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None Shall Escape: Radical perspectives in the Caribbean

Fundi

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1988

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Trinidad

1970: Rebellion of African and Indian unemployed and sugar workers sparked by student demonstrations. Army mutinies. 1973: Sabotage of sugar and other industries by workers. \$200 000 appropriated from bank by youths, political leaflet issued at scene.

Guyana

1972: Bauxite workers wildcat shortly after bauxite industry nationalized. 1973: Indian and African sugar workers occupy sugar estate lands and build houses.

Surinam

1969: Labor unrest and general strike. 1973: Repeated on a larger scale with riots of unemployed.

Panama

Students and workers protest US occupation of Canal Zone, violent confrontations with US soldiers.

Curacao

1969: Oil workers wildcat, riots of unemployed and employed workers.

Anguilla

1969: Under popular pressure political leaders are forced to declare secession for associated states (administrative grouping of British controlled islands). British troops invade island.

Antigua

1969–73: Strikes, demonstrations and riots as sugar industry is phased out to make way for tourism.

Dominica

1973: Agricultural workers of Castle Bruce estate and villagers struggle to take control of estate and manage it themselves.

St Lucia

1973: Banana workers wildcat

Grenada

1973: General strike. Rebellion eventually closing down airport. Government receives state aid from Trinidad.

Radical perspectives in the Caribbean

The following is a compilation of excerpts from a forum on Grenada and Jamaica, which was held in San Francisco in December, 1983, follow-up interviews and informal discussions. The edited statements belong to a 53-year-old Jamaican named Fundi. The basis for his critical analysis of Grenada and the English-speaking Caribbean comes from a history of first-hand experiences with collective revolt in Jamaica.

In 1967 he worked as a refrigeration mechanic at Western Meat Packers in the parish of Westmoreland. This area of Jamaica has the largest meat packing plant and the largest sugar refinery in the Caribbean outside of Cuba. Fundi was one of many workers who started the first strike in the history of Western Meat packers when a woman co-worker was fired for refusing to stand in a puddle while working on tile assembly line. By Jamaican law and institutional practice, workers must keep working while the dismissal of a Co-worker is being challenged. But in this instance, tile meat packing workers spontaneously shifted the fate of rebel workers from union office negotiators to instantaneous strike action.

Later in 1968, Fundi again became involved in a six week strike of sugar workers at the West Indies Sugar Company. This led to the formation of a broad-based Sugar Workers Council which took the government and unions by surprise.

The ongoing conflict between autonomous workers action and union/state representation has been detailed by a group of Caribbean Situationists in the LP recording “None Shall Escape.” In that album Fundi describes the resistance against hierarchical, representational forms of organization by Caribbean radicals:

From the start we saw through the fraud of the “independent” unions that ground up the meat packing and sugar factory workers. We decided that the union bureaucracy must stop; that there should not be any

mediation between us and the boss for this has been responsible for suppressing confidence in ourselves to take up the total task of ending capitalism. So we took control of our union dues. We developed the capacity for instant strike action. We had meetings on the factory compound and the farms during work hours against the wishes of the boss and traditional unionism. We took control of the canteen. Such actions are the bedrock of direct participation which stands in truth against the lies of centralized leadership.

Cuba

Committees for the defense of the revolution defend country against Bay of Pigs invasion. Instead of further formation into workers' councils of self-management, the committees were recuperated into state functions.

Dominican Republic

: Revolt against military coup which overthrew Bosch. American Marines invade to maintain the power of the military. As in most Latin-American countries, the situation is confused by a host of so-called revolutionary organizations stifling the spontaneity of real struggle.

Jamaica

Demonstration of University students, rebellion of Rastas and unemployed workers against ban of Walter Rodney. 1969: workers at Western Meat Packers establish democratic control over their trade union local, taking full control over union dues and factory canteen, negotiating with their employer without official mediation, and taking up direct organizational relations with sugar workers and local community. Recuperated by I.T.A.C in 1971. 1970: Massive prison break at Bamboo. 1973: Appropriations from banks, betting shops and warehouses continue. Wave of arson in Kinston. Demonstrations for the release of prisoners. Initiate by women. Demonstrations by students and workers against police brutality.

Bermuda

1968: Riots

Belize

1972: Riots

to intervene. Eventually a popular army commander was able to secure their surrender, after shelling by the Coast Guard.

The revolutionary initiative shifted away from the masses and Williams was saved. By 1973 armed guerrillas, the National Union of Freedom Fighters (NUFF) were “pranching” in the hills of Trinidad — attacking police stations and other targets. NUFF was snuffed out by 1975.

