process involves stepping outside one's being or "historical situation" in order to acknowledge its harsh reality, not simply on the basis of what it is not, but based on its nothingness – what it also can be. It is only after conceiving a new, more desirable society that the conscious activity involved in creating this society can truly begin.⁶⁸ Hill's notion of barbarism corresponds with Sartre's notion of being (as does his idea of liberation with Sartre's notion of nothingness and freedom). But unlike Sartre's being and nothingness syllogism, for Hill it is either the continued, ever-worsening barbarism for Jamaicans *or* utter liberation; barbarism *or* liberation because Jamaica's crisis-ridden social reality is so stark that it is without mediation and can only be defined in either/or terms. At this stage, the "horizon of possibility" – freedom – evades Jamaica's underclass, but as Hill anticipates, "soon the day will be upon us when the terror will break loose and most will not understand that the choice has been made: *LIBERATION* or *BARBARISM!*"⁶⁹

Perhaps the most obvious influence on Hill's notion of barbarism is the work C.L.R. James. The word barbarism crops up several times in *The Invading Socialist*

⁶⁷ Tim Hector to Alfie Roberts, n.d.

⁶⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1977 [1943]), 560, 562-563.

⁶⁹ Hill, "The Coming Struggle for Liberation," 2. (emphasis in original)

Society, which James co-wrote with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee. The booklet is littered with damning references to the barbarism and degradation engendered by global capitalism – “the barbarism and degradation of fascism;”⁷⁰ in the 1930s, “a society where social collapse and barbarism are very close;”⁷¹ the “unending murders, the destruction of peoples, the bestial passions the sadism, the cruelties and the lusts, all of the manifestations of barbarism;”⁷² and “this barbarism spreads its shadow over Europe and Asia”⁷³ – all of which is counterposed to an emerging socialist order.

James also uses the word barbarism in “Marxism for the Sixties,” which he once again contrasts with socialism. As he writes, “Marx never believed in the inevitability of socialism. Neither did Lenin. Never at any time would they put forward that socialism was inevitable. What Marx was very clear about, and Lenin followed him, was quite precise: Socialism or Barbarism...Either it goes this way or society will descend into barbarism.”⁷⁴ The similarities between Hill’s *Liberation or Barbarism* and James’s *Socialism or Barbarism* are too obvious to ignore. James was without a doubt the single most important intellectual-political influence on Hill, and although he does not use the word socialism in his essay or become mired in Marxist vernacular, the political ideas and the approach that he espouses – his emphasis on the Caribbean’s dispossessed, the revolutionary role of the intelligentsia, etc. – reflects his study of James’s ideas and the inner-workings of a young mind attempting to formulate a theory of liberation rooted in the autochthonous socio-political conditions of Jamaica and the Caribbean as a whole. It

⁷⁰ C.L.R. James, F. Forest [Raya Dunayevskaya], Ria Stone [Grace Lee], *The Invading Socialist Society* (Detroit: Bewick/ed, 1972 [1947]), 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁴ C.L.R. James, “Marxism for the Sixties,” in *Speak Out*, no. 2, May 1965, 2.

is in this sense that “The Coming Struggle for Liberation” represents one of the earliest Caribbean New Left attempts at formulating what is today known as Radical Caribbean Tradition of political and intellectual thought.⁷⁵

CCC’s Political Core

When “The Coming Struggle for Liberation” was circulated in Canada in 1965, plans for the Caribbean Conference Committee were already underway. The CCC was founded shortly after Robert Hill arrived in Canada in the fall of 1964 to pursue a degree in political science. His initial intention was to study at the University of Toronto, but when he attempted to register at the school, he was informed that he lacked an A Level language requirement and therefore would not be admitted.⁷⁶ Robert Hill’s cousin, Anthony Hill, was already studying public administration at Carleton University in Ottawa, and Robert Hill decided to join him.⁷⁷ Shortly after arriving in Ottawa, the two Hills made several trips to Montreal. Although Anthony Hill did not come to Canada with his cousin’s political experience in Jamaica, both Hills shared a keen interest in Caribbean politics and were anxious to make contact with other West Indians to promote the idea of organizing a conference on West Indian affairs. During their visits to Montreal they met a number of West Indians, most of them fellow students, who enthusiastically embraced the conference idea. Of the many West Indians the Hills encountered, however, several stood out. They would go on to develop a lasting relationship with one another

⁷⁵ Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press of the University of the West Indies, 1996), See also Brian Meeks, Rupert Lewis, Anthony Bagues, and Neville Duncan in Selwyn Ryan (ed.), *Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom: Essays in Honour of Lloyd Best* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies, 2003).

⁷⁶ Robert Hill and Alfie Roberts, discussion, audio recording, 24 August 1995. Alfie Roberts Institute.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

and form the nucleus of the CCC and its subgroup, the C.L.R. James Study Circle (CLRJSC). And it was to these young West Indians that Hill circulated “The Coming Struggle for Liberation” as the CCC prepared for its first conference.

The “kindred souls” of the CCC included Alfie Roberts of Saint Vincent, Franklyn Harvey of Grenada, Anne Cools, originally from Barbados (she moved to Canada at age 13), and Tim Hector of Antigua. Rosie Douglas of Dominica was a founding member of the CCC and played an important role in the group’s activities, using his extensive social networks in Montreal to raise funds for the organization, and Anthony Hill was an excellent organizer who played an important role in getting the first conference off the ground. But Robert Hill, Roberts, Harvey, Cools and Hector were the closest in terms of political affiliation.⁷⁸ Robert Hill and Alfie Roberts both studied political science, Hill eventually at the University of Toronto and Roberts at Sir George Williams University; Franklyn Harvey already had a degree in engineering from the University of the West Indies and was pursuing a degree in urban planning at McGill University when he joined the group; Anne Cools studied social sciences at McGill and Tim Hector was a philosophy student at Acadia University in Wolfville Nova Scotia at the time. These individuals gravitated towards one another and, as Alfie Roberts recalls in the

⁷⁸ Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical's Story* (Jackson: The Press of University of Mississippi, 2006), 144. Alfie Roberts, *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (Montreal: The Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005), 61-72. Referring to how Hector and other CCC members first made contact and became involved in the CCC, Roberts writes: “Apparently, when greetings were being brought to the 1965 conference[,] there was an individual who got up in the conference and said he brought greetings as the lone wolf from Nova Scotia. He turned out to be Tim Hector. I had never met or heard of Tim before but it turned out that Bobby had met him the previous year in Toronto where Tim was spending his summer vacation, and Bobby invited him to the conference.” “Franklyn Harvey was already here because he had been a friend of Hugh O’Neale and Hugh O’Neale, being my cousin in-law, we got to know Franklyn.... Franklyn came with a certain consciousness too because he studied at UWI [University of the West Indies] and, as a matter of fact, he had a paper that he had written on federation, a paper that I still have up to today. So he was of that thinking nature about the social-political situation in the Caribbean.” Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 65-67.

posthumously published book, *A View for Freedom*, “we were just like kindred souls who came together and...took off from there, organizing these conferences.”⁷⁹

“The Coming Struggle for Liberation” provided the CCC’s core with a political orientation and, as I have suggested, the document represents an early attempt to formulate a political perspective that would take the fate of the Caribbean masses out of the hands of the ruling elite. This feature would become central to the CCC’s work as the group evolved and developed its ideas. But its members read “The Coming Struggle for Liberation” alongside a range of political material, Caribbean and world history, and the philosophy of Hegel and Marx. They also organized public events that helped raise the consciousness of West Indians in North America, the Caribbean, and Britain, and assisted the careers of several prominent West Indian intellectuals – George Lamming and C.L.R. James, among others – by providing them with a platform for their ideas. In time, CCC members would emerge as a central part of the Anglophone Caribbean’s New Left and profoundly influence politics in the region from the late 1960s through to the twenty-first century. But in its formative days, the CCC’s mission was simple. Echoing “The Coming Struggle for Liberation,” the group’s goal was “to discover in ourselves, in our societies, the roots of West Indian freedom. From being the historical agent of other interests and peoples, the West Indian has for over three centuries been seeking to make his own history. To know what that history has meant to our forebears and what it means to us today, what has been its defeats, triumphs, and manifestations – that is the responsibility of the present time.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁸⁰ Anon., Prospectus, “Conference on West Indian Affairs, 1966,” *New World*, Croptime, 1966.

George Lamming was an important part of the CCC's quest to rediscover the Caribbean. Political scientist Brian Meeks has argued that Lamming was the most "consciously political" Caribbean writer of the post-Second World War era.⁸¹ Two of Lamming's novels, *Of Age and Innocence* (1958) and *Season of Adventure* (1960) anticipated the post-colonial challenges that the Caribbean would face once independent, and it was this visionary outlook that made him attractive to the group.⁸² Following his talk at the CCC's inaugural conference, the group organized a lecture tour for Lamming between October and December 1965. During the tour he spoke at several universities and to community groups in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, New York, Bloomington, and Nashville. And as a result of the tour, the CCC made important contacts with various West Indian and New Left groups across North America.⁸³

Robert Hill was also the founder of the C.L.R. James Study Circle in 1965, a group dedicated to studying the work of the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James. James's *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* and his semi-autobiography about cricket, *Beyond a Boundary*, were published in 1963 (*The Black Jacobins* was originally published in 1938). They appeared at a time when efforts to federate Britain's former Caribbean colonies had failed and each territory pursued its individual path to independence and various forms of sovereignty. For many West Indians who came of age in this period of anti-colonial agitation, including members of

⁸¹ Brian Meeks, "Lamming's Politics and the Radical Caribbean," in *The Locations of George Lamming* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 151), 2007.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 152-154.

⁸³ The tour included the following engagements in Canada and the United States: New York University; The American Society of African Culture, New York; Fisk University, Nashville Tennessee; University of Indiana, Bloomington; University of Toronto; and McGill's Centre for Developing-Area Studies, Montreal. Robert Hill, "Caribbean Conference Committee Report," (May 1967), Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

the CCC, these books provided a social and historical framework for understanding the anti- and post-colonial course on which they were embarking. In *The Black Jacobins*, James describes the sugar factories on which the slaves of Haiti laboured. Breaking with the historical tradition that has generally separated slavery from the global proto-capitalist system that produced it, James argued that, given the complex process involved in manufacturing sugar from raw cane, and “working and living together in gangs of hundreds on huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain,” the slaves “were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, he concluded that, as producers of sugar – at the time Britain and France’s most lucrative agricultural product – slave labour was central to the development of modern capitalism.⁸⁵

Beyond a Boundary is as much about Caribbean society and social mores as it is about cricket. The book has been celebrated for its literary style and vivid accounts of Caribbean life, and through James’s fluid prose, this was one of the first books by a West Indian depicting colonial West Indian life.⁸⁶ If there is one figure that stands apart from the others in the book, it is the character of Matthew Bondman. Bondman is a barefoot quasi-vagrant and a ne’er do well who was denigrated by middle-class members of his small community just outside of Trinidad’s capital city, Port of Spain. Despite being shunned and cast aside by his neighbours, Bondman earned their admiration on the

⁸⁴ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980 [1938 & 1963]), p. 85.

⁸⁵ For an example of how CCC members drew upon this analysis see Alfie Roberts, “The Sugar Industry and Revolution in the Caribbean,” in *Caribbean International Opinion*, October 1968, 45-46.

⁸⁶ For an appreciation of the significance of *Beyond a Boundary*, both as a West Indian and literary text see Derek Walcott, “A Tribute to C.L.R. James,” in Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain, *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 34-48.

cricket field where he was all skill and grace.⁸⁷ With a cricket bat in hand, James's Bondman is transformed into a gifted batsman and artist who represents the unlimited and untapped potential of West Indians. For many who read it, *The Black Jacobins* and *Beyond a Boundary* helped to situate Caribbean people within the framework of world history while illustrating the latent potential of West Indians which, if nurtured, could transform the Caribbean's social and political landscape.⁸⁸

C.L.R. James Study Circle

The CCC embraced *The Black Jacobins*, *Beyond a Boundary*, and other James books as foundational texts. It is thus not surprising that, as we shall see in the next chapter, the CCC came under James's direct mentorship during his sojourn in Canada in the winter of 1966-1967. But, while the CCC was organized to appeal to a range of West Indians, its sub-group – the CLRJSC – was a small, tightly-knit political group comprised of Robert Hill, Alfie Roberts, Tim Hector, Anne Cools, and Franklyn Harvey, and was decidedly Marxist in its outlook. As part of his attempt to orient the CLRJSC's work, Hill authored "A Proposal for a C.L.R. James Study Circle." Like "The Coming Struggle for Liberation," this document provides the reader with insight into the early thought of the CCC. The document also connected the group to James and a Caribbean socialist tradition on which they could build. But unlike "The Coming Struggle," which drew on Hill's experience in the YSL, the C.L.R. James Study Circle proposal borrowed from a political tradition that included C.L.R. James and several other West Indian political

⁸⁷ C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993 [1963]), 4.

⁸⁸ For an example of how a CCC member read *Beyond a Boundary* see Tim Hector, "Beyond a Boundary: A Review," in Kenneth John, Baldwin King, and Cheryl L.A. King, *Quest for Caribbean Unity: Beyond Colonialism* (Madison, N.J: Kings-SVG, 2006), 181-183. The essay was originally published in *Flambeau*, no. 7, March 1967.

figures. In many ways, James's work embodied two traditions that Hill believed were crucial to Caribbean liberation: an appreciation for the best that Western civilization had to offer – not only in the arts and sciences, but notably the tradition of socialism – and an understanding of Caribbean history, cultural life, and mores. By associating themselves with James, CCC members became a component part of this tradition, providing the group with a historical precedent for its work. This no doubt gave the group the added confidence that its work was important. And once again, we find in the document what would become a defining feature of the CCC – its abiding preoccupation with the most dispossessed and their capacity to organize themselves to transform society.

The C.L.R. James Study Circle proposal begins with a call for unity among the West Indian political activists. As Hill writes, while many West Indians have attempted to embark on individual journeys in the quest for Caribbean liberation, he doubts that any of these “separate motivations constitute anything like a bold attack on the problems of West Indian life.” His desire to be part of what he describes as “an organized and disciplined grouping of committed West Indians, whose work will be governed by the sole concept of a free and united West Indian people” is guided by the belief that, in “the face of the enormous difficulties ahead, there is no other way.”⁸⁹

For Hill, C.L.R. James represents a crucial part of the group's journey because no “other West Indian has more consistently explored the meaning of the West Indian peoples' struggle for freedom, nor has any other brought such clear vision to the confused perspectives of that struggle.”⁹⁰ Notably, while Hill identifies C.L.R. James as the CCC's

⁸⁹ Robert Hill, “A Proposal for a C.L.R. James Study Circle,” (unpublished), 28 October 1965, i, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute,

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

central figure, he also situates him within the context of two other Caribbean socialists and anti-colonial thinkers, the Pan-Africanist George Padmore, James's boyhood friend who mentored several future leaders of various African independence movements; and the Martiniquan Aimé Césaire – poet, co-founder of the Negritude movement, and one of the leading decolonization thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century.⁹¹ Both Padmore and Césaire, are mentioned in James's 1963 appendix of *The Black Jacobins* as outstanding West Indians who have had an impact on the world stage.⁹² In placing James alongside Padmore and Césaire, while at the same time, adopting him as the group's mentor, Hill not only frames the work of these three men within a Caribbean radical political tradition, but also claims this tradition for the CCC.

The CLRJSC proposal goes on to describe the distinguished place ascribed James's work in the West Indies and the international socialist movement, and then states another reason for establishing the Study Circle. Like "The Coming Struggle for Liberation," the proposal invokes the term barbarism, arguing that it is "a common feature in the make-up of educated West Indians" and that it "can only be overcome when we have established a balance between the values of Western civilization and other aspects of our cultural heritage." For Hill, C.L.R. James is the only person that can help them to strike this balance.⁹³

Read together, Hill's proposal for the C.L.R. Study Circle and "The Coming Struggle" suggests that the barbarism Hill alludes to is a social condition, a combination of both the Caribbean elite's neglect of the underclass and the impoverished social state

⁹¹ Ibid. For an account of George Padmore, Aimé Césaire, and C.L.R. James's contribution to an alternative vision of international socialism and the political tradition that they represent see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

⁹² James, *The Black Jacobins*, 399.

