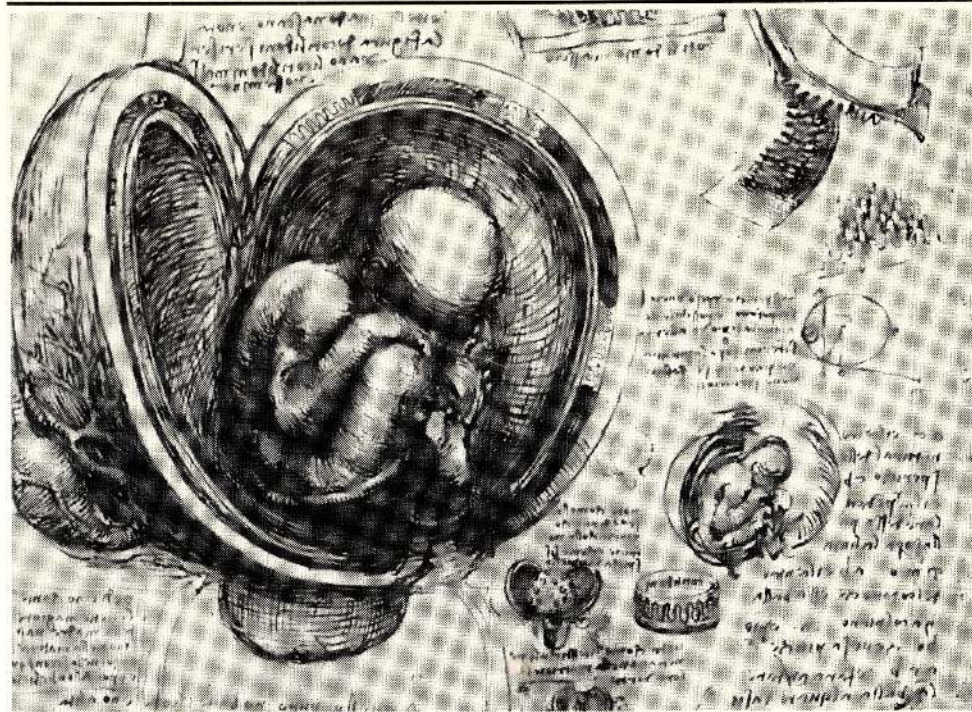


# RACE & CLASS

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FOR BLACK AND  
THIRD WORLD  
LIBERATION

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## *Bourgeois ideology and biological determinism*

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Class in 19th-century Haiti

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The state in West Malaysia

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Black migrations in the USA

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The African working class

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Ghana today

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# Thomas Hodgkin, 1910-82

Thomas abhorred racism. And when in 1972 he heard how the workers at the Institute of Race Relations had wrested control of the Institute, from a management council of businessmen and their cohorts, so that they might transform it into an Institute against racism, he hastened to join battle for that transformation and help change the Institute's quarterly *Race* from an academic apologia for power to *Race & Class*, an instrument in the struggle of the powerless.

Thomas had already spent a lifetime in the cause of the anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggle – in the Middle East, in Africa, in Asia. He now added to those concerns an unrelenting commitment to fighting racism in his own country. 'The overall purpose of IRR and its journal *Race & Class*', he wrote in a minute to the staff and council, 'is to abolish imperialism and racism, finally and totally; to create a world in which brotherly relations exist between peoples, and the exploitation of man by man – and woman by man and national group by national group – have been eliminated.' It was the purpose that informed his own life – his learning and scholarship, his teaching, his writing, his involvement with everyday struggle. There was hardly an attack on black people – whether by the fascists or by the state – that did not incur a phone call from Thomas demanding: 'What are we doing about it?'