What I want to talk about are some of the roots of the immediate conflict in Grenada that found comrade killing comrade. In particular, I am going to talk about the Communists and Socialists and how from inside that gathering a very difficult and serious revolution is taking place.

In 1952 the left-wing was expelled from the People’s National Parry (PNP) in Jamaica. In 1953 this group then formed the Communist Party (CP) in Jamaica. I became a member of that group and for the next decade about all we read was about Stalin. In fact we read everything Stalin ever wrote [laughter from the audience]. But when Khrushchev denounced Stalin in the mid-’50s, it caused a considerable amount of confusion among us. When new ideas started to come — because we never knew about anyone else but Stalin or Lenin. We began to think about what was happening. There were some folks from the Socialist Workers Party in the U.S. who came to Jamaica and introduced the ideas of Trotsky. So we started to get into Trotsky and left from being Stalinists to become Trotskyists and Maoists [more laughter]. We believed that Trotsky represented a democratic expression of the revolutionary process in Russia as opposed to what Stalin was about.

About that tune, C.L. R. James, George Padmore and others were part of what was called the ‘political Bureau’ in London. They were protesting and struggling for independence in Africa and in the West Indian colonies of Britain. C.L. R. James (himself a Trotskyist) had quarrels with the Russian Comintern [Stalinist Communist international] early in the 1940s because there was a doctrine coming out of Russia that the independence of African people would come after the World War was won by the allied forces. C.L.R. James and others from the “political bureau” felt that independence should be a process that happens now, whatever time is appropriate, unattached to whether Russia, Germany or Allied Forces won the war.

In 1956 C.L.R. James wrote a pamphlet about the Hungarian Revolution called Facing Reality. This was the first time we began to

see critically what was happening in Communist countries. This was very new to its. There were a lot of people, both in the West Indies and students studying abroad who were attracted to James's ideas: the development of workers councils in Hungary and the extent to which this democratic process was indeed a revolutionary process. We were surprised how this happened to be so much in conflict with the Russians that they had to send tanks to destroy what was taking place in Hungary.

I mention all this because up to the 70s most of the radicals and activists in the West Indies came out of this school of ideas. We had passed through all the ideas of Stalin and Trotsky until they had become unsatisfactory to us. We had hoped for a far more democratic manifestation in the West Indies than what was taking place in Russia -and that is part of the root of the current problem. In Jamaica there was the Young Socialist League and the Unemployed Workers Councils; in Antigua the Afro-Caribbean movement in Trinidad the New Beginning movement, and in a number of places all over the islands organizations sprang up (not from Soviet associations but from progressive ideas of local activists) that definitely expressed the influence of CLR James and the Hungarian revolution.

At the same time, some old currents, of Stalin being the right opinion, re-entered the West Indies. And a conflict developed, a considerable conflict, in all of the radical organizations and there were splits. On the one side were people who ferociously defended Russia. They were talking about things like Russia was going to win the war against America and, therefore, we should support Russia. But there were other free-thinkers who were seeing that there would be no winners in a nuclear war, or any war at all, between the super-powers.

In the trade union movement there were also differences: the Communists were defending the same old bureaucratic traditions and style about how the trade unions should be organized. On the other side of the split were those who were talking about work-

appropriations from banks, warehouses, stores, betting shops and a wave of arson and crime erupted in Kingston. Demonstrations initiated by students and workers and unemployed women against police brutality and for the release of prisoners plagued the Manley regime.

Trinidad 1970

It was in Trinidad and Tobago in 1970 that the very foundations of bourgeois parliamentary society, the church, and all the institutions of power were shaken up in one of the most profound rebellions in the Caribbean, which found workers, academics and intellectuals, and small farmers linking up against the system. The government of Prime Minister Eric Williams, the author of *Capitalism and Slavery*, was almost toppled as hundreds of people took to the street in a renunciation of parliamentary politics, stressing a "people's politics" in which new institutions would emerge. The revolt, which drew its influence from the Black Civil Rights struggle in the U.S., occurred against a backdrop of racism at the Sir George Williams University in Montreal, where West Indian students destroyed a computer center. In the course of their fight the students earned the solidarity and respect of West Indians at home.

After years of rule by Williams, noted for his slogan "Massa Day Gone," the people erupted against the neo-colonial system instituted in the oil rich nation by a leader who had posed in 1956 as anti-colonial and "Black Power" was the rallying cry of the thousands who experienced the realities of rule by the Black middle class. And as the revolt gathered steam, the "Black Power" advocates moved to unite both Indians and Blacks by attempting a march into the sugar areas, linking up both forces who were previously divided around Black versus Indian parliamentary policies. A section of the army led by Lieutenants Riffique Shah and Lasselles, mutinied. Venezuelan and American gunboats stood offshore ready

shaken by wildcat strikes of workers, riots by employed and unemployed workers. Labor unrest broke out in Surinam, leading to a general strike. In Antigua there were riots, strikes and demonstrations over several years as the sugar industry was phased out. In Jamaica workers at Western Meat Packers established democratic control of their trade union local, taking full control over union dues and the factory canteen, negotiating with their employer without official mediators and taking up direct organizational relations with sugar workers and the local community.