⁹³ Hill, "A Proposal for a C.L.R. James Study Circle," 5.

of both classes – the poor who live in squalor, and Jamaica’s elite who exploit them. Hill’s barbarism represents an irreconcilable contradiction between the national elites on the one hand, and the vast majority of the population on the other. And for Hill, this contradiction can only be overcome in the process of a liberation struggle, when the masses of Jamaica and the Caribbean organize themselves to bring about a new day in the region.

“The Coming Struggle” and “A Proposal for the C.L.R. Study Circle” represent the CCC’s critical entry into the world of radical Caribbean politics. The documents also help lay the political-intellectual foundation for what would become the New Left in the Caribbean in the late 1960s, a process which began with Abeng in Jamaica, a group co-founded by Robert Hill.⁹⁴ But in 1965 the CCC was still finding its way and at the conclusion of the C.L.R. James Study Circle proposal, Hill presents five specific objectives for the group:

- (1) The complete and thorough study of the work of C.L.R. James in its totality.
- (2) The publication of his work still unknown but which is crucial to any understanding of the man’s genius.
- (3) The publication, when we are ready, of a Bulletin of West Indian Studies, basing our research on the ideas of James and those areas of his thought which need to be carried through.
- (4) The distribution of his books, essays, articles, lectures, to the widest possible public.
- (5) To do all that we can to help maintain our patron in his work.

The CCC would achieve many of the goals set out in the proposal, and much more. In the process, they breathed new life into an aging C.L.R. James at an important crossroads in his personal and political life. Given the proposal’s stated aims at this early stage, it

⁹⁴ Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press of the University of the West Indies, 1996), 1–2. See also Lewis, *Walter Rodney’s Intellectual and Political Thought*.

should come as no surprise that, as we shall see in the next chapter, the CCC not only adopted James's work as part of its preparation for the "coming struggle," but that by 1966, James had a sustained physical presence in Canada and became the CCC's political mentor. The group had already created a name for itself in 1965, and following the success of its first conference, its reputation as an important Caribbean organization grew steadily. Now its direct link to C.L.R. James and his Detroit-based group, Facing Reality, squarely placed the CCC among the wave of New Left groups that swept across the globe.

Chapter Two: You Don't Play with Revolution

Conspicuous among the hundreds of Caribbean women and men who crammed into the Université de Montréal's Social Center during the CCC's inaugural conference was Martin Glaberman, chairperson of the Detroit-based Marxist organization Facing Reality. Born in New York in 1918, Glaberman was one of the early members of the group which was founded in 1941 by C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya under the name the Johnson-Forest Tendency. Glaberman worked for many years as an autoworker, wrote numerous pamphlets and articles about the labour movement and revolutionary struggle. He later taught at Wayne State University and remained James's close collaborator up until James's death in 1989. Glaberman did not simply attend the conference; he actively participated in the meeting, delivering a talk titled "C.L.R. James: The Man and His Work" which outlined James's contributions to Marxist theory, cricket literature, popular culture, and African and Caribbean politics. Though he described James as "a world figure of the greatest importance," Glaberman argued that James's remarkable achievements were not simply the result of individual genius. "It is not an accident that such a man was born in Trinidad. It is part of the contribution of the West Indies to the modern world.... But unlike Europe," Glaberman argued, "the West Indian intellectual has not experienced the unparalleled catastrophes and defeats that have been the fate of Europe in this century. Two world wars, the defeat of revolutions in the major countries of Europe, the barbarism of Nazism and fascism and Stalinist totalitarianism, all this has made of the European intellectual a cynic and a pessimist. As a result, to many Europeans, the narrow view has seemed more rewarding than the broad view." For

Glaberman, “C.L.R. James embodied both the totality of Western culture and the optimism and fire of a people who have not been defeated by history, who have still to make their own history. He is not the least that the West Indies has contributed to the world.”⁹⁵

Glaberman and *Facing Reality* played a crucial role in the CCC’s political development, and in this chapter I will demonstrate that, through its ties to the CCC, *Facing Reality*’s influence stretched from Canada to the Caribbean. James and FR were the most important political influence on the CCC, and it was largely as a result of James’s connection to the group that the CCC developed its signature political outlook.

Martin Glaberman and Facing Reality

Martin Glaberman’s presentation at the conference solidified a budding relationship which began earlier that year when he and Robert Hill began exchanging letters about C.L.R. James.⁹⁶ Alfie Roberts also began corresponding with Glaberman and soon Hill and Roberts were writing under pseudonyms for FR’s political tract, *Speak Out*.⁹⁷ In the fall of 1965 Robert Hill and Glaberman attended the inaugural Socialist Scholars conference at Rutgers University, after which Glaberman was overflowing with

⁹⁵ Martin Glaberman, “C.L.R. James: The Man and His Work,” *New World*, no. 31, 7 January 1966, 23.

⁹⁶ Martin Glaberman to Robert Hill, 13 June 1965, Glaberman Collection, Wayne State University.

⁹⁷ Martin Glaberman to Alfie Roberts, 22 August 1965, Robert Hill to Martin Glaberman, 6 July 1965, and Martin Glaberman to C.L.R. James 12 July 1965, Glaberman Collection, Wayne State University. See Antillean [Alfie Roberts], “On Guevara’s Message to the People of the World,” *Speak Out*, November 1967 and James Abeng [Robert Hill], Marcus Garvey – Yesterday and Today, *Speak Out*, January 1967. We know Antillean is Alfie Roberts because of a letter from Roberts to Glaberman dated 27 September 1967, Glaberman Collection, Wayne State University, in which he mentions the article. Robert Hill’s essay on Garvey also appears under his name in a CCC bulletin under the title “Marcus Garvey: Yesterday and Today,” in *Caribbean Symposium: West Indian Nation in Exile*, 6-8 October 1967, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

enthusiasm for Hill and the prospect of further collaboration between the CCC and FR.⁹⁸ In one of his letters to Hill, Glaberman mentions that he recently discovered a copy of what he describes as “a remarkable document which, among other things, forecasts the general form of the Hungarian revolution some eight years before the event.”⁹⁹ The document was written by James in 1948 in Nevada, and at some point Hill and Glaberman discussed the idea of collaborating on the “Nevada Document” in order to prepare it for publication. As part of a joint CCC and Facing Reality initiative (by this time Hill was also an active member of Facing Reality and made frequent bus trips to Detroit for the organization’s meetings), Hill typed and edited the manuscript under the title *Notes on Dialectics*.¹⁰⁰

The publication of *Notes on Dialectics* served the dual purpose of making the book available to members of the CCC for their own study while promoting James’s work. More than any other James book, *Notes on Dialectics* shaped the CCC’s view that the downtrodden and dispossessed of the world – what Fanon described as the damned and condemned of the earth – were the driving force behind any meaningful process of social transformation.¹⁰¹ The book is an idiosyncratic study of the evolution of socialism and the international socialist movement, traced and analyzed through Hegelian philosophical categories. The original draft was written during sustained fits of energy

⁹⁸ Martin Glaberman to Robert Hill, 22 August 1965 and 27 September 1965; Martin Glaberman to C.L.R. James 27 September 1965, Glaberman Collection, Wayne State University.

⁹⁹ Glaberman to Hill, 22 August 1965.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Hill to Tim Hector, 1 April 1966, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹⁰¹ For an account of how James, along with his associate Raya Dunayevskaya and French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, appropriated “Lenin’s writings on Hegel in a manner that made them central to their overall understanding of dialectics” see Kevin B. Anderson, “The Rediscovery and Persistence of the Dialectic in Philosophy and in World Politics,” in Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Zizek (eds.), *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 121-147.

that kept James awake and writing at a manic pace.¹⁰² The result is a book that cultural critic Pier Paolo Frassinelli has described as “a brilliant non-academic exposition of Hegel’s *Logic* and a bold political intervention in contemporary debates within Marxism,” which “bears the indelible mark of James’s characteristic colloquial style and ease of prose.”¹⁰³ Ultimately, the book is less a treatise on Hegelian metaphysics and Marxist materialism, and more a political statement that grapples with the question of organization for revolutionary transformation.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the book’s most important original contribution rests on its repudiation of the leadership of political elites, the intelligentsia, and the organized labour movement in favor of the self-organization of the working class. “You can organize workers as workers. You can create a special organization of revolutionary workers. But once you have those two you have reached an end. The task is to abolish organization. The task today,” declares James, “is to call for, to teach, to illustrate, to develop *spontaneity* – the free creative activity of the proletariat. The proletariat will find its method of proletarian organization.”¹⁰⁵ In James’s view, the ideal form of political organization, both inside and outside the labour movement begins “with spontaneity, i.e. free creative activity, as its

¹⁰² As James confessed in a letter to his future wife, Constance Webb in 1948 while immersed in writing the manuscript in Nevada, “I am writing and writing and writing, and thinking and thinking and thinking.... I sit at the table and do not move for hours on end. The people here look on me here as if I am some freak, the natives and visitors.... I feel no mental or manual fatigue – absolutely none.... I have in between mastered at last the Hegelian logic. I know what I am doing in it.” C.L.R. James, *Special Delivery: The Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 359. Prior to *Notes on Dialectics*, he had not written with such verve in twenty years, harkening back to a time when he wrote three major books, *A History of Negro Revolt* (later titled *A History of Pan-African Revolt*), *World Revolution: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937), and *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938), and his 1936 play on the *Toussaint L’Ouverture*.

¹⁰³ Pier Paolo Frassinelli, “Introduction,” in *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, and Lenin* (unpublished), 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics* (Detroit: 1966), 96 (emphasis in original).

necessity.”¹⁰⁶ He also argued that the “Actuality of organization and Spontaneity” are present “in the constantly breaking-out impulses, activity, spontaneity, of the workers and the implacable bureaucracies of Stalinism.”¹⁰⁷ As we shall see in the next chapter, members of the CCC took these lessons from *Notes on Dialectics* to heart.

With the help of his wife Diane, Robert Hill typed the manuscript from James’s scrawled handwriting, which he then proceeded to edit. As he informs Alfie Roberts in an April 1966 letter, “work on *The Notes on Dialectics* has been arduous and complex and I am still only about quarter-way.”¹⁰⁸ But he had little doubt that, once the work was finished, the book was “going to be absolutely fantastic for our work and ways of thinking,” although he admitted with bemusement that he “still can’t figure out how James managed to do it.”¹⁰⁹ Hill persevered and during the 1966 CCC conference on “The Making of the Caribbean People,” he presented a mimeographed copy of the manuscript to C.L.R. James.

A few years later, when Hill reflected on the accomplishments of the CCC in a letter to Franklyn Harvey, he listed the publication of *Notes on Dialectics* among the group’s crowning achievements, perhaps their most important one.¹¹⁰ That this small group of women and men were responsible for bringing to light what James would come to consider his “most important work” is of considerable significance.¹¹¹ But there were

¹⁰⁶ James, *Notes on Dialectics*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ James, *Notes on Dialectics*, 97.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Hill to Alfie Roberts, 21 June 1966, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Robert Hill to Franklyn Harvey, 11 January 1970, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹¹¹ When, much later in life, he was asked to describe what had been his greatest contribution, James proposed that his “contributions have been, number one, to clarify and extend the heritage of Marx and Lenin. And number two, to explain and expand the idea of what constitutes the new society.” Asked what he considered to be his “most important work,” he replied that, in light of the Solidarity movement in Poland that was dismantling Stalinism, *Notes on Dialectics* was his unequivocal choice. C.L.R. James,

several other milestones related to James that Hill believed he and his cohorts could be proud of: “We have done exhaustive work on James’ work. We have...assisted in the publication of the *Perspectives and Proposals*. We have made [James’s] books and pamphlets available on a scale never before achieved, and this was done in conjunction with the work of FR organization.”¹¹² Hill also notes that they did what they could to maintain James financially in his work and that, “Today we are looking to our own publication and the publication of James in a Selected Works edition.”¹¹³ These were significant achievements for a group whose core was no bigger than six individuals, most of whom were pursuing full-time university studies. But the CCC’s relationship to James went even further, touching him at a crucial point in his political life by providing the frail and aging revolutionary with an audience for his ideas. But although James benefited immensely from his association with the CCC, it was ultimately his students who gained the most from the relationship once James took them under his wing.

C.L.R. James

In 1966, C.L.R. James was entrenched in Trinidad politics and, although he corresponded with the group, the CCC’s relationship with him was largely facilitated through Martin Glaberman. Clearly, CCC members were touched by James’s work. His political insight and his knowledge of Caribbean, European, and American history were critical for CCC members at a time when they were searching for answers, not only to the many pressing issues that confronted the Caribbean, but to important global questions. In

“Interview,” in *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* Paul Buhle (ed.), (London: Allison and Busby, 1986), 164.

¹¹² Robert Hill to Franklyn Harvey, 11 January 1970, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹¹³ Ibid.

the autumn of 1966 the CCC invited James to Montreal. Reflecting on his visit, Alfie Roberts recalls, “we had very open and inquiring minds about what was happening [in the world] and James’s intervention with us, at that point in time, was very crucial in helping us to clarify, even instinctively I think, things that we were thinking about.”¹¹⁴ Once in Montreal, James delivered public lectures, conducted political classes for members of the group, and engaged them in a sustained political dialogue. In retrospect, it appears as though he was consciously tutoring his West Indian students in preparation for the political roles they would soon play in the Caribbean. In his recent biography of CCC member Tim Hector, historian Paul Buhle also describes the relationship between the CCC and James. According to Buhle, “These ardent young intellectuals and activists met formally and informally, naturally more often at close range as friends, to discuss and argue over texts, to become intimates that only fellow exile-revolutionaries are likely ever to be. They also hosted James in visits that would change their collective lives.”¹¹⁵ As they read James, Hegel, Marx, and Lenin alongside Caribbean history, James nurtured their political ideas in what Buhle describes as an “extended non-academic tutorial” during which they would present their views and “he [James] would listen and then ask questions that prompted the speakers to see the error of their own thinking.”¹¹⁶

Caribbean fiction, history, and politics, including the Cuban Revolution, were the main focus of their work, but the group also followed developments in the United States, Europe, and Africa with keen interest. In addition to Hegel, Marx, Lenin, and James, they also studied and critiqued the writings of Shakespeare, Rousseau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Raya

¹¹⁴ Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 71.

¹¹⁵ Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical’s Story* (Jackson: The Press of University of Mississippi, 2006), 137

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Dunayevskaya, and Herbert Marcuse, along with Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X. They combined their eclectic informal reading with their university studies. For Hector, a philosophy student at Acadia University in Wolfville Nova Scotia, and Hill, who studied political science at University of Toronto, this meant engaging and critiquing the ideas of Ortega Y Gasset and Heraclitus alike, and Hill believed that his study of Heraclitus and Greek ‘polarity’ would illuminate his reading of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, Marx, and ultimately the ideas of Facing Reality.¹¹⁷ But more than their studies of politics and revolutionary texts, it was James’s political classes in Montreal and the time he spent in their presence during this period that left the most lasting impression on the CCC’s political core.

Between 7 December 1966 and 8 March 1967, C.L.R. James delivered a series of public lectures on a range of subjects. Four of the lectures, however – *Rousseau, Capital, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, and *Lenin and the Trade Union Debate in Russia* – were actually private classes for Alfie Roberts, Franklyn Harvey, and Tim Hector (Robert Hill was immersed in his studies in Toronto and busy organizing James’s tour and was unable to participate in the classes, and Anne Cools was living in England).¹¹⁸ In many ways, the Montreal lectures and private classes represent James at the height of his political maturity. In addition to his theoretical writings, he brought years of study and experience in politics to bear on his presentations; and as someone who had been actively engaged in revolutionary politics for more than thirty years, he sought to impart to his students some of the real challenges and vicissitudes of political

¹¹⁷ Robert Hill to Martin and Jessie Glaberman, 7 February 1966, Glaberman Collection, Wayne State University.

¹¹⁸ Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 70.

struggle. Although the classes explored themes that, at face value, had their roots in European history and thought, James's constant allusions to the Caribbean grounded them in the contemporary political context of the region.