His vision for *Race & Class* was no less demanding. It should become a revolutionary journal, creating – through its 'quality, relevance, political understanding and vitality – its own constituency of anti-racist and anti-imperialist activists throughout the world' – for, 'the anti-racist, anti-fascist struggle in Britain and the imperialist countries and the anti-imperialist struggle in the Third World countries were linked in practice by a thousand threads'. And in order to translate that vision into reality, he asked that the journal's articles be 'much better than those by bourgeois writers ..., better grounded in the evidence, more exciting and readable, more lucid and better argued'. He showed us too how to remain true to basic principles, yet eschew sectarianism; how to put scholarship at the service of the oppressed and the exploited; how to write simply without being simplistic.

And he told us the story of The An, a sturdy young man of great courage and loyalty but barely literate, whose understanding of an article Ho Chi Minh used as the criterion for its publication in *Independent Vietnam* (1941). For, 'Comrade The An, Uncle Ho explained, represents the average level of the masses. If he understands what we write this means the masses will also understand.'

Good morrow, Uncle Thomas; goodnight, sweet prince.

# RACE & CLASS

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# Bourgeois ideology and the origins of biological determinism\*

## The role of ideology

The process of change from feudal to bourgeois society, especially in the last phase after the seventeenth century, occurred through constant conflict and struggle. Just as feudal society was repeatedly upset by servile revolts, like the slave uprisings of Spartacus and Nat Turner or the peasant revolts in Germany and Russia, bourgeois society has been marked by incidents such as the rick-burning and machine-breaking of Captain Swing in nineteenth-century Britain and the insurrections in the 1960s of blacks in America and workers in France and in the 1970s and 1980s in Poland. This is a general phenomenon: at all times the violence of those who do not have against those who do is close to realisation, and when it erupts it is met by the organised police power of the possessors. Yet it is clearly a disadvantage to those with power to have to meet violence with violence. The outcomes of violent confrontations are not always sure: they may spread; property and wealth are destroyed; production disrupted; and the tranquility of the possessors to enjoy the fruits of their possessions is disturbed. It is clearly better if the struggle can be moved to an institutional level – the courts, the

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\*An extract from *Not in our genes: biology, ideology and human nature*, to be published in 1983 by Penguin, (UK), Pantheon (US) and Mandadori (Italy).

*Race & Class*, XXIV, 1(1982)

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parliamentary process, the negotiating table. Since the institutions are themselves in the hands of the possessors of social power, the outcome is better assured, and, if concessions must be made for fear of successful disruption, those concessions can be small, slow and even illusory. Those who have power must, if possible, avoid the struggle entirely, or at least keep it in bounds that can be accommodated within the institutions that they control. To do either requires the use of the weapon of ideology. It is a primary object of those who possess power and their representatives to disarm those who would struggle against them by convincing them of the *legitimacy* and *inevitability* of the reigning social organisation. If what exists is right, then one ought not oppose it, and if it is inevitable, one cannot successfully oppose it.

In feudal times, and even up to the seventeenth century, the main propagator of legitimacy and inevitability was the Church, through the doctrine of grace and divine right. Even Luther, the religious rebel, commanded that the peasants obey their lord. Moreover, he stood clearly for order: 'Peace is more important than justice; and peace was not made for the sake of justice, but justice for the sake of peace.' To the degree that ideological weapons have been successful in convincing people of the justice and inevitability of present social arrangements, any attempt to revolutionise society must use ideological counter-weapons that deprive the old order of its legitimacy and at the same time build a case for the new.

### The contradictions

The change in social relations brought about by the bourgeois revolution required more than simply a commitment to rationality and science. The need for freedom and equality of individuals to move geographically, to own their own labour power and to enter into a variety of economic relations was supported by a commitment to individual freedom and equality as absolute, God-given rights. The French Encyclopaedia was not merely a rationalist technical work. Diderot, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau and its other contributors made of the Encyclopaedia a manifesto of political liberalism that matched its scientific rationalism. The hundred years from Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, which justified the English Revolution, to Paine's *Rights of Man*, which justified the French, was the period of invention and elaboration of an ideology of freedom and equality that was claimed to be unchallengeable. 'We hold these truths to be self-evident', the composers of the American Declaration of Independence wrote, 'that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' (i.e., wealth).