1971

Agricultural workers in Guadeloupe staged wildcat strikes which were supported by strikes of students and riots by the unemployed, while the Communist Party organized thugs to beat students back into the classrooms.

1973

After the state nationalized the American-and Canadian-owned bauxite companies in Guyana, the workers went on a wildcat strike as the same old backward social relations remained. The workers dubbed the new Guyanese bureaucrats the “New Canadians.” Guyanians of African and Indian descent “captured” and occupied sugar estate lands to build houses and to farm. Surinam also saw an expanded general strike of workers on a much larger scale than that of 1969 and it was joined by riots of the unemployed. St. Lucia also experienced a wildcat strike of banana workers. In Dominica, agricultural workers and people in the villages occupied and captured part of the British-owned Castle Bruce Estates, attempting to manage it themselves, after the manager had refused to fire a list of workers whom the Owners had ordered the manager to fire. In Jamaica, after a year of easing of class tensions and waiting on Manley to institute his election promises of “Better Must Come,”

ers’ councils, much more decentralized and much more democratic than what the Communists were defending in the independent (the “independent” unions were so-called because they were break-offs that were not associated to either the ruling or opposition political parties) trade unions movement.

The New Jewel movement was one of these groups which came out of this democratic tradition. In different countries we were using different names about how this organization would be. You hear in the New Jewel movement the term “peoples assemblies” in Jamaica you hear the term “workers councils”, in Antigua and Trinidad you hear “community councils” and in other Islands similar democratic expressions as opposed to the high powered name of a centralized political power.

In New York city there were representatives sending information, money, food and clothes back into the islands to support these democratic groupings — of which the New Jewel movement was one. When [Maurice] Bishop came to New York city — before he became head of the Government [in Grenada] — we discussed his democratic intentions. You see, Bishop was a student of CLR James. We all were in the Caribbean so to speak. But Bishop was confused about what exactly James was all about. You see, one of the things James did when he returned to Trinidad was to form a political party. Here he was writing, in *Facing Reality*, about the strength of the Hungarian revolution manifesting itself in workers’ councils, and then he goes back to Trinidad and starts a political party. Of course, James didn’t stay with the party long. I think he couldn’t combine his perspective as an internationalist with an immediate practice in Trinidad. Long before any of the Islands became independent, James was a very active proponent of a West Indies Federation. He believed that a Federation of all the Islands would be more democratic and closer to the possibility of generalized self-management than to start with the tedious task of developing councils in a small way.

Bishop and the New Jewel movement did not escape James's (and others') ambivalence on social organization. In fact no sooner than the coup was made against Gairy than people began to see the establishment of a political party — and an immediate move away from the democratic expression began to take place in Grenada, instantaneously after the revolution.

Here is what looking into the psychological dimension of consciousness tells us they were on a very dangerous path. When those guys got into power they began to concentrate on the same charisma, the same rhetoric, the same spectacle of appearances as the bourgeois parties. Bishop got extremely caught up in this.

Bishop got caught up in a process that was happening throughout the Caribbean. In Jamaica you had the formation of two Communist parties in one week. In Trinidad you had the New Beginning Movement reverting back to a re-reading of Lenin and an abandonment of looking to the Hungarian revolution and what took place in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Some were turning back to reading Lenin and Stalin again. In New York City this caused a break tip of the support group and all over the West Indies there were splits.

But a number of us free thinkers influenced by the Rastafarian movement (in that old anti-authoritarian spirit that existed in Jamaica) saw that we had to stick to some serious and definite principles. So we decided to stay away from representatives and electoral politics. We began to see ourselves as facilitators who avoided all the bureaucratic positions in organizations.

I myself became interested in new dimensions of revolution the psychological dimensions. For instance, the individual weaknesses, the backward bourgeois values that people were carrying along with them. Since I came to America and ran into the ideas of Marcuse, the Situationists, and others I began to see a wealth of ideas that were extremely refreshing. One of the lessons I learned from this milieu is that the victims of exploitation are responsible for their own liberation. This is in opposition to the ideas of Bishop

A period of revolt

I know you count them for nothing, because the state is armed, but I beg you permit me to tell you that one should count them for much, every time they count themselves for everything. They are there: they themselves begin to count your police for nothing, and the misfortune for *you* is that their strength consists of their imagination. And one can say to *rahtid*, that as opposed to all other kinds of power, with imagination they can do — when they arrive at a certain point — every thing they think they can.