James's lectures reflect his abiding preoccupation with the plight of the underclass and his belief in the capacity of "ordinary people" to transform themselves and make timely interventions on the world stage. This is evident in "The Making of the Caribbean People," his presentation at the second annual gathering of the Caribbean Conference Committee. After citing several passages from *The Black Jacobins* which describe the remarkable feats of Haitian slaves during their war of independence against Napoleon's army, James declares, "These are my ancestors, these are my people. They are yours too, if you want them. We are descendants from the same stock and the same kind of life on the sugar plantations which made them what they were. Faced with certain difficulties, we would respond in the same way," James adds, hinting that the contemporary Caribbean needs the same kind of creative energy, if not activity, that the slaves of Haiti displayed.¹¹⁹

His public lecture on *King Lear* emphasizes the role of the underclass and destitute in political struggle, demonstrating that it is the vagrant agricultural laborer, Shakespeare's Poor Tom, who enlightens a delusional Lear on the plight of his country's dispossessed and, in a sense, paves the way for a new social order to emerge.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ C.L.R. James, "The Making of the People of the Caribbean" in *Spheres of Existence* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 187. James extended this theme in his 1968 presentation on the Haitian Revolution delivered at the Congress of Black Writers, confidently declaring that "The stage of revolution that has been reached in the world...and the ideas which have been developed, will be taken over by any revolution of the great mass of the population" as was done in Haiti. C.L.R. James, "The Haitian Revolution and the History of Slave Revolt in the New World," 1968 (unpublished), Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹²⁰ C.L.R. James, "King Lear," 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute.

While James's public lectures appealed to students, academics, and members of the general public, his private classes catered to the political core of the CCC as part of their diet of revolutionary politics. Their ultimate objective was to return to the Caribbean and transform what James described as a region drifting "towards reaction internally and neo-colonialist relations with a Great Power"¹²¹ within a system of national independence that was "only the old colonial system writ large."¹²² Like the public lectures, the classes tackled themes of political power and the self-organization of "ordinary" women and men. In his class on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, James draws on a passage from *The Social Contract* to argue that power should lie in the hands of the general populace because once politicians are elected, they inevitably represent their own interests.¹²³

James's belief in the latent capacities of the "barefoot man," that the poor and underprivileged laborer held the key to genuine social transformation was further demonstrated in his class on Marx's *Capital*. According to James, "somewhere about 1848, the extension of labour-power had reached such a stage that the civilization, the level of physical and intellectual development of the working-class, was falling to pieces.... [T]hese circumstances, and by the struggles of the working-class, not for an eight-hour day, but to defend its very habits of life, resulted in people passing laws" to limit the working-day.¹²⁴ It was under these circumstances that capital began developing machinery to intensify the working-day in order to increase the rate of profit. As James argues, "the development of profit by means of machinery was the direct result – Marx makes no bones about it and it has never been challenged – of the battles that the

¹²¹ C.L.R. James, "Parties, Politics and Economics in the Caribbean," in *Freedomways*, p. 313.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹²³ C.L.R. James, "Rousseau," 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹²⁴ C.L.R. James, "Capital, Volumes I & II," 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute.

working-class fought in order to save the civilization, health, and general intellectual and moral development of the working-class.”¹²⁵ Workers not only fought to maintain their physical and spiritual well-being and preserve a modicum of dignity in their work but, in the process, contributed to the development of modern technology.

James’s enthusiasm for the underclass is not without qualification. As his class on Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* attests, his notion of self-organization is tempered by his reading of history as well as his personal experience. Here James emphasizes that politics is not an exact science and revolution has no magic mathematical formula or calculus. For James, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is as much about the art of politics as it is about class struggle and economics. Paraphrasing Marx, he argues that, in politics, there are situations in which neither class struggle nor economics determine a political outcome and, as he cautions his students, “Marxism does not give you a blueprint in which you know what to do every time.” “It creates a situation where you observe the classes based upon the economic relations and you face the decisions.”¹²⁶ In James’s view, politics is complex and multifaceted process and its actors have to be acutely attuned to the interplay of forces that contribute to, or hinder, social change. As he argued in a 1968 interview for the *McGill Reporter*, “you don’t play with revolution” because it is a timely, sensitive, measured process in which both human and, at times, imperceptible objective social factors combine to present unique political circumstances that cannot be

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ C.L.R. James, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute. For an analysis of how James invokes *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in *The Black Jacobins* see Brian Meeks, “Re-Reading the Black Jacobins: James, the Dialectic, and the Revolutionary Conjuncture,” in *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press University of the West Indies, 1996), 114.

predicted.¹²⁷ As we shall see in chapter 4, Franklyn Harvey's analysis of the general strike in France in 1968 appears to embrace these lessons.

The best example from James's Montreal classes of the unscientific and unpredictable nature of revolutionary politics is found his treatment of the 1920-1921 trade union debate in Russia. The class was delivered in three separate sessions, an indication of the importance he attached to the debate, as well as his great admiration for Lenin's thought, and his recognition of the relevance of this debate for his young Caribbean protégés. Like the Caribbean and the rest of the developing world, Russia's small proletariat, large peasantry, low industrialization, and high illiteracy – all of which the Bolsheviks inherited when they seized power – meant that the leadership had to, in an sense, build socialism from scratch. In the class, James makes the link between his lecture and the political situation in the Caribbean and the rest of the developing world explicit. Politics is, in part, a process of trial and error, and without the deliberate involvement of the mass of the population, the process is destined to fail. According to James, after winning the Civil War, the Bolsheviks were faced with the daunting task of rebuilding Russia. As he reminds his students, the same situation confronted Britain after the Cromwellian Revolution and, faced with this challenge, Lenin was adamant that the only way to build socialism in Russia was “by practical experience and involving the mass of the population. Any other attempt – what they are attempting in Africa, in the Caribbean and all these places – is bound to end in disaster.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Michael Smith, “You Don't Play with Revolution,” interview with C.L.R. James, *McGill Reporter* 4 November 1968.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

James's Lenin is a seasoned politician who, after years of reflection and political agitation – and as a veteran of the Russian Revolution whose party survived the ravages of civil war – now has to transform a war-torn and besieged society into a workers' revolution. Faced with this mammoth task, Lenin attempted to develop policies and programs that would engage the entire population, without which, he believed, the Revolution was doomed. This reality became Lenin's great preoccupation towards the end of his life and is the main reason why James states at the beginning of his class that this debate "is one of the finest political discussions that I know anywhere."¹²⁹

According to James, Lenin believed that the only way to build a socialist society was by instilling into the population the idea that it could not be built from above and that ordinary Russians must play a central in the process. In order to build Russia from above, James argues, Stalin "had to destroy the Bolshevik Party and rewrite the whole history of the Russian Revolution."¹³⁰ In opposition to some of the most respected leaders of the Russian Revolution, including Leon Trotsky, Lenin not only argued that trade unions must be independent and separate from the state, but went further, calling for the gradual inclusion of non-workers into trade unions and that the unions become a political training ground for workers as part of the process of them assuming control of production and political management. According to James, Lenin argued that Russia's leadership "could not control what was happening in all the departments of production" and that "workers and peasants...were to inspect what was taking place in the government."¹³¹ Lenin did not live to see these policies through and, as James argues, once Lenin died, the door was opened to

¹²⁹ C.L.R. James, "The Trade Union Debate in Russia," 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Stalinist totalitarianism.¹³² But reading Lenin in light of the 1960s, James firmly believed that the trade union debate was key to understanding politics in the Third World.

Conclusion

When he began exploring the history of radical movements in the United States in the 1950s, Maurice Isserman writes in his study *If I Had a Hammer*, he “gradually came to understand that the early New Left had emerged from the Old Left in ways that made it difficult to perceive exactly where the one ended and the other began.”¹³³ For Isserman, the key to understanding the New Left was the discovery that “movements of the 1960s were set on a particular trajectory because of that initial interaction of Old Left with New.”¹³⁴ *If I Had a Hammer* deliberately excludes “lively but obscure groupings as the followers of C.L.R. James” because, according to Isserman, James’s influence was limited to the Detroit left.¹³⁵ But as we have seen, James and *Facing Reality*’s influence extended to the CCC in Canada and, through the CCC, to the Caribbean. C.L.R. James’s classes, and particularly his analysis of the Russian Revolution, were central to the CCC’s conception of Caribbean liberation and its overall political outlook. Combined with their study of his writings, particularly *Notes on Dialectics* and *Facing Reality*, the group embraced James’s notion of self-organization and the idea that society’s most oppressed possessed the ability, under the right conditions, to organize themselves and transform their surroundings in their own interest. The CCC too would argue that no meaningful social and political transformation occurs without the active involvement of society’s

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), xiii.

¹³⁴ Ibid., xvii

¹³⁵ Ibid., xvi.

underclass. Having immersed themselves in James's work and participated in several intense political sessions with him, members of the CCC set out to test their acquired knowledge on three major preoccupations of the New Left – the Cuban Revolution, the French uprisings of 1968, and Vietnam. But unlike many New Left groups that simply embraced these political developments, the CCC critically analyzed and assessed them, drawing on the political tools they acquired through their association with James and Facing Reality.

Chapter Three: Confronting Cuba, the Roberts-Hector Debate

The Cuban Revolution was arguably the most important catalyst of the global New Left. As Richard Gott argues in his recent history of Cuba, the success of the Revolution, with its “reformist zeal and fiery internationalist rhetoric was soon seized on by new generations everywhere, dissatisfied...with the post-war settlement.” In the process, the revolution inspired Black rebellions, student and anti-nuclear protests, and mobilization against the Vietnam War.¹³⁶ Echoing Gott, historian Van Gosse argues that, long before the *Port Huron Statement* surfaced in August 1962, and even before the Southern lunch counter sit-ins, the mesmerizing images of the Cuban Revolution captured the imagination of young women and men in North America. The Revolution’s gun-toting combatants, clad in olive-green fatigues, along with romantic images of the seemingly indefatigable Fidel Castro calmly puffing Cuban cigars, led to a groundswell of enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution in the U.S and inspired a new generation of young women and men to become politically engaged.¹³⁷ In North America, Fair Play for Cuba Committees mobilized support for the Revolution in the face of U.S. aggression against the island and the Revolution inspired the Black Power movement in its early stages.¹³⁸ But despite its importance, Cuba’s early impact on the New Left has largely been ignored in the historiography.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven and London: Yale Nota Bene, 2005), 176.

¹³⁷ Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War, America and the Making of the New Left* (London: Verso, 1993), 2-3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-173 and Cynthia Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of the Third World Left* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 3-4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

In this chapter I will show that, like other New Left groups, CCC members followed political developments in Cuba very closely. Cuba shared a common history with the rest of the Caribbean, and unlike other more distant revolutionary struggles, the Revolution's reverberations were immediately felt in the West Indies. At a time when some Caribbean territories were taking tentative steps towards independence, Cuba provided the CCC with a social and economic alternative. As a result, CCC members critically analyzed and debated the Cuba Revolution, bringing to bear their extensive reading and experience sitting in C.L.R. James's political classes; and at least one member of the group, Tim Hector, questioned whether Cuba's political leadership was committed to involving the vast majority of the population in the Revolution or merely securing power for its revolutionary elite.

Che Guevara

Although the entire group followed the Cuban Revolution closely, no one in the CCC followed its trail with more enthusiasm than Alfie Roberts. Roberts began tracing the course of the Cuban Revolution from his own island of Saint Vincent early in the Revolution's development, and was immediately sympathetic. In those early days, he followed the Revolution through journalist Herbert Matthews's column in the *New York Times* and his book, *The Cuban Story*.¹⁴⁰ The Cuban Revolution provided him with an example of how the economic stranglehold that gripped Caribbean economies could be broken, and as Roberts writes in *A View for Freedom*, "In geography they were always talking about the mono-culture, one-crop economy – which was sugar – that the

¹⁴⁰ Alfie Roberts, *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005).

Caribbean was suffering from, that it needed to be transcended and that diversification ought to take place.... And now, in the real world, you had people [in Cuba] come into power inside of the Caribbean saying that we need all of those things. So in a sense, theory was dovetailing with practice in a certain way.”¹⁴¹

An example of how closely Roberts observed the Revolution is found in his 1967 essay on Che Guevara, published in *Speak Out*, Facing Reality’s monthly bulletin. By 1967, Alfie Roberts was much more than an enthusiast of the Cuban Revolution. He not only followed political developments in Cuba very closely but felt sufficiently learned on the subject to write about it. The five-page article is written under the name Antillean, his *nom de plume* and in the same issue, C.L.R. James also wrote on Guevara.¹⁴² But unlike James’s broad appraisal of Guevara’s global political contributions, Alfie Roberts’s essay

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴² See Alfie Roberts to Martin Glaberman, 27 September 1967, Glaberman Collection, Wayne State University, in which he describes the article to Glaberman. James’s essay is an elegy, originally delivered in London during a public Che Guevara memorial and is primarily concerned with Guevara’s lasting legacy. James notes that Guevara, from Argentina, a component part of the Third World, came to embody the internationalist ideal. His second point is that Guevara not only risked his life during the Cuban revolutionary struggle, but having tasted power, willingly gave it away in order to fight among and for people of another country. For James, this “attitude to power is badly needed by those who achieve power in underdeveloped countries and...is even more required in the most advanced countries of the world, where power can be won not by the rifle but by the ballot box and the by no means dangerous process of parliamentary democracy.” James final point concerns guerilla warfare which, as a means towards the goal of liberation, has been elevated, he argues, to a legitimate form of liberation struggle by the example of the Cuban Revolution, and not only in the Third World, but “even in the most advanced countries” where the world’s powers “continue to prepare their weapons of destruction and destroy the material elements of the civilization we have reached.” If and when the point is reached in which guerilla warfare becomes a viable option in the developed world, suggests James, “Che Guevara will occupy a foremost status in our political plans, due to the supercession, in fact the impossibility of our depending upon the traditional means of struggle in the wreck of civilization in which those of us remain and shall be compelled to work.” In conclusion, James suggests that the most fitting tribute that can be paid to Guevara is to ensure that “his life and politics will continue in the person of and politics of Fidel Castro.” See C.L.R. James, “Che Guevara,” *Speak Out*, no. 16, (November 1967), 17-18. By 1967, Alfie Roberts was much more than an enthusiast of the Cuban Revolution. In a letter, Roberts renewed contact with C.L.R. James after what he describes as “long delay in replying.” Alfie Roberts to C.L.R. James, 8 December 1967, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute. Che Guevara’s demise was considered a serious blow to the revolutionary movement in Latin America and the Third World, and yet Roberts, one of Cuba and Guevara’s most ardent supporters, is very casual in his reference to Guevara’s death, simply writing, “Guevara has passed on. A truly exemplary human being.” Alfie Roberts to C.L.R. James, 8 December 1967.

is primarily concerned with the lessons that Guevara's example provided for the Caribbean. Roberts begins by situating Guevara's "Message to the People of the World" within the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the ongoing war in Vietnam. Supporting Guevara's embrace of armed struggle against imperialism – "Victory or death" – Roberts argues that Guevara's call for more opposition to U.S. imperialism – more Vietnams – is timely.¹⁴³ He then addresses himself to the question of size and revolutionary struggle. For Roberts, Cuba represents the "vanguard of the permanent revolution," despite its relative small size and close proximity to the United States.¹⁴⁴

Rejecting those who dismissed Guevara as idealistic and romantic, Roberts invokes Frantz Fanon who argued that to "change course [from] the great night into which we were plunged, it is necessary for us to arouse ourselves.... [W]e must invent, we must discover.... For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity: comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, develop a new way of thinking, attempt to erect a new man."¹⁴⁵ In closing, Roberts reminds his readers that, despite his internationalism, he is primarily pre-occupied with the Caribbean and his concern is to situate the Cuban Revolution within the context of the West Indies: "Cuba has taken the lead in the Caribbean in her politics and economics to rehabilitate man; and the great 'social measure' of this heroic nation is 'its own working existence' and example."¹⁴⁶ For Alfie Roberts, Cuba was not simply a socialist alternative operating in isolation from the rest of the Caribbean. It proffered hope for the entire Caribbean basin and provided an example to be emulated. Roberts

¹⁴³ Antillean [Alfie Roberts], "On Guevara's Message to the People of the World," *Speak Out*, no. 16, (November 1967), 19-20.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, cited in Antillean, "On Guevara's Message to the People of the World," 23.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

believed that the Cuban Revolution proved that the economic and political straitjacket that crippled the Caribbean could be broken. Not everyone within the CCC shared his enthusiasm, however. Tim Hector had serious doubts about the viability of the Cuban Revolution and in his debate with Roberts, they both marshaled the political and theoretical resources they had acquired from C.L.R. James. Naturally, the political arsenal that they drew upon was often the same as they read, discussed, and engaged James's ideas along with the work of Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, and Lenin. Unfortunately, Roberts's end of the correspondence has not survived. But from his essay in *Speak Out* on Che Guevara, allusions to his ideas in Hector's correspondence with him, and a letter that was written by Roberts to Martin Glaberman, we gain a clear sense of Roberts's position on Cuba.