Yet, when the framers of the Declaration of Independence wrote



that 'all men are created equal', they meant quite literally 'men', since women certainly did not enjoy these rights in the new Republic. However, they did not mean literally 'all men', since black slavery continued after both the American and French revolutions. Despite the universal and transcendental terms in which the manifestos of the revolutionary bourgeoisie were framed, the societies that were being built were much more restricted. What was required was equality of merchants, manufacturers, lawyers and tax farmers with the formerly privileged nobility, not the equality of all persons. The freedom needed was the freedom to invest, to buy and sell both goods and labour, to set up shop in any place and at any time without the hindrance of feudal restrictions on commerce and labour, not the freedom of all human beings to pursue happiness. As in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, all were equal, but some more equal than others.

The problem in creating an ideological justification is that the principle may prove rather more sweeping than the practice demands. The founders of liberal democracy needed an ideology to justify and legitimate the victory of the bourgeoisie over the entrenched aristocracy, of one class over another, rather than an ideology that would eliminate classes. Yet they also needed the support of the *menu peuple*, the yeoman farmers and the peasants, in their struggle. One can hardly imagine making a revolution with the battle cry 'Liberty and justice for some!'. So the ideology outstrips the reality. The pamphleteers of the bourgeois revolution created, by necessity and no doubt in part by conviction, a set of philosophical principles in contradiction with the social reality they intended to build.

The final victory of the bourgeoisie over the old order meant that the ideas of freedom and equality that had been the subversive weapons of a revolutionary class now became the legitimating ideology of the class in power. The problem was, and still is, that the society created by the revolution was in obvious contrast with the ideology from which it drew its claim of right. Slavery continued in French St Dominique until the successful slave revolt of 1801 and in Martinique for a further fifty years. It was abolished only in 1833 in British dominions and not until 1863 in the United States. Suffrage, even among the free, was greatly restricted. After the Reform Bill of 1832 there were still only about 10 per cent of the adult population of Britain enfranchised and only in 1918 was universal manhood suffrage established. Woman suffrage waited until 1920 in the United States, 1928 in Britain, 1946 in Belgium and 1981 in Switzerland, that model of bourgeois democracy.

More fundamentally, economic and social power remains extremely unequally distributed and shows no sign of being effectively redistributed. Despite the idea of equality, some people have power over their own lives and the lives of others, while most do not. There remain rich people and poor people, employers who own and control the



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means of production and employees who do not even control the condition of their own labour. By and large, men are more powerful than women and whites more powerful than blacks. The income distribution in the United States and Britain is clearly unequal, with about 20 per cent of the income accruing to the highest 5 per cent of the families and only 5 per cent accruing to the lower paid 20 per cent. The distribution of wealth is much more skewed. The richest 5 per cent own 50 per cent of all the wealth in the United States, and if one discounts the houses people live in, the cars they drive and the clothes they wear, then nearly all wealth belongs to the richest 5 per cent.\*<sup>1</sup>

Nor can a case be made that economic equality has dramatically increased over the last 300 years. Using the admittedly rough figures gathered by Gregory King in 1688 from hearth taxes, one can estimate that at the time of the Glorious Revolution the poorest 20 per cent of families had 4 per cent of the income and the richest 5 per cent received 32 per cent of the income. The income distribution has become somewhat more equal during the last 100 years, but the figures are based on money income. The proportion of the workforce in agriculture has dropped from 40 per cent to 4 per cent, for example, in the United States, so no account is taken of the loss of real income as the poorest groups have moved out of subsistence agriculture. On the other hand, there have been periodic expansions of poor law and welfare payments which have had the effect of redistribution of income, but these have fluctuated considerably. It would be extremely difficult to show that the industrial working poor at the height of the Chartist movement in the 1840s were better off than their rural ancestors of Tudor times, and there is considerable evidence that the early part of the nineteenth century was a time of immiseration of the poor. Even the redistribution of income that has occurred in the last 100 years has hardly had the effect of creating a society of equality. In the United States, the infant mortality rate among blacks is 1.8 times that for whites, and the average expectation of life is 10 per cent lower. In Britain, perinatal mortality is twice as high for infants born to working-class as it is to middle-class families.<sup>2</sup> Political ideology may separate people on the question of the origins, mortality and future of economic and social inequality, but no one can question its existence. Bourgeois society, like the aristocratic feudal society it replaced, is characterised by immense differences in status, wealth and power. The fact that there has been growth in the economy over time, so that in every question – at least until the present – children are better off than their parents, and that there have been great shifts in the labour force, from a production to a service economy, for instance, serves merely to mask these differences.