The background against which the New Jewel emerged in Grenada was one of intense confrontations and conflicts between rulers and the fundamental class throughout the Caribbean. It was a catalog of revolts:

1965

In the Dominican Republic a popular revolt against a military coup drowned in blood by a U.S. invasion.

1967

A spontaneous rebellion of agricultural workers in Guadeloupe.

1968

Blacks in Bermuda rioted against racist, colonialist control.

1969

Violent confrontations against U.S. soldiers by students and workers protesting U.S. occupation of the Canal Zone. Curacao was

U.A.W.U

University and Allied Workers Union

and those guys in Grenada who took the position that the people were not conscious and, therefore, not responsible.

This [alleged] irresponsibility can be excused, in their view, because a certain amount of time is needed...15, 20 or 100 years is needed for them to get conscious and during this time political leaders will assume responsibility for their liberation. Bishop believed in that, that leaders have to manage a program of consciousness raising and pass people through various stages. The consequences are that the people themselves in Grenada now cannot provide themselves with the opportunity to participate. When Bishop and those guys took power from Gairy they should have submitted it to the people, they should have given people all the power. In a very physical way, they could have done this if they set about arming the people instead of forming a standing army of the state.

In my personal experience, what we were trying to do with the development of the sugar workers councils in Jamaica was to show that it was when those who can't read or write nor do anything at all began to assume responsibility, and when those who were reading a lot and who had a lot of experience saw ourselves as facilitators, refused positions of any kind within an organization and let people know very plainly that it is upon the basis of their responsibility whether this thing will succeed or not — it was then that we saw tremendous results take place. [Clapping and cheering from the audience.]

Now when I talk to people about what was happening in Grenada, I say, "look! they were definitely on a path of failure. Shortly after the coup they moved from people's assemblies to the formation of a political party, and then to executive councils, and on and on. They used Lenin as a model, as this great organizer, and then applied that to a philosophy of stages of revolution. So that that there is a stage ova period of time when the people who are not politically conscious must wait for the consolidation of this model organization. Yet despite so many years of resistance, I don't know how the Russian people haven't arrived at the level of conscious-

ness beyond a certain stage so that they can participate more fully in the decision-making of Russia.

So I am very suspicious of stages because a lot of things these guys will put off for the next 20 years until the correct stage is completed, when in fact it can be done right now.

In the case of Grenada, we are talking about a place 19 miles long and nine miles wide. Y'know you can run around the whole place and still be fresh. You are not talking about a big place. So you don't need stages, you don't need a bureaucratic organization of 16 men waiting for the next ten years until the ideas of Lenin are consummated.

You are talking about a small group of people in a small island in which if they are working here or working there or they are reaping and growing cocoa or they are preparing corn and flour or spices, they can get together on the basis of workers councils or whatever name they apply to themselves. By accepting the self-responsibility for producing what they need to produce — the running of the generating plant and all the work that needs to be done could be done in this manner.

They don't even need money! I wouldn't advocate them burning money [laughter from the audience]. But what I would advocate is they abolish money and take all the money in Grenada and put it in small packages and sell it to art collectors [more laughter]. We can get a lot of money for this money! [Most laughter.]

And you don't need to be spending all that money on a representative to the United Nations. What you want is people from Grenada scattered all over the world working into similar democratic activities whether it is in California or anywhere. And then you go around collecting printing presses and various tools and sending it back into the island of Grenada. You don't need to go to the IMF for that and shackle yourself with a loan of \$15 million which is what Coard (the leader of the Grenadian coup) did. This was a big achievement for him — to have made a deal with the IMF as a Communist.

to the natural society of proletarians as they move through time and space in their attack against the bourgeois power and morality

to all those who continue to gamble on the will to live.

Abbreviations:

B.I.T.U

Busmante Industrial Trade Union

I.T.A.C

Independent Trade Union Advisory Council

N.W.U

National workers Union

P.N.C

Peoples National Congress

P.N.P

Peoples National Party

P.P.P

Peoples progressive Party

T.U.C

Trade Unions Congress

by the *Halfway* democratic organisation. An organisation is either democratic or it is not. In content this means that there can be no other power of decision outside the general assembly itself, and the execution of decisions must not be done in any way that the body carrying out decisions becomes a separate power.