The Roberts-Hector Debate

Tim Hector's July 1966 letter to Alfie Roberts is a strident, lengthy polemic. Considering their friendship and political ties, the letter is instructive on how political ideas evolved within the group and the depths to which their reading and discussion had taken them ideologically. Like several of his letters to Roberts and Robert Hill, this one begins on an apologetic note in which he feels the need to explain his prolonged lapse in communication. But as he assures Roberts, he has not been sitting idle, but exploring the principle subjects of their ongoing discussions – “Cuba and Fidel, the W.F.P. [Workers' and Farmers' Party], and politics today.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Tim Hector to Alfie Roberts, July 1966, 1, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

The thrust of Hector's argument is that independence is merely a phase, albeit an important one, in the process of genuine liberation. Echoing James's *Notes on Dialectics*, Hector declares that "ALL DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE AS A RESULT OF SELF-MOVEMENT, NOT ORGANISATION OR DIRECTION BY EXTERNAL FORCES."¹⁴⁸ Having laid the political terrain, he then proceeds to outline how Cuba has failed to meet this basic criterion.

While many of the left focus on the exploits of the leadership of "Dr. Castro and Dr. Guevera," Hector argues that a genuine "revolutionary...should have been looking for what we should have been looking for" – the role played by the majority of the population in the Cuban Revolution. Hector then cites a passage from volume seven of Lenin's *Selected Works* in which he writes, "a revolution can be successfully carried out only if the majority of the toilers display independent historical CREATIVE SPIRIT."¹⁴⁹ For Hector, Cuba has not lived up to Lenin's dictum. In fact, he did not believe that Cuba's was a genuine social revolution, but rather a nationalist one in which the people were mobilized to make a clean break with the country's colonial legacy, only to have their creative potential stymied and snuffed out by a revolutionary vanguard poised to plan and administer over the heads of the population, having arrogated unto themselves the state apparatus. "Instead of cultivating, wholly and solely relying on the positive creative spirit of the Cuban toilers," in Hector's view, "the Cuban leaders preferred to align themselves with the old Communist Party, which at first spurned the Revolution; consequently, old Blas Roca [of Cuba's Communist Party] has become Cuba's principle

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2. (emphasis in original)

¹⁴⁹ Lenin in Hector to Roberts, 2. (emphasis in letter)

theoretician, pontificating on the Labour process, art and politics.”¹⁵⁰ Hector does not deny that much of the talent required for the reconstruction Cuba was to be found among the communists. But, as he asserts, “against the Cuban Revolutionary masses and their independent institutions, the Cuban Communist Party would have been reduced to the shambles and hoax it really is.”¹⁵¹

In this searing indictment of Cuba’s political and economic policies, Hector goes as far as to equate Roca’s promotion of piecemeal work with Adolph Hitler’s belief that piecemeal labour was crucial to Germany’s national socialist economy because it eliminated laziness and loafing.¹⁵² For Hector, these economic policies ran contrary to the perspective that he and other members of the CCC were developing. He juxtaposes this approach to Marx’s declaration that “Piece wage is the form of wages most in harmony with the capitalist mode of production... turning the worker and his labour into a commodity” and “crippling the international proletariat, who are basely forced into the life-long repetition of one and the same task and hustled to their death to over-produce.”¹⁵³ Hector believed Cuba was clearly pursuing a non-socialist road and, far from benefiting from socialism, the majority of Cubans were still economically exploited.

To cement his argument, Hector compares Cuba’s leadership to that of C.L.R. James’s Worker’s and Farmer’s Party (WFP) in Trinidad. James joined the WFP in 1965

¹⁵⁰ Hector to Roberts, 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 5. Interestingly, René Dumont, the famous French agronomist and author of many studies on development in the Third World, supported piecemeal work in Cuba. Like Hector, he was an avowed socialist who genuinely wanted the Cuban Revolution to succeed. But Dumont argued that piecemeal work was more productive because it provided workers with an incentive whereas productivity decreases when workers’ salaries were paid on construction sites, for example. See René Dumont, *Cuba: Socialism and Development* (New York: Grove Press, [1964] 1970), p. 150. For Dumont, payment by the piece was a necessary evil that suited Cuba’s immediate needs, even though this position seems to contradict Dumont’s call for workers’ councils in Cuba, a move that Hector endorsed in his letter to Alfie Roberts. Ibid., 159.

after being placed under house arrest by Prime Minister Eric Williams and the WFP was promoted as a people's party which transcended racial divisions between people of Indian and African descent in Trinidad. Hector hails the WFP for being "undivorcably (sic) wedded (such is its constitution) to the release of the positive creative spirit of the mass of the Caribbean people" through conventional party politics.¹⁵⁴ He also saw the WFP as a model for a party which, unlike Cuba's communists, was attempting to carry out its program through the political mechanism of parliamentary democracy.¹⁵⁵ There is an apparent contradiction here. Lenin's model of self-organization and parliamentary democracy appears to be at odds. In the Russia that Hector celebrates, parliamentary democracy was abolished. His celebration of parliamentary democracy goes against the grain of James's lecture on Rousseau in which he argued that politicians betray the electorate and represent their own interests once in office.¹⁵⁶ Hector resolves the apparent contradiction by arguing that WFP policies reflect the fact that, "in a country without strong political traditions (colonialism imparts none), political development must come through a series of well-developed stages, making and strengthening its own institutions and traditions at every stage. Parliamentary Democracy is only the first of these stages."¹⁵⁷ In other words, unlike Russia in 1917 and Cuba in 1959, the Caribbean was not ready for a revolutionary overhaul. In this sense, for Hector, Cuba is not a model for the rest of the Caribbean.

As he sums up his arguments, Hector draws on the experience of U.S. autoworkers to buttress his case. This example, along with his references to self-

¹⁵⁴ Hector to Roberts, 11.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵⁶ C.L.R. James, "Rousseau," 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹⁵⁷ Hector to Roberts, 11-12.

organization and his allusions to Lenin, are all signs of the close relationship between the CCC and Facing Reality which had done extensive work on Detroit autoworkers and the U.S. labour movement.¹⁵⁸ According to Hector, American workers find themselves in the invidious position of having to endure the drudgery and alienation of factory labour. This is a phenomenon that he argues modern technology has exacerbated. Combined with racial animosities in the country, Hector contends that this reality will lead to what he describes as “universal barbarism,” perhaps invoking Robert Hill’s use of the term in the “Coming Struggle for Liberation.”¹⁵⁹ For Hector, these poor, degrading, and alienating work conditions represent a clear indication that “bourgeois civilization, as a civilization, is not in its twilight, but has collapsed into darkness already.”¹⁶⁰ And citing *Facing Reality* once again, he adds that a practice that ensures “self-realization, creativity based on the incorporation into the individual personality of the whole previous development of humanity” is necessary. Freedom, he concludes, “is creative universality, not utility.”¹⁶¹ The inference here is that “creative universality” and “self-realization” of the individual personality does not exist in Cuba.

No record of Alfie Roberts’s response to Hector’s musings on the Cuban Revolution appears to have survived. But, in its absence, Roberts’s letter to Martin Glaberman gives us an idea of what he might have written. The letter is not exclusively about the Cuban Revolution, but one of many letters that he wrote during this period to various left organizations, newspapers, and journals – including *Monthly Review* and *News and Letters* – in an attempt to educate them about current events in the Caribbean

¹⁵⁸ See Martin Glaberman, *Punching Out* (Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1973 [1952]).

¹⁵⁹ Hector to Roberts, July 1966, 13.

¹⁶⁰ Hector to Roberts, July 1966, 14-15.

¹⁶¹ Grace C. Lee et al., *Facing Reality*, cited in Hector letter to Roberts, July 1966, 16.

and engage them in a political dialogue. But Cuba is by far the most prominent part of the letter and, in it, he admonishes Marxist scholars for neglecting important political developments in that country. According to Roberts, while Marxists have been preoccupied with the romantic side of revolution and the fact that it has dealt a blow to U.S. imperialism. And while some have focused on Cuba's criticisms of the Soviet Union or "aberrations of the islands development," they have neglected the important political debates being waged in Cuba which have profound significance for the understanding of socialism.¹⁶²

Roberts then draws Glaberman's attention to a four-part article that was published in *Granma*, organ of the Communist Party of Cuba. The article came on the heels of a series of speeches delivered by Fidel Castro which denounced Cuba's bloated bureaucracy. According to Roberts, "the Notional attitudes that guide Fidel and the Party are very similar to Lenin's concepts and Notions," particularly those articulated in the trade union debate.¹⁶³ (Here it is worth recalling that Roberts's comparison of Fidel

¹⁶² Alfie Roberts to Martin Glaberman, 21 April 1967. In the same letter, Roberts also argues that North American and European Marxist behave as if Lenin and the Russian Revolution was alpha and omega of revolutionary politics with no equal in the southern hemisphere. He also expresses his sneaking suspicion that European and North American Marxists do not take seriously Marxist-oriented politics the Third World.

¹⁶³ Roberts to Glaberman. In another letter to the editors of *Monthly Review* at about the same time, Roberts similarly argues that in his attack on bureaucracy, Fidel Castro "made some very Leninist pronouncements on this problem" which bear similarity to ideas articulated by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Roberts places great stock in Castro's idea of moving the capital from Havana to another, more remote, location in the country in order to address the problem the over-concentration of resources in the capital and the social and economic neglect of the interior. Cited from a *Granma* report of Fidel Castro's 15th Congress speech, Castro lamented that "we failed in one respect...in not doing away with the ministries and in not moving the capital to Guáimaro," a failure that Castro believed had been detrimental to the needs of the interior of the country.¹⁶³ Castro is alluding to Cuba's bureaucracy which had come under fire from him in 1967 which, in turn, resulted in an attack on bureaucratic practices by the government. For Roberts, Castro's remarks sat firmly within the tradition of Lenin and Frantz Fanon and he cites both theorists to support his claim. Roberts cites Lenin's 1920 remarks on bureaucracy:

assistance in the successful struggle against bureaucracy, in the struggle to overcome the harmful inertness, must come from the localities, from the ranks....

Castro to Lenin comes on the heels of James's Montreal classes on the Russian trade union debate.) In closing, he proposes that Marxists scholars: 1) compare Cuba's fight against bureaucracy with Lenin's *State and Revolution*, his statements on bureaucracy, and the experience of the Paris Commune; and 2) compare the trade union debate in Russia with the recent Trade Union Elections Congress in Havana, tying these with Castro's pronouncements at the closing session of that Congress.¹⁶⁴

Given that less than a year separates Tim Hector's letter from Roberts's correspondence to Glaberman, it is unlikely that Roberts's perspective on the Cuban Revolution changed radically in the interval. This being so, the letter is another indication of the enthusiasm with which he supported the Cuban Revolution and the reasons why his

Those of us who are doomed to...work at the centre will continue the task of improving the apparatus and purging it of bureaucracy.... Generally speaking... things are better in the localities than at the centre... for naturally, the evil of bureaucracy concentrates at the centre. In this respect Moscow cannot but be the worst city, and in general the worst "place," in the republic....

Lenin continues, this time make a concrete proposal: "All of us are still doing very far from enough systematically and unswervingly to promote these forces from the bottom to the top.... Some workers," he continues, "can and should be transferred from work at the centre to work in the localities: as leaders of uyezds and *volosts*, by organizing all economic work *as a whole in an exemplary* manner, they will do far more good and perform work of far greater *national* importance than if they performed any central function." Lenin then proceeds to pose two questions: "Why not transfer several members of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, or members of the collegiums, or other highly placed comrades to uyezd or even volost work? Surely we have not become so "bureaucratsied" as to "be ashamed" to do that." Alfie Roberts finds echoes of Frantz Fanon in Castro's remarks as well. Writing forty years after Lenin, Fanon emphasized the problems associated with concentrating human and financial resources in the national capital in a strikingly similar way:

In an underdeveloped country, the leading members of the party ought to avoid the capital as if it had the plague. They ought, with some few exceptions, to live in the country districts. The centralization of all activity in the city ought to be avoided. No excuse of administrative discipline should be taken as legitimizing that excrescence of a capital which is already overpopulated and overdeveloped with regard to nine-tenths of the country. The party should be decentralized in the extreme. It is the only way to bring life to regions which are dead....

For Fanon, "the interior, the back-country, ought to be the most privileged part of the country. Moreover, the last resort, there is nothing inconvenient in the government choosing its seat elsewhere than in the capital." By whatever means, the "capital must be deconsecrated; the outcast masses must be shown that we have decided to work for them. Alfie Roberts to *Monthly Review*, 24 April 1967.

¹⁶⁴ Roberts to Martin Glaberman.

support was so strong. That both he and Hector cite Lenin in order to make distinct and opposing arguments about the Revolution reflects their close political relationship. Their respect for Lenin's ideas were central to their understanding of Cuba and other developments in the Third World, and like Roberts, Hector drew upon Lenin's *Selected Works* in his letter, indicating his familiarity with these writings as early as 1966. His citations of Lenin refer to volume seven of the set, but in another letter he informs Roberts, "I got a copy of Volume IX, it is Volume 32 of the Collected Works. If Franklyn [Harvey] does not know about this you can tell him for me. I am on my second reading of it, taking notes this time. I think it illuminates a lot of things that we discussed, and a lot James said which was passing me by. Cuba is getting clearer to me."¹⁶⁵ Although they arrived at different conclusions, clearly, both Hector and Roberts believed Lenin's analysis of the Russian Revolution shed light on the Cuban Revolution. But in his response to Roberts, Martin Glaberman questioned the appropriateness of comparing the two revolutions and drawing tight conclusion from such comparisons.

While acknowledging that he needed to review Castro's discussion on bureaucracy first, Glaberman cautioned Roberts not to jump to hasty assumptions about the character of the Cuban Revolution. And although he acknowledges that the Cuban Revolution is a "major question," as he advises Roberts, "it cannot be treated lightly or 'off the cuff' so to speak, and as a result we have not treated it at all."¹⁶⁶ He disagrees outright with Roberts's view that "Castro displays the theoretical acuteness of Lenin," but he does concede that, "as a revolutionary leader he is unsurpassed."¹⁶⁷ Unlike Hector,

¹⁶⁵ Tim Hector to Alfie Roberts, n.d, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹⁶⁶ Martin Glaberman to Alfie Roberts, 4 May 1967, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Glaberman expresses his admiration for the Revolution, and shuns the idea that Cuba is a Stalinist society because of its close ties to the Soviet Union. However, he does grant that “those relations obliged Castro to say certain things which otherwise made no sense whatever.”¹⁶⁸ And whereas Hector downplayed the influence of external factors in the evolution of the Cuban Revolution, for Glaberman, Cuba’s relationship with the Soviet Union was related to its small size and its proximity to the U.S., which “does not allow it to be left alone to work out its own problems, but forces it to assume the problems of the cold war” and to relinquish its economic sovereignty.¹⁶⁹

Overall, Glaberman’s analysis of the Cuban situation is quite favorable, but as he concludes his letter, he again raises the question of internal versus of external influences: “what, of the things that are happening in Cuba, is integral to the Cuban revolution, and what is externally imposed[?]”¹⁷⁰ Glaberman does not offer a response to his question, but the fact that he poses it implies that, like Tim Hector, he believed at least some of Cuba’s problems were self-imposed.

Conclusion

The Roberts-Hector debate demonstrates the significance the CCC attached to the Cuban Revolution. While, for Alfie Roberts, the Revolution represented an example of a Caribbean territory that had broken its former colonial and neo-colonial ties in order to pursue an independent path of development, for Hector, Cuba illustrated the limitations of the Soviet communist model which, having adopted it, hindered the Revolution’s

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

progress. The debate also illustrates how, through discussion and disagreement, CCC members sharpened their ideas. Cuba was one of many issues they discussed in their meetings and correspondence. It was part of their ongoing dialogue on Caribbean and world affairs, philosophy, history, and the strengths and weaknesses of nationalist politics. Historian and Tim Hector biographer Paul Buhle argues that Martin Glaberman found the “Third World nationalism” of the CCC too eclectic and too indulgent of the “Stalinist” leadership of North Vietnam and Cuba.¹⁷¹ James, on the other hand, as a result of his presence on “the lecture trail but also in his personal affinities...had gone beyond” Glaberman and other senior members of Facing Reality.¹⁷² In essence, Buhle argues that James was far more supportive of Third World liberation movements that received assistance from China and the U.S.S.R. – including Cuba and Vietnam – than Glaberman, and referring to the CCC, Buhle believes James’s “openness” was in no small part due to the “young enthusiasts who adopted him.”¹⁷³ From what we have seen, however, Glaberman was equally open to these political developments and he embraced members of the CCC by engaging them in an ongoing political dialogue, of which the Cuban Revolution was an important part.