The theory now returns with greater coherence. Let our practice now unite with that theory, and in a way that *none shall escape*

June 1973

Dedicated:

to Broom and the Gathering who live in combat

to Benman and the Gathering in the realization of their vision

to Veeman and Hidrickman who were always on the hytal side in the adventure of Westmoreland

to Bromleyman who is like a tree in the region

to the Gathering of Savlamar, Saverent, Georges Plain, Grange Hill and the surrounding villages

to Elveta and Jean who knew they were right so early from the start, and Linneth, Suzie, and other sisters and brothers who in making the Workers Council of Western Meatpackers made the moments of organizing with them the best of times

to Creation and those who held the Eastfort for so long to the revolutionary outlaws of Kinston and Mo-bay

to the sugar workers who made the effort to break from the N.W.U – B.I.T.U prison, moving for the revolution in their daily lives, with the help of direct self-management of their organizational affairs

But there are all kinds of alternatives the Grenadian people can do. You can close all the prisons and let the prisoners out. You can arm everybody; put the standing army out of existence. That is the question we used to talk about and people thought we were mad. Now let the rapists who rape women try to rape women who are armed. Let everybody possess arms! Have no standing army, no standing police, and no prisons. [Cheers and clapping from the audience.] You would see whether people would be foolish enough to commit crimes when they know everybody else has arms. I think the psychological results of that would be tremendous.

Now you laugh about the fact of everybody should have arms. Okay, if everybody has arms in Grenada there would be no opportunity for the Stalinists (which is the name I would like to give them) to do what they did against the charismatic Bishop. There would be no basis for it without a standing army to turn to. That is one way to look at it. Another way to look at it is to ask what is the purpose of a standing army in Grenada? To fight the U.S. government in case of an invasion? It's ridiculous. None of the islands in the West Indies can organize a standing army to fight the U.S. The standing army is a part of the philosophy, a part of the ideology of bureaucratic Communist doctrine.

Now in my further readings I found that neither Lenin nor Trotsky nor any of these guys were as democratic as we were led to believe. As early as 1921 Trotsky went on the radio and told the workers of Kronstadt that they would be shot down like partridges if they didn't obey the Bolshevik directives. When Lenin was on his dying bed he realized the monster he had created; he began to wonder whether Stalin should be the guy to take over from him. All these readings are information that has been hidden from us. Information that is hidden from a considerable number of people participating in the revolutionary process that need to know it.

For instance, Wilhelm Reich who did a considerable amount of work in the psychological dimension was expelled from the German Communist Party, very early. Because, I feel, he began to ques-

tion the whole philosophy of obedience; because he was questioning that dangerous course in which the people of Germany became conditioned enough to obey someone like Hitler. And Communist philosophy depends upon obedience just like the most bourgeois manifestation of political representation. Obedience is the basis of both Communism and capitalism.

This same conditioning process is going on in Cuba today. I'm willing to make the statement that Cuba has offered no example to the English-speaking Caribbean, or any model at all as to how they should proceed in a genuine process of self-responsibility and self-management. They have no new ideas. Unlike the Black Power Movement in the U.S. which had such a considerable influence on people in the West Indies, in Cuba after 25 years you don't get that spirit, that breath of fresh air coming out of there. Cuba is very much part of the kind of crystallized and bureaucratic, high technology, Westernized way in which European and North American industrial capitalism has been organized.

So people in the West Indies are going to have to do some serious thinking about all social organizations. In Jamaica you have the largest population with about 2.25 million people. Then you have islands in the Virgin Islands that have 900 people. You don't have to have the CP to organize 900 people! [laughter] And they don't need a representative to the U.N.! With this doctrine of one nation/one vote, Bishop and the Grenadian government was able to intimidate and harangue the Commonwealth Conference so that the matter of Poland, of Solidarity, was not discussed. What a criminal thing! One representative of 110,000 people was able to squash a serious matter of the freedom of 30 million people. We don't need to go to such forms of organization. We ought to abandon them. One nation/one vote — you ought to abandon the notion of the nation-state in the first place. And burn all the flags.

meeting at the Kingston Sheraton Hotel, which is out of bounds to the proletariat. This is what the international class struggle has been reduced to by these men: fund raising parties In the name of Africa under the patronage of capitalists. The contradiction these fools face, is that while Francis as an individual is becoming more embarrassing for their "radical" appearances as the class struggle intensifies, he is able to maintain his position with them depending on the power of his money-bag, precisely because of the crippling effects that their bureaucracy has on the independence of the "independent" unions. The insolubility of this contradiction by them therefore places them against the class struggle. To be taken care of in keeping with the *decisive recognition that humanity will never be free until the last bureaucrat is hanged by the guts of the last capitalist.*