Buhle also argues that, even though Tim Hector shunned attempts by communists to court him during his student days in Canada, given the constant threat of U.S. intervention in Cuba, he understood the island’s strategic ties with the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁴ But as we saw in his letter to Alfie Roberts, Hector demonstrated very little sympathy for the Soviet Union and seriously questioned Cuba’s involvement in the Soviet Bloc. There

¹⁷¹ Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical’s Story* (Jackson: The Press of University of Mississippi, 2006), 137.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

may be some substance to Buhle's claim, however. In an internal bulletin, Hector reminds his colleagues that the group has "committed to writing a chapter on Cuba for the 'October Statement' by the Facing Reality organization" and expresses his regret that CCC member Anne Cools, who lived and observed life in Cuba, is not available to share her experience and assist in the preparation of the document.¹⁷⁵ The group also anticipated holding formal classes on Cuba designed to develop its perspective on the Revolution with the goal of publishing a preliminary article in a journal they were preparing.¹⁷⁶ Thus it would appear that, by this time, Hector and Roberts had reconciled their opinions on Cuba to the point where they were prepared to draft a document that would reflect a group perspective. This may be so, but as we shall see in the next chapter, in the case of Vietnam, Hector is as critical of the Vietnamese leadership as he was of Cuba's revolutionary government. True to the CCC approach, he attempted to discern the role of the most oppressed in North Vietnam's social hierarchy, and at a time when most on the left unequivocally threw their support behind the Vietnamese, Hector levied a scathing critique of North Vietnam's leadership.

¹⁷⁵ Hector, *Caribbean Nation – Internal Bulletin*, 4. The "October Statement," so named because it was intended, in part, as a commemoration of the Russian Revolution, was eventually issued in a draft form in November 1967 but, due to internal political differences about the draft within Facing Reality, it was never published and circulated.

¹⁷⁶ Hector, *Caribbean Nation – Internal Bulletin*, 4.

Chapter 4: Caribbean and International Opinion

Nineteen sixty-eight was a tumultuous year. Reading the newspaper headlines of the time, one would think that the world was on the brink of global revolution. Mass uprisings in France and Czechoslovakia almost toppled their governments. In Guinea Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique, armed campaigns were well underway, and in Rhodesia, the racist regime of Ian Smith drew scorn and derision from around the globe. In the United States, anti-Vietnam War protests shook the country to its foundation; and on the heels of the assassination of Martin Luther King, riots gripped American cities as the African American struggle completed the transition to its more militant Black Power form.¹⁷⁷ It was in the midst of this period of global crisis that the first and only issue of the journal *Caribbean International Opinion: The Dynamics of Liberation* appeared.

Caribbean International Opinion was published in October 1968 by the Caribbean Nation Publishing Committee. Caribbean Nation (CN) was founded by the core members of the Caribbean Conference Committee when the latter group folded shortly after its third annual conference in the fall of 1967. By this time, Robert Hill had returned to Jamaica and, according to Alfie Roberts, “new forces” emerged which were inspired by the U.S. Black Power movement and focused on the conditions of Blacks in Canada.¹⁷⁸ A faction of this new group changed the Caribbean Conference Committee’s name to the *Canadian Conference Committee* and began organizing events. In response, the core members of the old CCC formed CN, and although it was CN that published *Caribbean International*

¹⁷⁷ For a general account of the global events that shaped the year 1968 see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005).

¹⁷⁸ Alfie Roberts, *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute 2005), 74-76.

Opinion, the journal was, for all intents and purposes, a Caribbean Conference Committee publication.¹⁷⁹ Like its predecessor, CN was dedicated to Caribbean liberation and committed to publishing a journal and other material related to the Caribbean.¹⁸⁰ (For the sake of clarity and continuity, from here on, the CN will be referred to as the CCC.)

According to a report written by Tim Hector, the group initially intended to establish a journal as a “medium for stimulating new perspectives and conceptions of West Indian history and contemporary events,”¹⁸¹ and this is what *Caribbean International Opinion* set out to achieve. In the spirit of the Caribbean Conference Committee, the journal affirmed that the toilers of the world have the capacity to organize themselves in order to transform society. Its introduction boldly declared itself an “Independent Tribune... born out of the desire to articulate opinions on the activities and problems of the day, and to pose perspectives for our time.” It also announced that its orientation was “premised on the profound belief in man, individual man who ‘is the social entity’, and whose independent self-activity within the social collective milieu is the motivating force of all history and[,] as a consequence[,] must be fostered and elicited as the national basis of human development.”¹⁸²

Caribbean International Opinion focused on both global and Caribbean affairs. It is noteworthy that the journal’s introduction mentions neither the Caribbean nor Caribbean people, but instead employs universal phraseology such as “perspectives for our time,” “belief in man,” and “independent self-activity” – language that transcends nationality and

¹⁷⁹ For a description of the disagreements that led to the emergence of the Canadian Conference Committee see Dorothy Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 118-119.

¹⁸⁰ Tim Hector, “Caribbean Nation – Internal Bulletin No. 1,” n.d., 5-6, Alfie Roberts Institute.

¹⁸¹ Hector, “Caribbean Nation,” 1.

¹⁸² Anon., “Introduction,” *Caribbean International Opinion: The Dynamics of Liberation*, (October 1968).

race. This can perhaps be viewed as an attempt to make explicit what their work had implied; that the Caribbean and Caribbean thought had a political contribution to make that extended beyond the West Indies. And yet reading the table of contents through a contemporary lens, one is immediately struck by the caliber of its contributors. In addition to submissions by three former CCC core members – Alfie Roberts on sugar and the Caribbean revolution, Franklyn Harvey on France 1968, and Tim Hector on the Vietnam War – it also contains two contributions by C.L.R. James, the first on political economy and the second titled “State Capitalism and the French Revolutionary Tradition.” Other contributors include two future Caribbean prime ministers – Arnim Eustace of St. Vincent, who wrote on the Caribbean economy, and Rosie Douglas of Dominica, who wrote on racism in Canada.

This chapter focuses on Tim Hector and Franklyn Harvey’s essays. As we have seen, James’s ideas on self-organization and the role of the underclass in social movements were central to the CCC’s political outlook. Drawing on James, Harvey and Hector provided their own critical assessment of two important international developments – France 1968 and the Vietnam War. Moreover, they did so in a way that attempted to, as the subtitle of the journal suggests, unravel the “dynamics of liberation.” This last point is instructive as, once again, it speaks to the group’s efforts to influence its readers on matters that were not only related to the Caribbean. If, as Mark Kurlansky and Kristin Ross have argued, France 1968 and the Vietnam War were two defining events for the New Left, Harvey and Hector’s analysis of France 1968 and Vietnam, along with the

Roberts-Hector debate on Cuba, represent their attempts to define these events for West Indians and the New Left.¹⁸³

France 1968

In “French Revolution ’68,” Franklyn Harvey writes about what historian Ian McKay describes as “those miraculous days when Paris suddenly reclaimed its great stature as the world capital of enlightenment and revolutionary reason.”¹⁸⁴ Conventional accounts of France 1968 primarily focus on the role of students, and particularly the role of student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, thus reducing the events to what historian Mark Kurlansky describes as “simply an explosion” by students “against a suffocating, stagnant society.”¹⁸⁵ But for Franklyn Harvey, France 1968 was much more than a rebellion by privileged, disgruntled students. As he observes, it was precisely because workers and students came together and mobilized the entire society that they were able to bring France to the brink of revolution. Nor can France 1968 be reduced to an attack against communism. As Kristin Ross argues in *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*, conventional studies of France 1968 attempt to situate it within a historical trajectory that begins with opposition to the French Communist Party and the organized labour movement in 1968, and ends with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc.¹⁸⁶ Such arguments give the impression that France 1968 was about ending communism in Europe, and while Harvey agrees that France’s New Left equally opposed the French Communist Party (FCP) and the state in 1968, he

¹⁸³ See Kurlansky, *1968* and Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁴ Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 186.

¹⁸⁵ Kurlansky, *1968*, 236.

¹⁸⁶ Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*, 20.

argues that the legacy of the events extend well beyond this. He echoes Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit's view that the events demonstrated the potential for revolution in a highly industrialized country and provides valuable lessons on vicissitudes of revolutionary politics.¹⁸⁷ In keeping with the political outlook that was developed within the CCC, he also suggests that it was the spontaneous self-activity of French students and workers, working against the state, the FCP, and the bureaucratic trade unions that produced the 1968 revolt. And although the 1968 revolution failed, for Harvey, the emergence of Action Committees during the events signified a new form of political organization in which social movements shed hierarchical and elitist political parties, unions, and leaders in favour of a more collective mass movement. This for Harvey represents the great legacy of the revolution.

“French Revolution ’68” divides the events into four stages. In the first phase, students occupied the University of Nanterre. The occupation was sparked by the arrest of student Xavier Langlade during an anti-Vietnam War demonstration. The students demanded his release, but when he was freed, they decided to continue the occupation and spontaneously formed general assemblies in order to discuss, debate, and pass resolutions on a range of social and political issues.¹⁸⁸

On May 3, students attempted to occupy the Sorbonne. In response, the CRS (riot police) brutalized the students who, in turn, engaged in a protracted battle in Paris' Latin Quarter. The conflict escalated, and while the student leadership deliberated on what direction the protest should take, the mass of the students took action and, “completely

¹⁸⁷ Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (Edinburgh, London, and San Francisco: AK Press), 2000 [1968], 18.

¹⁸⁸ V.P.F. Harvey, “French Revolution ’68,” *Caribbean International Opinion*, 12.

spontaneously,” marched on Sante prison demanding the release of the students who had been imprisoned during the May 3 protest.¹⁸⁹ The students were joined by workers as they marched and, once again, the demonstrators were brutally attacked by the police. Spontaneously, thousands of students set up barricades, armed themselves with cobblestones, pieces of iron, helmets, goggles, and Molotov cocktails, and faced off against the CRS in the Latin Quarter.¹⁹⁰

Fearing a movement that was not led by them, the FCP initially denounced the students and reproached the workers who joined them. But workers joined the students despite the denunciations of the party and the CGT, the communist controlled union. Parisians, outraged at the police’s senseless brutality, also came to the students’ aid, providing them with food, clean sheets, warm water, and other necessities. The police were now confronting students, workers, and ordinary citizens.¹⁹¹

Until this point, the workers had played a secondary role in the struggle. But, as Harvey observes, “it is only in times of... deep social crisis that... contradictions [between labour and capital] and the consciousness of the working class show themselves in the open.” It was at this stage in the struggle that the working class prepared to “heave itself on the revolutionary stage with a *spontaneous general strike*.”¹⁹² In the second stage of France 1968, students and workers took control of universities and factories across France. It began on May 13 when one million workers and students marched in the streets of Paris in an unparalleled show of worker-student solidarity. The following day, high school students occupied classrooms and newsmen and personnel of government-controlled

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid. 14. (emphasis in original)

television and radio stations walked off the job.¹⁹³ Here the impact of C.L.R. James's *Notes on Dialectics* on Harvey is palpable. Echoing James's notion of spontaneity and self-organization, Harvey writes: "The unions, Communists and Socialist parties were all suddenly caught in a terrific whirlpool. Events were moving too fast for them – a spiraling general strike they could not control and an increasing student-workers' solidarity they feared" How did they respond? "They decided to put on a SHOW."¹⁹⁴ Show is what, drawing on Hegel, James describes as the immediate expression of a movement, its appearance in transition, "unimportant, a mere Show, until it persists and becomes Appearance" which "is existence which has become essential."¹⁹⁵ While the students and workers moved in France, the FCP called upon the government to resign, demanded fresh election, and introduced a motion in the Assembly censuring the government. For Harvey, the Communist Party's SHOW of solidarity with the students and workers obscured the fact that they were actually trying to co-opt the movement and control the creative potential of the students and workers.¹⁹⁶ Harvey appears to stretch the concept of SHOW, as in James's example, SHOW represents an initial appearance or incomplete expression of a movement, where as Harvey argues that the FCP made a deliberate attempt to derail a movement that was already in progress. Nonetheless, once again, Harvey draws a line between the official left leadership and the workers and students who challenged it and the state.

Dazed by the rapid acceleration of the conflict, General De Gaulle called for "order," "peace," and "reason". But events had passed him by. Action Committees were

¹⁹³ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹⁵ C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics* (Detroit: 1966) 87-88.

¹⁹⁶ Harvey, "French Revolution '68," 15.

formed in universities and over 2000 factories comprising over 10 million workers.¹⁹⁷ In highlighting the importance of the Action Committees, Harvey draws on *Facing Reality* which, although it was co-authored by Grace Lee Boggs and Pierre Chaulieu, according to Boggs, “is pure C.L.R. James in its celebration of spontaneous rebellion and its insistence that the main role of socialist revolutionaries is to recognize and record the rebellions of ordinary people.”¹⁹⁸ James argued that the spontaneous emergence of workers’ councils during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and in Poland the same year affirmed that, whereas all previous social transitions transmitted power from one class to another, the “present transition is from class society to a society without classes.”¹⁹⁹ For James, these kinds of social upheavals bring out the kind of political organization that already exists in embryonic form. Accordingly, the new society based on “cooperative labour” is already present and all that is required is to “get rid of what is stifling it, what is preventing it...from tackling not only the immediate problem of production, but also the more general problems of society.”²⁰⁰ Echoing James, Franklyn Harvey argues that Action Committees were the 1960s equivalent of Hungary’s workers’ councils and an “embryonic form of the new state – independently and spontaneously organized by students and workers to work out the emancipation of man.”²⁰¹ Whereas the Russian Revolution gave rise to Soviets, and the Hungarian Revolution gave birth to councils, France 1968 brought a new form of socialist organization into being which “constitute[s] the New Society in embryo.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁹⁸ Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 69-70.

¹⁹⁹ Grace C. Lee, Pierre Chaulieu and J.R. Johnson (C.L.R. James), *Facing Reality* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1958), 84.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 67 and 107.

²⁰¹ Harvey, “French Revolution ’68,” 15.

²⁰² Ibid., 21.

As the established order teetered on the brink of collapse in late May, the conditions appeared to be stacked in the student and workers' favor. This critical juncture marks the beginning of Harvey's third, and shortest, stage in the struggle (May 27 to May 30) in which the students and workers fail to seize power. According to Harvey, "the *fundamental question of any revolution is POWER*" and "unless this is clearly grasped and understood, all talk of revolution is a farce. *Power must be transferred from one class to another class. That is the immediate, the primary task of a revolution.*" And this is the point where he surmised the revolution in France had reached. But seizing power, he argued, is unthinkable in an advanced country without the support of the army.²⁰³ It is worth noting that Harvey is at odds with Kristin Ross who questions the emphasis that has been placed on the movement's inability to seize power. For Ross, the general strike challenged the existence of the FCP and other left parties in France, thus opening up political space outside of their stifling control.²⁰⁴ Here Ross argues that the question of equality is more important than power in that, while the seizing power is often an idea that is predetermined by established political parties and groups – the Bolshevik Party for example – the students and workers developed a new praxis of equality, direct democracy, and collective self-organization – exemplified in the Action Committees – and did so in the process of the struggle.²⁰⁵ Their goal was to, in Ross's words, "transcend the distinction between leadership and mass activity" and, in the process, build a more egalitarian society.²⁰⁶ Although Franklyn Harvey too sees Action Committees and the spontaneous, creative actions of the students and workers as the most important

²⁰³ Ibid., 16-17. (emphasis in original)

²⁰⁴ Ross, *May '68*, 68.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 74-75.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 77.

development of the uprising, he also – no doubt influenced by his study of the Russian Revolution – sees armed struggle as a political means to which those engaged in revolutionary movements resort when civil and other forms of protest exhaust themselves. The students and workers were no match for the police and their sophisticated weapons. But, he observes, with the support of the army – guardians of the state – or even a section of it, power was within their grasp. They did not reach out to the armed forces, however, and when the shrewd De Gaulle secured the army's support and announced elections, it was evident that the battle was over.²⁰⁷

France in 1968 appears to be one of those historical moments to which James referred in his class on the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. James argued that there are moments when the fate of a struggle balances on a razor's edge. Under such circumstances, the outcome depends on subjective factors such as the decisions made by the principle actors in a movement.²⁰⁸ In France in 1968, the failure to seize power marked the beginning of what Harvey calls the counter-revolution. The Communist Party and its alliance of socialist and left parties collapsed in the face of a reinvigorated De Gaulle and by May 31 workers began trickling back to work. Some of the younger workers and the students continued to protest, but their moment had passed and their sticks and stones were no match for the CRS which took control of universities and factories by force.²⁰⁹

In the last stage of the struggle (May 30 to June 30) De Gaulle swept the elections and the workers returned to their factories. Despite the defeat, for Harvey, the French Revolution of 1968 provided valuable political lessons: "Today in an advanced country,

²⁰⁷ Harvey, "French Revolution '68," 17.