Yet in spite of these men we are to blame for our present defeat. Some of us who were if fired went off to continue wage slavery, instead of putting our resources in one purse and our skills together in a project to collectively deal with our own survival. Hidrickman and Veeman were profoundly coherent on this. It would have given us more control over time to work consistently together. We overplanned instead of beginning with what we had: the positive project of the shops, the daycare centre, the healthcare scheme and the technical training workshop which we wanted to do. We remained In the "independent" unions instead of breaking from them to establish a new game. It is impossible to function in any bureaucratic organisation and change it in the interests of the working-class, though you may try to. In practice, whatever success that comes from working in these organisations can only be at the same time their destruction. The structure which we established in Western Meatpackers allowed for a "delegate council" which became a petty bureaucracy over other workers, and stifled the growth of consciousness and participation of all. It is some of these worker-bureaucrats that ITAC was able to recuperate on their side and spread confusion. Thus we sowed the seeds of our own defeat

ened as we seized more control over our immediate situation. They reacted with statements which reveal their willingness to appeal to the most backward attitudes of workers. At a seminar held to impress foreign visitors where workers were *paid* to come they said, "Look at your clothes get out of the meeting", and in the meeting that produced our pamphlet "Unions Versus Management" they responded to it, "You are not trying to build unions you want to build revolutionary cells". At the same time they passed rumours around, "They have plenty woman", "They are Rasta frightening the workers from joining the Independent unions". After we left, in a desperate attempt to discredit us, they falsely accused us of misusing their funds. We asked Trevor Menroe to raise the ITAC executive to get them to issue a public statement to set the record straight. He said he would, but nothing came of his promises, proving him to be in solidarity with the liars. The bureaucrats were the carriers of the slanders, but they were able to buy with their money office pimps like Alphonso Rubbish.

While the entire bureaucracy fought against us, they sneakily criticised their president Roderick Francis to other people, (Particularly those outside Jamaica from which they get support In the name of being "vanguard" in the "anti-imperialist struggle") in the effort to hide the reactionary position of the "progressive" forces In the said bureaucracy. As the owner of a cattle farm, a cane farm, as a speculator In housing lands and as a speculator in other businesses, with none of the workers In these places being even members of the "vanguard" ITAC, capitalist Francis is indeed a contradiction in a "workers" organisation. The ideology of the Leninists says he is a national capitalist against Imperialism, that their "united" front needs him and that they will use his money until they can do without him. But the shrewd businessmen that Francis is uses them Instead, to the extent that he has now popularised himself into the position as head of another "radical" representation, the Jamaica section of the 6th and Pan-African Secretariat and the Africa Liberation Committee that held its inaugural

What Padmore Passed Through

"What did Russia ask Padmore to do to do between the 1930's and 1940's. In the 1940's when he was a very prominent international communist, a member of the Communist Party — He was given a post, something like a General of the Red Army of Russia. He was such a prominent black man in the Communist hierarchy that he was recognized all over the world as such. And he was very influential in the national liberation movement in Africa. And what Russia and the Communist Party called upon him to do was to use his influence to contain the struggles of Africans against the colonialism of the French and the British. And the reason for that is because Russia was into some kind of military alliance in the form of an allied treaty with America, France, Britain and Russia. And what the Communist Party was arguing is that the struggle against the colonisation of these territories would have used up the military resources of Britain and France to suppress that struggle and this would have weakened the military strength in this allied arrangement. So what in effect Russia was doing is to sacrifice the end of colonialism so as to suit some military arrangement that he claims was to be against Fascism. And not only that, but that is the most prominent act of the Communist Party of Russia that disturbed particularly, black people who called themselves Communists all over the world...but separate and apart from that, which is popular knowledge among so-called Third World people, is what the Communist Party did in Spain, being actually a part of oppressing the real revolutionary forces in Spain They did it in Indonesia, they did it in Greece, they did it in Ceylon The Communist Party of Guadeloupe (this is a French territory in the Caribbean) sided with the police to suppress the riots of the workers. And this is in keeping with the French Communist Party, with the Communist parties of both Britain and France, who have always supported the colonisation of the territories. That is what the French Communist Party was notorious for during the Algerian Revolution"

The Adventure of Westmoreland

Westmoreland is one of the 14 parishes in the south-west part of Jamaica where the largest meat-processing plant and the largest sugar factory in the Caribbean outside of Cuba, are situated. This is the same area where the 1938 rebellion started.