²⁰⁸ C.L.R. James, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute.

²⁰⁹ Harvey, "French Revolution '68," 19.

parliamentary government is not only obsolete. It is dead. The fact that the personificators (sic) of capital can only maintain the capitalist system and parliamentary government by naked organized violence is sufficient testimony to the death of an old an[d] antiquated social institution.”²¹⁰ Once again echoing C.L.R. James, Harvey concludes that the “new [social order] exist all around us everywhere.”²¹¹ In every department of national life, the new social order is invading the old. Modern capitalism in its highest stage is pregnant with the new social order. But his new society can only begin its higher and unimpeded development by a LEAP, by a sudden JUMP.” The LEAP signified a break with the old order, including the labour unions and the Old Left, and Harvey believed “modern society...is approaching that critical point where a qualitative LEAP from the old to the new social organization will take place[,] and with that leap will come a quantitative increase in social production; thus making possible, for the first time in human history, the control of the productive forces of society by man,” resulting in “the emancipation of man from man and the free development of the creative potentialities and capacities of the human species.”²¹² As the workers, farmers, and youth attempted to transform France, they not only established the moral and political bankruptcy of the Gaullist state, but also illustrated the counter-revolutionary character of the unions, the Communist Party and other left organizations in France. For Harvey, Action Committees represent the New Society, and just as the students and workers in France did not need Marx, Lenin, or Mao to demonstrate this – according to Harvey they learned from their own concrete experience – neither would the modern proletariat.²¹³ “Either the working-class takes

²¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

²¹¹ James, *Facing Reality*, pp. 67, 107.

²¹² Harvey, “French Revolution ’68,” 20.

²¹³ Ibid., 21-22.

power,” he apocalyptically concludes, “or we are all DOOMED. This the working-class MUST KNOW. To do this it must know precisely where we are heading; it must be informed of what workers are doing in all parts of the world; it must be informed of the new society, the new social form, wherever it exists and appears in the open as in France; it must be informed of its own development and the development of society in general.”²¹⁴

“French Revolution ’68” critically analyzed the social forces that coalesced and clashed in France. Like other CCC members, Franklyn Harvey was concerned with the dynamics of liberation, and although he was, first and foremost, committed to the Caribbean, as the essay demonstrates, the CCC’s political contribution extended beyond this immediate concern. The essay focuses on the ability of students and workers organize for social change without being guided “from above” by the FCP and other left parties and trade unions. Harvey’s emphasis on the spontaneous eruption in France and the emergence of Action Committees during the uprising is consistent with the CCC’s deep suspicion of official leadership and its focus on the capacity of ordinary people to affect change. Like the other essays published in *Caribbean International Opinion*, “French Revolution ’68 ” attempted to deepen its reader’s understanding of revolutionary politics; this was true whether they were writing about the Caribbean, France, or other parts of the world far removed from the West Indian reality such as Vietnam.

Vietnam

More than any single struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, the Vietnam War captured the attention of people across the globe. It was an anti-Vietnam War protest that sparked

²¹⁴ Ibid., 23. (emphasis in original)

France 1968. Tariq Ali, once a leading figure of the international New Left describes the Vietnam War as his great preoccupation in the 1960s and argues that the Viet Cong victory over the U.S. was one of the few causes that the New Left could celebrate.²¹⁵ As Che Guevara wrote, Vietnam represented “the aspirations, the hopes for victory of the entire world of the disinherited.”²¹⁶ Students, militants, academics, politicians, and even the politically non-committed found common cause in the Vietnamese struggle. The sheer weight of the U.S. war machinery, marshaled against an army of peasants and innocent women, men, and children shocked those who witnessed the war’s carnage via the media. The war had a profound impact on Students for a Democratic Society, and on Martin Luther King and civil rights groups such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and the Congress for Racial Equality.²¹⁷ In Canada, the “Vietnam War hit Canadian Leftists like a hammer blow, forcing even the most moderate into radical positions on Canadian independence and anti-imperialism.”²¹⁸ Naturally, members of the Caribbean Conference Committee were not immune to the war’s impact. Based in Montreal, the hotbed of New Left politics in the country, CCC members found themselves drawn to Vietnamese struggle as they attempted to deepen their understanding of revolution.²¹⁹

For Robert Hill, the Vietnam struggle was “among the greatest events of the twentieth-century,” and played a crucial role in the formation of his generation’s

²¹⁵ Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005 [1987]), 109 and 9.

²¹⁶ Che Guevara, *On Vietnam and World Revolution* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1967), 5.

²¹⁷ Kurlansky, *1968*, 11 and 44-45.

²¹⁸ McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 102.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

political consciousness.²²⁰ As Paul Buhle argues, Tim Hector and other CCC members were wholly supportive of the Vietnamese struggle against U.S. imperialism.²²¹ Hector became a somewhat prominent figure on the North American anti-Vietnam War circuit who attempted to learn as much as he could about the struggle from the Vietnamese themselves: “Every South East Asian student or worker I met I plied with questions aplenty. Some got sick of me,” he recalls, but history “is best understood by learning from those who experience it.”²²² He observed the Vietnamese struggle with a critical eye, however, and much like his analysis of the Cuban Revolution, for him the Vietnam War was not a simple David and Goliath story or a neat, clearly demarcated struggle between good and evil. The protracted war “opened the veins” of Vietnam and exposed the contradictions inherent in the global struggle against imperialism; at the same time, it provided important insights into the vicissitudes of revolutionary politics.²²³

Like Harvey’s essay on France in 1968, “Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism” bears all the markings of C.L.R. James’s influence, particularly his aversion to official communist leadership. As Hector argues, it is the peasantry, aligned with students and its intelligentsia, that represent Vietnam’s true revolutionary force. The peasantry’s heroic role in the struggle against American imperialism and what he views as the perfidy of the North Vietnamese communists and their allies – the Soviet Union and China – is the crucial dynamic for Hector. As such, the essay provides

²²⁰ Robert Hill, “Afterword,” *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005), 100.

²²¹ Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical’s Story* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 137.

²²² L. Tim Hector, “My Grandmother in Time and Place and Luck,” *Fan the Flame*, August 30, 2002.

²²³ For an example of how the New Left viewed the struggle in Vietnam see Tom Hayden of Student for a Democratic Society leader, “Prefaces,” in Herbert Aptheker, *Mission to Hanoi* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), 7-9. See also Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 158-182.

remarkably few details about the war that was raging between the Vietnamese and the United States. His main concern is with the class contradictions within Vietnam and with Vietnam's relationship to its communist allies, whom he argued were as guilty of imperialism as the United States. Both, according to Hector, vied for trade markets and mineral resources in Southeast Asia while the Vietnamese peasantry found itself caught in the middle of an epic global struggle.²²⁴

Drawing from the same theoretical well as "French Revolution '68," Hector appears to invoke James's lecture on Rousseau as well as Frantz Fanon, two thinkers whom James himself compares in the lecture. Both James and Fanon described how nationalist and political leaders betray the aspirations of their followers once in power, a view that Hector believes is true in Vietnam.²²⁵ The seeds of the Vietnam War were sown during the country's independence negotiations. The Vietnamese resoundingly defeated France at Dien Bien Phu, only to be pressured into accepting the partition of their territory. But as Hector contends, this pressure was not only exerted by the United States, but also by Russia and China which, under the guise of a policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the U.S., supported the partition of Vietnam into two distinct spheres of influence.²²⁶ Hector's analysis runs contrary to both Old Left and New Left positions of the time. Whereas the communist historian Herbert Aptheker argued that China and

²²⁴ Hector, "Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism," 59.

²²⁵ L. Tim Hector, "Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism," *Caribbean International Opinion*, October 1968, p. 57. See Frantz Fanon, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968 [1961]), 176 in particular. We know from a letter from Hector to Robert Hill that Hector studied Fanon's work and discussed it with Franklyn Harvey. See Tim Hector to Robert Hill, 29 March 1966, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute. James alludes to Fanon twice in his Rousseau lecture, but without elaborating on the specific parallels that he sees between Rousseau and Fanon. C.L.R. James, "Rousseau," 1967 (unpublished manuscript), Alfie Roberts Institute.

²²⁶ Hector, "Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism," 57. Che Guevara was also critical of Soviet unwillingness to throw the weight of its support behind the Vietnamese struggle and embrace Vietnam into the socialist fold. See Guevara, *On Vietnam and World Revolution*, 6.

the Soviet Union's support of North Vietnam was selfless – a position that co-founder of Students for a Democratic Society, Tom Hayden, appears to have endorsed – Hector believed that China and Russia were manipulating Vietnam for their own political ends.²²⁷ And contrary to Aptheker, Hector argued that the quality of life for North Vietnamese peasants did not fundamentally improve after the country gained independence and that they were still exploited by avaricious landlords.²²⁸ And when northern opposition to the partition of Vietnam erupted in a peasant uprising in 1956, it was, in Hector's words, "as quickly suppressed [by the North Vietnamese government] as the Hungary Revolt of the same year," resulting in the exodus of close to a million North Vietnamese to South Vietnam.²²⁹ More recently, Historian Gareth Porter has raised questions about the centralized, authoritarian leadership of Vietnam's Communist Party and described how its grip on power has shaped post-war Vietnamese society.²³⁰ In 1968, however, such descriptions were rare among the New Left.

The exodus to the south sparked a "movement from below" which coalesced into the National Liberation Front (NLF). But according to Hector, the NLF was viewed with skepticism and aloofness by the Communist Bloc, despite the fact that southern peasants flocked to the movement once it demonstrated its commitment to genuine land reform.

²²⁷ Aptheker argues: "Monopoly powers [the U.S. and France] regret the termination of colonialism.... [T]hey seek in all possible ways to preserve colonialism knowing that it has bulwarked them in the past and serves them in the present. Socialist powers on the other hand have basic interests that favor the retention of that system [socialism]; they will, therefore throw their weight on the side of the forces of national liberation." Aptheker, *Mission to Hanoi*, 91. Hector, "Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism," 57.

²²⁸ Whereas Herbert Aptheker heralds North Vietnam's achievements in land reform, education, roads, irrigation and basic infrastructure, healthcare, and nutrition, Hector suggests that, for those who fled from the north, the communist government that they left behind was no different than the former French colonizers. Aptheker, *Mission to Hanoi*, 21-26 and Hector, "Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism," 57.

²²⁹ Hector, "Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism," 57.

²³⁰ Gareth Porter, *Vietnam: The Politics of Bureaucratic Socialism* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Even his description of the process that led to civilian rule in South Vietnam makes it clear that it was not due to the actions of the ruling class in the south or to the magnanimity of the United States, but the result of the self-activity of the Vietnamese people – workers, peasants, Buddhists, Catholics, etc. – who demonstrated in the streets of Saigon and Hue and, in so doing, forced the hand of the military government.²³¹ For Hector, the workers and peasants represent the true force of liberation in Vietnam, and despite the devastation of the war, he is confident that the Vietnamese people will prevail against imperialism because, in addition to their valiant efforts, history itself, he triumphantly adds, “has decreed the swift collapse of such a social order in the middle of this twentieth century.”²³²

“Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism” is a unique appraisal of a country whose heroic struggle inspired political movements around the world. The essay raises critical issues about the political leadership in North Vietnam and its relationship to communist China and Russia. For Tim Hector, it was the peasantry, aligned with the intelligentsia and other groups in South Vietnam that represented the true revolutionary force in Vietnam. It was their spontaneous self-activity that sustained the liberation struggle in South Vietnam despite receiving a lukewarm reception in official communist circles. *Caribbean International Opinion* captured two of the most inspirational political events of the 1960s, and in writing about, and demonstrating solidarity with, student and working class struggles in France and the peasantry in Vietnam, Harvey and Hector made important analytical contributions to the New Left. They were concerned with social change in the Caribbean and the world at large, and their essays informed their

²³¹ Hector, “Vietnam: The Struggle Against Imperialism,” 57-59.

²³² *Ibid.*, 59.

readers' understanding of revolutionary politics at a time when it appeared as though the world was on the brink of global change.

C.L.R. James taught CCC members that so-called ordinary people have the capacity to do extraordinary things; that they were capable of transforming society through their creative, self-organized activity. Very little has been written about the work of former CCC members in the Caribbean, but from the little that is known it is evident that they took James's lessons to heart as they made the transition from study and theory to direct involvement in politics. Shortly after the publication of *Caribbean International Opinion*, developments in the West Indies, linked to two Montreal events – the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair – gave political expression to their ideas while demonstrating the impact of the group's work in Canada and the Caribbean.

Chapter Five: From Theory to Praxis

When the Caribbean Conference Committee began planning its first conference in 1965, none of its members could have imagined the role the group would play in Canada and the Caribbean. Its conferences and publications created an awareness of the challenges confronting the colonial and post-colonial Caribbean while highlighting the possibilities that these challenges engendered. In the process, CCC members developed a vision of the Caribbean in which the poor and underprivileged played an active role in building a new society. From the outset, C.L.R. James played a significant role in the CCC's work and his importance to the group cannot be overstated. James embodied a tradition of socialist, Pan-African, and Caribbean political struggle within which the CCC could situate itself, and a political approach that provided the group with a notion of social change. But CCC members did not simply echo or regurgitate James's ideas; they creatively applied them to their reflections on Caribbean and global politics, and in the process, contributed analyses of the specific events about which they wrote while informing their readers' understanding of the dynamics of liberation in general.

While most of the emphasis has been placed on the CCC's theoretical contributions to the Caribbean liberation struggle and the New Left, the focus will now shift to an examination of the group's impact in Canada and the Caribbean. In Canada, the group inspired two important events – the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair – and indirectly contributed to the establishment of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. And in the Caribbean, former CCC members played central roles in a number of New Left groups. But it is important to note that, although the CCC had a significant impact in Canada and the Caribbean, it would be inaccurate to speak of

a Canadian *and* Caribbean impact as if they are unrelated. The work of the CCC and its individual members in Canada had direct bearing on political events in the Caribbean, and vice versa, and although Caribbean and Canadian historiography has generally neglected the group, this study suggests that it is time to rethink how Caribbean and Canadian New Left history has been framed.

The Congress of Black Writers

Caribbean International Opinion represented the last direct intervention of the Caribbean Conference Committee in Canada. By the end of 1968, Robert Hill, Tim Hector, and Franklyn Harvey had returned to the Caribbean, and Anne Cools was living in England. But although Alfie Roberts was the only core member of the group who remained in Canada, former CCC members Rosie Douglas, Raymond Watts, and Walton Look Lai were still based in Montreal, and sometime in 1968 the three came together to organize the Congress of Black Writers: Towards the Second Emancipation, The Dynamics of Black Liberation.

Despite the fact that it was not organized by the CCC, Alfie Roberts considered the Congress of Black Writers to be the climax of the CCC's "consciousness raising" activities.²³³ But whereas the CCC's conferences focused on the Caribbean, the Congress symbolized a shift towards Black Power among people of African descent in Canada.²³⁴ Held between 11 and 14 October 1968, the Congress unfolded in Quebec's politically

²³³ Alfie Roberts, *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James* (Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005), 76.