The tradition of trade-unionism and party politics weighs heavily down on the working-class there, Down on the employed workers that are imprisoned in the unions and sold out to the boss, down on those workers who are passed off as “unorganisable”, working under the most oppressive conditions as domestic servants and in small businesses of petty capitalists. The great areas of land owned by a handful of people against the general interest and particularly the food production capacity of the poor and oppressed in the villages. A courthouse of legal criminals passing judgment on the proletariat, with thieves lawyering for them in the name of justice. The non-existence of transport facilities in most parts of the area. A single hospital in the town of Savlamar which turns away people and their children who go there for attention, because they did not have the fees charged. A police force of murderers that put a gun to the ears of Baker and pulled the trigger, and tried to intimidate us that no drums must beat in this town. These among other things is what influenced the actions we took in our adventure.

The wave of strikes against the old unions and these conditions which existed everywhere in the country, gave birth to the new “independent” unions. Around 1957 during the wildcat of bauxite workers at the Kirkvine plant in Manchester, John Vickers, Maclean, Peejee and other brethren initiated the move towards the formation of a bauxite workers’ union. Mikehell Menlie *(We have retained Fundi’s original spellings) Prime Minister now, then area supervisor of the NWU, led PNP thugs to the meeting and beat up the brethren taking the initiative. The bauxite workers union never got off the ground. Menlie and the personnel offices of the bauxite plants set down a list of over 100 rebels to be excluded from the

read, he or she takes it home and their children or another relative or neighbor reads It with them. On occasions someone In a group would read it to the others, and many people who were not directly involved¹ knew outside of gossip about what was happening and support grew. Given time one can imagine the natural results, with children continuing to read these leaflets to their parents. *We know they will carry on in the same way with what is written here.*

The combined effect of the varying activities smoked out the local capitalist thieves and trade-union-party crooks from behind their apparent respectability and invincibility. A gas station owner and member of the school board came with his colleagues raging and brandishing his gun In front of the home of Hidrickman shouting, “Get out of the town you are corrupting our sons and daughters”. The police raided homes under the guise of searching for ganja, banned books and guns and offered bribes to shopkeepers and others living In the area to inform to them. The Prime Minister and leader of the “Opposition” who have switched places since then came to Frume and Petersfield one week following each other to address conferences of their unions an “behalf” of sugar workers. They had not been to any similar meeting in the area for *8 years* before then.

The constant prophecy by Bromley in Grange Hill that the life of sugar workers will remain as it is until they organise themselves outside of the two-party-union system was eventually taken seriously. Watch It Bromley. Watch it now. Do not be tricked by the same system that continues under cover of the Independent unions.

In spite of the opposition of the parliament parties and unions, and the police brutality and imprisonment which the proletariat experiences everywhere, our main enemy was the ITAC “vanguard” leaders. With some workers being a part of them and therefore closest in the network of bureaucracy bearing down on the working-class, they were in a position to oppose us more effectively than anyone else, and at the same time they were the first to be threat-

tors to instantaneous strike action. In the midst of the spontaneity, with organised precision the machine switches went down, a check made on those who were known to be dragging their feet were doing at that moment and everyone went out. In the compound and lounged on the grass until the manager recognised in no uncertain terms that we would only work with Jean. In the light of the institutionalized labour relations policy of employers, unions and government, which establishes that workers in the event of strike action must go back to work while the dismissal of their co-worker is being negotiated, and even when negotiations decide in favour of the worker he or she remains dismissed, the winning of that strike was decisive for our perspective. It proved also that *spontaneity*, which bureaucrats always try to cry down is an *essential weapon* of the exploited class. We can sharpen it to strike decisively by the permanent existence of self-organisation, to guarantee that what may be normally overlooked or taken for granted in the speed of revolt, is recognised and acted upon for what it is.

By this time the sound was going around that “some workers at Meatpackers want to make revolution”. Hidrickman teaching at Mannings Low school began to ground up students as to what real learning is all about, and was dismissed by the school board made up of capitalists and “senior citizens” of the area. Veeman extending the groundation in the sugar estate was also dismissed. Groundations of Rasta grew and the drums became more. Gossip spread in the area saying, “Is a Rasta union. Them going to use the union dues and fix a old ship them have, to go to Africa and don’t come back”. “They are Communists”. “They are Black Power”. “When you become a member of the organisation you get ganja to smoke”. The meetings of sugar workers’ councils at the homes of different sugar workers had already begun. A variety of leaflets were produced and distributed, elaborating what we were trying to do. We were criticised by the bureaucrats for the “sophistication” of the leaflets, because according to them the majority of people are illiterate. In practice what happened, is that although a sugar worker cannot

bauxite industry. Many brethren returned with another name. In other plants beside Kirkvine. In 1970 St Aloysius Hall met the same fate under the NWU at the Ewarton plant, when he tried to ground up a strong defence of his co-workers in the plant.