²³⁴ For analyses of the Black Power movement in the U.S. see Jefferey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004) and Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

charged atmosphere. If it is true that Montreal was Canada's epicenter of New Left politics, it is also true that the U.S. Black Power movement inspired Quebec nationalist groups, and especially the Front de Liberation du Québec (FLQ).²³⁵ But although FLQ members openly acknowledged their debt to Black Power, they were seemingly oblivious to the racial antagonisms simmering in Montreal. Writing in *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* in 1968, FLQ theorist Pierre Vallières was confident that, unlike the United States, "French Canadians are not subject to this irrational racism that has done so much wrong to the workers, white and black, of the United States. They can take no credit for that, since in Quebec there is no 'black problem.'"²³⁶ To his credit, Vallières revised his position in a subsequent edition of *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*. Perhaps his reconsideration occurred as a result of the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair which, if true, would represent an example of how Caribbean and Black radical politics in Montreal influenced the French Québécois left.²³⁷

Quebec politics had a significant impact on Black Montrealers. The electoral victory of John Lesage and the Quebec Liberal Party in 1960 signaled the beginning of the "Quiet Revolution," the end of premier Maurice Duplessis's stranglehold on Quebec politics, and a break with the religious and cultural control of the Catholic Church in the

²³⁵ Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 185. In 1966, Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon traveled to the U.S. in order to make contact and forge links with Black Power and Puerto Rican militants with the goal of forming a nationalist front against colonial oppressors. They distributed a declaration in the United Nations headquarters concerning incarcerated FLQ members in Montréal, and on Québec's decolonization movement. Pierre Vallières, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* (Montréal: Éditions Typo, 1994), 454. See Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 58.

²³⁶ Pierre Vallières, *The White Niggers of America* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1971), 21.

²³⁷ Vallières, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, 62. Vallières also overlooked the conditions of Quebec and Canada's indigenous population. It is known that Quebec poet and writer Gérald Godin attended the Congress of Black Writers and that African Canadian Rocky Jones's presentation was particularly appealing to him. See inscription on *Congress of Black Writers: Towards the Second Emancipation, the Dynamics of Liberation, Souvenir Program*, Fonds Charles Gagnon, 81P-660:02/16, Université du Québec à Montréal.

province. These events were an important part of Alfie Roberts's political awakening and he describes the CCC's conferences and the Congress of Black Writers as the "Black complement to the ongoing Québécois Quiet Revolution."²³⁸ Moreover, in addition to the social and political shifts occurring in Quebec in the 1960s, strikes by police officers, teachers, and taxi drivers, coupled with the activities of anti-poverty, women, and student organizations in Montreal also contributed to the heightened political consciousness of Blacks in the city as plans for the Congress of the Black Writers were underway.²³⁹

Participants gathered at the Congress to discuss and debate the history and struggles of people of African descent and the meaning of Black Power in the face of racism in the West and colonialism and neo-colonialism in the Third World. As the Congress' editorial declared: "The most noticeable characteristic of modern white oppression has been its guilt-ridden conscience" and that it "has always sought to justify its oppressive control over the other races by resorting to arrogant claims of inherent superiority, and attempting to denigrate the cultural and historical achievements of the oppressed peoples."²⁴⁰ The organizers recognized the importance of rewriting the history of those subjected to the violence and demoralization of colonial oppression and viewed the Congress as an attempt "to recall, in a series of popular lectures by black scholars, artists and politicians, a history which we have been taught to forget...in short, the history of the black liberation struggle, from its origins in slavery to the present day."²⁴¹ In order

²³⁸ Roberts, *A View for Freedom*, 57-58 and 73.

²³⁹ Denis Forsythe, "By Way of Introduction: The Sir George Williams Affair," in Denis Forsythe (ed.), *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams Affair and Its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montreal: Black Rose Books—Our Generation Press, 1971), 10.

²⁴⁰ Elder Thebaud and Rosie Douglas, "Editorial," *The Congress of Black Writers: Towards the Second Emancipation, The Dynamics of Black Liberation*, Souvenir Program (October 1968), Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

²⁴¹ Thebaud and Douglas, "Editorial."

to meet these objectives, the organizers invited some of the most prominent Black Power and Pan African figures of the period, including Stokely Carmichael, Walter Rodney, James Forman, Harry Edwards, C.L.R. James, and Richard B. Moore (writers Leroi Jones, René Depestre, and Eldridge Cleaver sent their regrets). However, reflecting a phenomenon that plagued the New Left, although women played a crucial role in organizing the Congress, they were conspicuously absent from the list of speakers.²⁴² In fact, the celebrated singer and South African exile Miriam Makeba was the only woman with a high public profile in attendance, and she was present in the shadow of her new husband, Stokely Carmichael, and was not a speaker. And almost as if to emphasize the subordinate place of women, the bulk of the speakers directed their comments to the “brothers” in the audience, seemingly oblivious to the presence of women in the room. The absence of women participants was reminiscent of the 1956 black writers conference in Paris, which led novelist Richard Wright to remark that, “When and if we hold another conference. . . . I hope there shall be an effective utilization of Negro womanhood in the world to help us mobilize and pool our forces” and that in “our struggle for freedom, against great odds, we cannot afford to ignore one half our manpower, that is, the force of women and their active collaboration. Blacks will not be free until their women are free.”²⁴³ Anne Cools, the only woman who was part of the CCC’s political core, was no doubt thinking similar thoughts when she wrote on women’s liberation in 1971. Unlike

²⁴² According to Sarah Evans, by 1967, “a generation of women in the new left had...begun to assert their own leadership abilities.... [T]hey had gained a new maturity and self-confidence as they broke through the boundaries of womanhood. Yet as they did so they simultaneously experienced the increased male domination of the left.” Many of the women who encountered their male colleagues’ shortcomings on the “woman question” and who were no longer willing to function in organizations entirely dominated by men, went on to become active members in the Women’s Movement. Sarah Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 193-194.

²⁴³ Richard Wright, “Traditional and Industrialization” in *Presence Africaine: The First International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists*, Nos. 8-9-10 (June-November 1956): 356.

the Caribbean Artists' Movement in England, which invited the esteemed Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia to participate in their activities, none of the CCC's keynote speakers were women. Perhaps reflecting on her involvement in a group that was dominated by men and which, despite its prolific theorizing, did not develop an analysis of gender relationships, Cools remarked that Black women "have reared their own children almost single-handedly and have carried them on their backs," as well as "all the burdensome, backbreaking and stultifying labour of both black and white society" while pointing "the way towards economic independence for the women of the world. Perhaps," Cools suggests, "it is time that society in general, and black men in particular, take a careful look at black women." "Black women, the slaves of the slaves, can have no peace, no rest," concludes Cools, "until they have evolved new social structures within which men can be Men, women can be Women, and their children, free-thinking total creative human beings."²⁴⁴

Despite its shortcomings, as one observer noted, the Congress represented an opportunity to "demonstrate the emotional intensity of blacks crying out in the wilderness" and spurred Black Canadians into political action. It also exorcised the pent-up anguish and frustration that had accumulated as a result of centuries of slavery, colonialism, and racial discrimination.²⁴⁵ For a brief moment, the presence of many of the "stars" of the Black Power movement transformed Montreal into a Black Power hub and, as future events would show, the Congress left its imprint on both Canada and the Caribbean.

²⁴⁴ Anne Cools, "Womanhood," in Black Spark Edition of the *McGill Free Press*, February 1971, 8.

²⁴⁵ Forsythe, "The Black Writers Conference," in *Let the Niggers Burn!*, 65.

Not only was the Congress of Black Writers organized by several former Caribbean Conference Committee members, but Franklyn Harvey appears to have influenced the meeting's direction from Trinidad through his correspondence with Rosie Douglas.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, along with Guyanese historian Walter Rodney, Robert Hill's presence at the Congress brought an important Caribbean dimension to the proceedings. As part of his attempt to put into practice the ideas he developed in "The Coming Struggle for Liberation," Hill collaborated with Rodney in Jamaica, organizing political discussions in the country's urban slums. Hill and Rodney traveled to Montreal in order to highlight the country's social and political situation and presented a joint statement at the Congress in which they described Jamaica's ruling elite "as merely acting as representatives of metropolitan-imperialist interests. Historically white and racist-oriented, these interests continue to stop attempts at creative social expression on the part of the black oppressed masses." According to the statement, hunger, insufficient water, drought, poor electricity supplies and telephone communications, and police brutality in Jamaica were all symptomatic of a government and a class that was unwilling to meet the needs of the majority of the population.²⁴⁷ After the meeting, Rodney was banned from Jamaica where he had been teaching at the University of the West Indies. Despite his popularity on the university campus, he was accused of engaging in subversive activity and labeled a grave security risk by Jamaica's government.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Franklyn Harvey to Alfie Roberts, 31 January 1969, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

²⁴⁷ Robert Hill and Walter Rodney, "Statement on the Jamaican Situation," in Walter Rodney, *Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle and L'Ouverture, 1990 [1969]), 12-15.

²⁴⁸ Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 113.

News of Rodney's expulsion sparked rioting in Jamaica and protest in Canada and England.²⁴⁹ Beginning with Abeng, the "Rodney Riots" marked the beginning of the Black Power movement and the resurgence of the left in the Anglophone Caribbean.²⁵⁰ Abeng was the first New Left group to emerge in the Anglophone Caribbean and the first of several Caribbean New Left groups that were directly tied to a former CCC member. Established in the aftermath of the Rodney's expulsion, Abeng was both a newspaper and a political group that brought together Jamaicans who were dissatisfied with established political order in the country.²⁵¹ Abeng galvanized Rastafarians, students, intellectuals, radical Catholics, and workers, and with Robert Hill serving as editor, the group's newspaper, *Abeng*, circulated articles on Black Power, revolutionary politics, and world events.²⁵² Internal differences contributed to its demise, but out of Abeng emerged the Worker's Liberation League (WLL), which later became the Worker's Party of Jamaica (WPJ).²⁵³ With the exception of Cuba's communist party, the WLL-WPJ was arguably the Caribbean's most influential left political party in the 1970s and 1980s whose reach extended to the Grenada Revolution (1979-1983).²⁵⁴ Abeng also influenced the leftward swing of Jamaica's People's National Party's (PNP), resulting in the PNP's platform of

²⁴⁹ See Jessica Huntley and Eric L. Huntley, "Publisher's Note," in *Groundings with My Brothers*, ii, Wouter de Wet, "Expulsion of Rodney 'Scandal,'" in *The Montreal Star* (19 October 1968), 3, and Anon., "Jamaicans Soldiers on Guard," in *The Montreal Star*, 18 October 1968, 3.

²⁵⁰ Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press: University of West Indies, 1996), 1–2. See also Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought*.

²⁵¹ David Scott, "The Dialectic of Defeat: An Interview with Rupert Lewis," in *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism*, vol. 5 no. 2 (September 2001), 99.

²⁵² See David Scott, "The Archaeology of Black Memory: An Interview with Robert A. Hill," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism*, no. 5 (March 1999): 85–94.

²⁵³ Scott, "The Dialectic of Defeat," 103 and "The Archaeology of Black Memory," 92.

²⁵⁴ Brian Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: An Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993), 151.

democratic socialism while its leader, Michael Manley, became a prominent Third World spokesperson in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵⁵

Like Robert Hill, Tim Hector also became an important Caribbean New Left figure. Shortly after his return to Antigua in 1968, he became actively involved in the Antiguan Workers Union and editor of its paper, *Trumpet*.²⁵⁶ He also became the leader of the Antiguan Caribbean Liberation Movement (ACLM), an outgrowth of the Afro-Caribbean Movement and through his involvement in the country's labour movement and organizing events such as African Liberation Day, Hector – and the ACLM – became an influential voice among the Caribbean left. As historian Paul Buhle argues, “scattered left-wingers looked to him [Hector] and to the *Outlet*,” a weekly newspaper Hector founded, “to uphold the red flag and to disassociate socialism from IMF-corrupted social democracy, demagogic racial populism, or Soviet-style party rule.”²⁵⁷ Not only was the ACLM important to Antiguan politics, but its Jamesian notion of de-centralized power distinguished it within the Caribbean for more than thirty years.²⁵⁸ As Paget Henry suggests, had the ACLM's Jamesian, bottom-up approach to politics been applied during the Grenada Revolution, the revolution might have averted sudden collapse in 1983.²⁵⁹ This is a significant claim considering that the Grenada Revolution was one of the most important political developments in modern Caribbean history whose end signaled the decline of the Caribbean left.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ Scott, “The Archaeology of Black Memory,” 91. See also Michael Manley, “We are Told... We Must Have More of this Disease,” *Harper's Magazine*, December 1983.

²⁵⁶ Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical's Story* (Jackson: The Press of University of Mississippi, 2006), 146.

²⁵⁷ Buhle, *Tim Hector*, 13-14.

²⁵⁸ Henry, “C.L.R. James and the Antiguan Left,” 225.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁶⁰ Meeks, *Revolution and Revolutionary Theory*, 129

From the foregoing it is evident that the CCC played a significant role in the emergence of the Caribbean New Left. Three former CCC members organized the Congress of Black Writers that brought Robert Hill and Walter Rodney to Montreal. Hill co-founded Abeng in the aftermath of the “Rodney Riots,” and not only was Abeng the first Caribbean New Left group, but it also helped give birth to the Worker’s Party of Jamaica. These details, along with Tim Hector’s work within the ACLM, place CCC members at the centre of both Black radical politics in Canada and the New Left in the West Indies. But these are not the only important Canadian and Caribbean New Left events that involved former CCC members. In 1969, another Montreal event – the Sir George Williams Affair – had a significant impact in Canada and the Caribbean, and like the Congress of Black Writers, it too had a strong connection to the work of the CCC. The Sir George Williams Affair was one of the most costly student rebellions of the 1960s, resulting in \$2,000,000 in damages to the university.²⁶¹ But beyond its financial costs, the incident had a significant social cost as, when it was over, Canada’s reputation as a society that had escaped the “race question” was shattered.²⁶²

Sir George

The Sir George Williams Affair began in the spring of 1968 when several students, most of whom were Black (two were Asians), lodged a complaint against Perry Anderson, a biology professor, to the university administration. According to the grievance, Anderson was deliberately failing the students or consistently awarding them

²⁶¹ Dorothy Eber *The Computer Centre Party: Canada Meets Black Power: That Sir George Williams Affair* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1969), 8.

²⁶² Omawale, “Introduction,” in *Grounding with My Brothers*, v., and Meeks, *Radical Caribbean*, 13.

low grades. The complaint was made to the Dean of Students, Magnus Flynn, on 28 April 1968 and although the Dean met with the complainants in May 1968, the general feeling among the students was that they were not being taken seriously.²⁶³ The students were inspired to reissue their complaint in the fall of 1968 after participating in the Congress of Black Writers and the Hemispheric Conference to end the Vietnam War. The latter conference took place in Montreal only a few weeks after the Congress and the presence of Black Panthers, White radicals, as well as Latin American and other Third World activists – all condemning the Vietnam War and American imperialism – hardened the students' resolve to pursue their case with the university.²⁶⁴

When discussions with the university administration floundered, the students decided to up the ante. Following an impromptu rally on 29 January 1969, over two hundred students occupied the university's computer room.²⁶⁵ The occupation lasted two weeks, during which Sir George Williams University and racism in Canada were placed in the media spotlight. But when news spread that a putative settlement had been reached with the university administration, the students and their supporters began trickling out of the computer center. It was only when the police raided the centre on 11 February and arrested the protesters that the remaining occupants realized that no formal agreement had been ratified.²⁶⁶ By then a large crowd had gathered outside the Sir George Williams Hall Building. For weeks, the general public had been saturated with the idea that the

²⁶³Butcher, "The Anderson Affair," in *Let the Niggers Burn!*, in *Let the Niggers Burn!*, 79.

²⁶⁴Forsythe, "The Black Writers Conference: Days to Remember," 68.

²⁶⁵Butcher, "The Anderson Affair," 91.

²⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 95.

protesters were rabble-rousers, violent communists, or Maoist agents.²⁶⁷ Now, as smoke emerged from computer room, some onlookers began the incendiary chant of “Let the Niggers Burn!” as stunned supporters of the protesters paraded placards inscribed “Montreal, Alabama,” and with other references that equated Canadian racism with southern U.S. segregation.²⁶⁸

As someone who had sat in C. L. R. James’s political classes in Montreal, the Sir George Williams Affair provided Alfie Roberts with important lessons on the dynamics of social change and brought James’s views on self-organization to life. According to Roberts, the protesters organized themselves in the computer center, some taking charge of security while others prepared food or monitored the computers to ensure they were kept in pristine working order and maintained at the correct operating temperature. Roberts also noted that visitors to the computer room, including professors, submitted to the authority of the students during the occupation, presenting their identification before entering the room. When the arrest of the occupants became public knowledge, hundreds of people spontaneously marched in the streets in support for the students and lined up in front of the apartment of a known supporter in order to contribute to a legal fund for the arrestees. For Roberts, the protests underscored in microcosm the ability of “ordinary” people to organize their lives and communities.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷For an interesting take on the “Maoist plot” during the occupation see Eugene D. Genovese in Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 105–06 and Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (1968; reprinted New York, 1971), v.

²⁶⁸Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 7 as well as photos in the book. It has never been publicly disclosed how the fire started.

²⁶⁹Ibid., 85. In addition to drafting the letter stating the student’s demands which were submitted to the university administration, Roberts also did security at the entrance to the computer room. Roberts was not the only one who believed that the occupation was an example self-organization. See, Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 142.

Another former CCC member also found the occupation instructive. Writing from Antigua for a special edition of McGill University's *Free Press*, Tim Hector observed that the media and general public seemed to be more concerned with the fact that the university's computers had been destroyed than with the impact of the incident on the students.²⁷⁰ Hector nonetheless found consolation in the fact that the Sir George Williams Affair demonstrated that Black people were no longer "prepared to have their humanity denied and challenged, and not have that denial and challenge taken seriously. When they are not taken seriously," he concluded, "they will destroy sacred cows (computers) and shake the pillars of the universe. . . . In so doing they will ensure the triumph of humanity eventually, at which time man will reign supreme, and not property."²⁷¹

Like the "Rodney Riots," the Sir George Williams Affair sparked protest in the Caribbean. Canada's Governor-General, Roland Michener, was confronted by hostile students during a visit to the Caribbean in February 1969 and was removed from the University of the West Indies campus in Trinidad for his own security. The following year, Black Power protests gripped the island, triggered by the trial of ten Trinidadians in Montreal for their involvement in Sir George Williams Affair.²⁷² In an attempt to quell the protest, the government of Eric Williams declared a state of emergency and called in the Trinidad armed forces. A section of the army refused to use force against the population and, along with a group of civilians, attempted a *coup d'etat*. Former CCC

²⁷⁰Tim Hector, "Students and Computers," in the Black Spark Edition of the *Free Press*, 18 February 1971, 13. This special edition of the *Free Press* was coordinated by Alfie Roberts, Anne Cools, Rosie Douglas, and Allan Brown, one of the initial complainants in the Sir George Williams Affair. Hector's observation appears to have substance as, writing only a few years after the occupation, historian Robin Winks described the event as a "thoughtless, needless, and frustrated destruction of the twentieth century's symbol of quantification, the ultimate equality – Sir George Williams University's computer center." Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1997), 415.

²⁷¹Hector, "Students and Computers," 13.

²⁷²Delisle Worrell, "Canadian Economic Involvement in the West Indies," in Forsythe, *Let the Niggers Burn!*, 41-42.

member Raymond Watts played an active role in these events, serving as a liaison between the army and other civilians involved in the plot, but the coup attempt ended when, with the threat of U.S. marines and Venezuelan submarines on Trinidad's shores, the revolting army returned to the barracks.²⁷³ As Valerie Belgrave, one of the Caribbean students who occupied the computer center at Sir George emphasizes, the leaders of the Black Power protests had direct links to the protestors at Sir George. The National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) not only led the street protests in Trinidad, but also visited Montreal to confer with and show their support for the students.²⁷⁴ NJAC activists were also aware that Canada was a major investor in the Caribbean and targeted Canadian companies during their protests.²⁷⁵

In the aftermath of the Sir George Williams Affair, Franklyn Harvey was also actively involved in the Caribbean New Left. Harvey was one of the driving forces behind two New Left groups – the Trinidad-based New Beginning Movement (NBM) and Movement for the Assemblies of the People (MAP) in Grenada.²⁷⁶ Very little has been written about NBM and MAP. NBM produced a number of publications, including its popular newspaper, *New Beginning*, and according to Brian Meeks, MAP organized popular assemblies in Grenada that were critical to the success of the Grenada Revolution and bore the undeniable markings of C.L.R. James's decentralized, bottom-up approach

²⁷³ Meeks, *Radical Caribbean*, 31-32; Omawale, "Introduction," vi.

²⁷⁴ Valerie Belgrave, "The Sir George Williams Affair," in Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart, with the assistance of Roy McCree, *The Black Power Revolution, 1970: A Retrospective* (St. Augustine (Trinidad): I.S.E.R., The University of the West Indies 1995), 130. Ibid., 42. See Meeks, *Radical Caribbean*, 3-32.

²⁷⁵ Worrell, "Canadian Economic Involvement in the West Indies," 41-56.

²⁷⁶ Perry Mars, *Ideology and Change: The Transformation of the Caribbean Left* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 50. See also Paget Henry, "C.L.R. James and the Antiguan Left," Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.) *C.L.R. James Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 240.

to politics.²⁷⁷ MAP later merged with several other groups to form the New Jewel Movement which inaugurated the Grenada Revolution, the single-most important event in the history of the Anglophone Caribbean left.

The Sir George Williams Affair illustrates the intricate links between the work of the CCC, Canada, and the Caribbean New Left. The fact that two of the leaders of the Sir George Williams Affair were former CCC members speaks volumes about the group. So too does Raymond Watts's role in Trinidad 1970. The Sir George Williams Affair also rallied and brought a sense of unity and cohesion among Blacks in the Montreal and served as a catalyst for a variety of Black community institutions – newspapers, educational and community centers, a theatre company, and a television program – designed to meet the community's growing needs.²⁷⁸ Rosie Douglas served a prison sentence for his involvement in Sir George, and in the process became a leading spokesperson for Blacks in Canada and an active participant in the struggles of First Nations communities in Canada. When he was released from prison, Warren Hart, an African American F.B.I. agent on loan to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), befriended Douglas and became his personal driver. Hart had reputedly been a bodyguard for Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, but years later it was alleged that he had been implicated in the assassination of Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton and in a failed assassination attempt on Tim Hector.²⁷⁹ In an article published in *Outlet* in Antigua, Hector revealed an international plot involving the Antiguan-based Canadian-

²⁷⁷ Paget Henry, "C.L.R. James and the Antiguan Left," Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds.) *C.L.R. James Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 205. Meeks, *Revolution and Revolutionary Theory*, 146.

²⁷⁸ Belgrave, "The Sir George Williams Affair," 131 and Dorothy Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 123-138.

²⁷⁹ Linda McQuaig, "The Man with the Guns," *The Gazette: Today Magazine*, 13 June 1981, 8.

American multinational, Space Research Corporation, which Hart once worked for. The company was allegedly shipping illegal military weapons from New Brunswick in Canada to South Africa, using Antigua as a transshipment point.²⁸⁰ When the plot made international headlines, Hart was apparently sent to silence Hector.²⁸¹ Hart later revealed his RCMP work when Canadian authorities denied him landed immigrant status and returned him to the U.S. He contacted a Canadian Minister of Parliament and his revelations led to a national commission which, when it concluded, resulted in the creation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service in order to separate Canadian intelligence from police work.²⁸²

Clearly, the CCC's influence extended well beyond the realm of its ideas. While its reading, discussion, and correspondence played a central role in the group's political development, its publications were circulated among West Indians and members of the left. Coupled with its public forums, which brought many of the Caribbean's leading intellectuals to Montreal, the CCC's work shaped and informed the actions of its members and adherents alike. The Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair were rooted in the wave of global protests that gripped the world in 1968, and in many ways these events represented Canada's Black and Caribbean complement to these worldwide rebellions. As we have seen, these events significantly influenced social and political developments in Canada and the Caribbean, and former CCC members played leading roles in organizing them. They were organizers of and

²⁸⁰Race Today Collective in cooperation with Antiguan Caribbean Liberation Movement. "The Antiguan Connection," *Race Today*, 29 January 1979, 4–5.

²⁸¹Ibid. See also Peter Moon, "Bitterness Remains on Caribbean Island after Canadian Arms Company Forced Out," *The Globe and Mail*, 10 March 1980.

²⁸² See Tim Riordan Raaflaub "Civilian Oversight of the RCMP's National Security Functions," Library of Parliament, 11 January 2006, 1.

spokespersons for the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair and in the Caribbean, one of its members co-founded Abeng, the first of the Caribbean's major New Left groups. Given the historical cross-currents involved, it would be difficult to simply characterize the CCC's work solely in either Canadian or Caribbean historical terms. In fact, in many ways, the history of the CCC represents a quintessential example of trans-national history, a history which defies simple geographic borders, and one in which people and ideas circulate from one region to the next, influencing social, cultural, and political developments on all sides in a series of tidal shifts between North America's Atlantic seaboard and the Caribbean basin.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this study it was argued that the Caribbean Conference Committee was the group most responsible for the emergence of the Caribbean New Left and that the group belongs in the historiography of the New Left. It was also suggested that one of the main reasons why the CCC has been excluded from the historiography is due to the fact that Black and immigrant political groups are generally excluded from North American New Left histories, and that the Caribbean is generally omitted from global histories of the New Left.

Chapter one of this study traced the CCC's roots back to Robert Hill's political experience in Jamaica's Young Socialist League. It also illustrated how this experience was reflected in the CCC's two founding documents – "The Coming Struggle for Liberation" and "A Proposal for a C.L.R. James Study Circle." Both documents questioned the Caribbean elite's ability to lead and argued that the West Indian underclass will have to play a leading role if genuine social change is to occur in the Caribbean.

Chapter two examined the CCC's relationship to C.L.R. James and Facing Reality. It was argued that, as a result of their collaboration with Facing Reality and their study of James's work, the CCC adopted James's notion of spontaneity and self-organization which they later adopted in their analysis of Caribbean and global events. Chapters three and four illustrate how James's ideas factored into the CCC's analysis of Cuba, France 1968, and Vietnam. Drawing on the ideas of their mentor, CCC members debated and critically assessed political developments in these countries, and in the case

of Cuba and Vietnam, the conditions of the most marginalized and oppressed served as a barometer of each movement's progress and success.

Through its conferences, essays, correspondence, and debates the Caribbean Conference Committee educated its members and readers about the Caribbean and political events around the world. As we have seen, long after the group ceased to exist, it continued to have an impact in Canada and the Caribbean, playing an active role in the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair, while serving as a catalyst for the New Left in the Anglophone Caribbean. The core of the CCC comprised no more than six individuals, and yet it was able to influence events in Canada and the Caribbean in a way that seems well out of proportion to its size. Although the CCC's primary concern was the Caribbean, their work contributed to revolutionary theory, and their analysis of Caribbean politics raised universal questions about leadership and organizing for social change. And as we saw in Franklyn Harvey and Tim Hector's essays on France in 1968 and Vietnam, the group also challenged the validity of official left and communist leaders in both countries.

The CCC's work also poses questions about transnational history. The roots of the group trace back to Robert Hill's experience in the Young Socialist League and the CCC was founded with Hill's work with this group in mind. But it was in Canada that the CCC was established and its influence in the Caribbean begins with its conferences and publications and events such as the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams. Not only did the CCC's work in Canada served as a catalyst for the New Left movement in Caribbean, but former CCC members played active roles in this movement, attempting to apply ideas developed in Canada in the Caribbean context. Clearly, Canada

occupies an important place in the history of the Caribbean, and the role of Caribbean New Left members who once sojourned in Canada deserves to be highlighted in the historiography.

Legacy and Future Research

Future work on the CCC might benefit from comparative studies. For example, the CCC was one of many New Left groups based in Montreal, and there are strong parallels between its ideas and those of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ). Robert Hill and FLQ theorist Pierre Vallières were profoundly influenced by the U.S. Black Power movement which, by the mid 1960s, was inspiring movements around the world.²⁸³ Despite the different contexts about which they wrote, Hill and Vallières were also political-intellectuals who reflected on the meaning of national liberation. Their reflections were rooted in analyses of their particular struggles, grounded in centuries of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, on the one hand, and the British conquest of New France on the other.²⁸⁴ In refining their understanding of colonialism, Hill and Vallières drew on Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and like Fanon, the two theorists were sensitive to the plight of the underclass and believed that national liberation, in-and-of-itself, did not mean liberation for everyone involved; that bourgeois nationalists and anti-colonial leaders often betray the ideals of their movements once in

²⁸³ David Austin, "Frantz Fanon: The Wretched of the Earth," CBC Radio One Ideas, November 2006. Vallières, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, 128.

²⁸⁴ See Robert Hill, "The Coming Struggle for Liberation," (unpublished), n.d., 1, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute and Pierre Vallières, "Quebec: Nationalism and the Working Class," *Monthly Review*, vol. 16, no. 10, February 1965, p. 597.

power, leaving the most vulnerable to fend for themselves.²⁸⁵ Hill and Vallières also challenged the notion that elite parties and revolutionary leaders could lead *les damnés de la terre* towards liberation, and although they were both influenced by the writings of Karl Marx, they jettisoned the “scientificism” of French philosopher Louis Althusser, among others, in favor of a more humanist, flexible variant of Marxism that privileged the creative capacities of the underclass.²⁸⁶

Another group, the Caribbean Artist Movement (CAM) also bears similarities to the CCC. Based in London, England between 1966 and 1972, CAM organized conferences and events involving George Lamming, C.L.R. James, Orlando Patterson and other prominent West Indians who were also involved in CCC activities. Like the CCC, some of CAM’s participants returned to the Caribbean to play important roles in the political and arts scene while others remained in England and were actively involved in Black British politics.²⁸⁷ A systematic comparison of the two groups would shed light on the social, cultural, and political experiences of Caribbean expatriates and how these experiences contributed to political developments in the Caribbean.

Although women played an active role in organizing CCC events, only one woman, Anne Cools, was part of the group’s political-intellectual core. Cools was not a prolific writer and did not leave a paper trail of her work in the group, but like many women who were actively involved in groups largely dominated by men, she became an

²⁸⁵ Hill, “The Coming Struggle for Liberation,” 2, David Austin, “The Wretched of the Earth,” on *Ideas*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, November 2005, and Vallières, “Quebec: Nationalism and the Working Class,” 604.

²⁸⁶ See Robert Hill, “Draft of Article on L. Althusser (based mainly upon reading his “On Contradiction” in *New Left Review* of January-February, 1967),” unpublished, n.d., and Vallières, *Nègres blancs d’Amérique*, 337.

²⁸⁷ Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement, 1966-1972: A Literary and Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books Ltd., 1992).

active feminist who is credited with influencing a new generation of women in Canada.²⁸⁸ Further research would highlight her role in the CCC, the challenges she likely faced as the group's sole woman, her role in the Sir George Williams Affair, and her work in the post-Sir George period.

The issue of power and leadership also deserves further attention. The CCC's notion of spontaneity and self-organization provided a theoretical framework in which they imagined political organizing occurring outside the control of left parties and labour unions. But as the Roberts-Hector debate demonstrated, there remain some lingering questions about this approach. For example, Tim Hector makes convincing arguments in his indictment of Cuba for failing to involve the majority of the population in the political process, but appears to downplay the role that the U.S. embargo against the Revolution played in Cuba's decision to develop close ties with the U.S.S.R. He also overlooks how U.S. hostility to Cuba influenced the country's centralized political structure and the imposition of stringent security measures. As Martin Glaberman asked in his letter to Alfie Roberts, how much of Cuba's problems are self-imposed and to what extent is the threat of U.S. intervention to blame for decisions made in the country.²⁸⁹ The issue of balance seems to be an important factor here, and while Hector is correct in arguing that the active participation of the mass of Cuba's population should have been prioritized by the Revolution, it is also important to consider how external factors influenced Cuba's political course.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Evans, *Personal Politics*. For an account of Anne Cools's influence as a member of the woman's movement see Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2005), 9-10.

²⁸⁹ Martin Glaberman to Alfie Roberts, 4 May 1967, Alfie Roberts Papers, Alfie Roberts Institute.

²⁹⁰ The Grenada Revolution faced similar challenges and its rigid adoption of Soviet-style Marxism, coupled with its failure to strike a balance between securing the revolution from foreign intervention and

Despite its small size and short existence, the CCC accomplished a great deal, and future research will only enhance our appreciation for the group's work. But in my view, the group's lasting legacy lies in its audacity. Members of the CCC dared to imagine a new world, and for them, imaging this new world was a stage in the process of actively working towards bringing this world into being. The world they imagined has yet to be realized and they no doubt discovered that developing theories and carrying them through are two very different endeavors that present different challenges. Nonetheless, they were willing to act, and as a result of their efforts, we are left with a body of ideas and a history that will no doubt inform future struggles for a more just and humane world. This is what I believe to be the group's lasting legacy.

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