The new “independent” unions were a fraud from the start because they repeated both in organisational form and in content, everything that the old union stood for. The only thing new was the type of leaders manning the official posts. Professional bureaucrats like Zhris Lowrence from the old TUC and bourgeois-Leninist intellectuals like Trevor Menroe in searching for a social base for their opportunism towards “Marxist” party politics started to intermingle with the movement. From their “radical” nest of appearances they further consolidated the bureaucracy of the “democratic” centralism of a tiny minority of workers over others, touting the pitfall that workers becoming presidents and secretaries of the “independent” unions as a great achievement. At the same time they worm themselves into positions of this same lumpen hierarchy. Then with dead workers like Dedsilva, Macarticks and others in their bureaucratic coffin becoming more and more decomposed in the vanity of leadership, they spread their ideology of “non-political unionism”; meaning in effect that you need a party for political purposes because the best the workers can do in the unions is to beg for more pay and better conditions of wage slavery. We knew that is what had become of the unions but we didn’t want to remain that way. An eventual consequence of this “non-political” ideology is that workers and students of U.Blind Mona campus allowed themselves to be tricked in steering the UAWU into ITAC, instead of establishing a direct democratic organisation of workers and students to continue with greater coherence the experiment in struggle where the Workers’ Council of Western Meatpackers left off. History must also here record that the UAWU allowed a worker of U.Blind to be a prosecution tool of the police frame-up of unemployed brethren in their struggle with capitalism, and abandoned them to the fate of the General penitentiary. The very brethren who

defended them when they were not willing to defend themselves against Pernell Charles and his BITU thugs, making more certain the UAWU winning the poll for recognition by the university administration.

Some of us from the start saw through this fraud of “independent” unions and working within the movement as a whole ground up with other workers in Western Meatpackers and in the sugar factories and surrounding farms to do certain things. The central accumulation of union dues in a Kingston office by the BITU, NWU, TUC and ITAC is the source of Income that feeds this parasitic bureaucracy. We decided this must stop, making available to us our own finances needed for our own projects. Professional negotiations with employers is used to put union leaders’ names in the headlines and popularise them for elections into parliament. This must stop, there need not be any mediation between ourselves and the boss, for this has been responsible for suppressing confidence in ourselves to take up the total task of ending capitalism. The centralisation of these union bureaucracy in Kingston perpetuates the myth that the proletariat of the countryside are not important in the struggle for change. This too must stop.

Thus from these perspectives we started to act. We took control of our union dues, refusing to send any to ITC to whom we were legally affiliated. We developed the capacity for *instant strike action*. We took control of the canteen. We had meetings on the factory compounds and the farms during work hours³ against the wishes of the boss and traditional unionism.

Removing the power of the union organisation from the union office into the factory, required permanent and much more thorough organisation among us. We were aware that the responsibility and success was upon our shoulders and this same awareness motivated us to become more and more *self-organised*. This is the bedrock practice of direct participation which maintains our growing consciousness and stands in truth against the lies of centralised leadership, that keeps us weak and disorganised. We didn’t waste

time in long lamentations of how bad the boss was. Our immediate problem was with those among us draggin⁹ their feet. Over 20 of us had already been fired. This had a very intimidating effect, and we had to try our new tactics of keeping up communication, through meetings at each others homes and individual contacts with one another multiplying, so as to get around the informer ring in the factory made up of workers themselves.

Barnes the butcher, who got the privilege to live on the factory compound fanatically opposed us. We issued leaflets against him. We fought him. Yet in a way that won the support of his lover, and eventually from our position of organised strength we defended him, after he was arrested for allegedly taking meat from the factory by the very boss he was fighting for. We did this because Vin who was jointly charged with him was one of us. They won the case. In the heat of the struggle among ourselves and against the boss new alliances were made and things became clearer. Lovers’ affections changed as rebels searched for recognition in each other. Ali Papa vigorously opposed the proposals to make contributions from union dues to sisters who were on unpaid maternity leave. He said “None of the sisters want to make love with me it is other man not working here that breed them”. We opposed him saying “How can you expect the sisters to love you if you don’t defend them”. Although some workers agreed with Ali Papa, 2 weeks after the proposal was made there was full agreement on it. In the meantime we were preparing to fight the company for maternity leave pay.

The do-gooders in the office and supervisory staff were exposed for what they were as the developing situation demanded a more transparent position from all. The turning-point was the *first strike* in the history of Western Meatpackers when Jean was fired for protesting for having to stand in a puddle while working on the assembly line. As a rebel she was marked to be fired. The internal organisation was now put to public test because we had reasoned for shifting the fate of rebel workers from union office negotia-