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\*For example, 1 per cent own 60 per cent of all corporate stock, and the wealthiest 5 per cent own 83 per cent of stock.



While there has always been a struggle between those who possess power and those over whom they exercise that power, that struggle is exacerbated in bourgeois society by the contradiction between ideology and reality in a way that did not apply in feudal times. The political ideology of freedom and, especially, equality that legitimated the overthrow of the aristocracy helped to produce a society in which the idea of equality is still as subversive as ever, if taken seriously. It is in the name of equality that the Paris Commune of 1871, the student/worker uprisings of 1968 and the uprisings of blacks in the inner cities of Britain and America have taken place. Clearly, if the society in which we live is to seem just, both to the possessors and the dispossessed, some different understanding of freedom and equality is needed. What is required is an exegesis of the doctrine of equality that brings the reality of social life into congruence with the moral imperatives. It is precisely to meet the need for a self-justification and for the prevention of social disorder that the ideology of biological determinism has been developed.

### **Dealing with the contradictions: the three claims of biological determinism**

The ideology of equality has become transformed into a weapon *for*, rather than *against*, a society of inequality by relocating the *cause* of inequality from the structure of society to the nature of individuals. First, it is asserted that the inequalities in society are a direct and ineluctable consequence of the differences in intrinsic merit and ability among individuals. Second, it is asserted that these differences are coded, in large part, in an individual's genes, so that merit and ability will be passed from generation to generation within families. Finally, it is claimed that the presence of such biological differences between individuals of necessity leads to the creation of hierarchial societies because it is part of biologically determined human nature to form hierarchies of status, wealth and power. All three elements are necessary for a complete justification of present social arrangements. We shall discuss each in turn.

The determinative role of individual difference in moulding the structure of modern bourgeois society has been made quite explicit. Lester Frank Ward, a major figure in nineteenth-century American sociology, wrote of

... the power that is destined to overthrow every [sic] species of hierarchy. It is destined to remove all artificial inequality and leave the natural inequalities to find their true level. The true value of a newborn infant lies ... in its naked capacity for acquiring the ability to do.<sup>3</sup>

The concept was given up-to-date form by another, English, sociologist, Michael Young, in the 1960s in his book *The Rise of the Meritocracy*.<sup>4</sup> This meritocracy was soon to be given biological underpinnings. By 1969, Professor Arthur Jensen of the University of California in his article on IQ and achievement could claim:

We have to face it; the assortment of persons into occupational roles simply is not 'fair' in any absolute sense. The best we can hope for is that true merit, given equality of opportunity, act as a basis for the natural assorting process.<sup>5</sup>

Lest the political consequences of this natural inequality escape us, some determinists draw them out quite explicitly. Professor Richard Herrnstein of Harvard, one of the most active ideologues of meritocracy, explains that:

The privileged classes of the past were probably not much superior biologically to the downtrodden, which is why revolution had a fair chance of success. By removing artificial barriers between classes, society has encouraged the creation of biological barriers. When people can take their natural level in society, the upper classes will, by definition, have greater capacity than the lower.<sup>6</sup>

Here the scheme of explanation is laid out in its most explicit form. The *Ancien Regime* was characterised by *artificial* barriers to social movement. What the bourgeois revolutions did was to destroy those arbitrary distinctions and allow *natural* differences to assert themselves. Equality, then, is *equality of opportunity*, not equality of ability or result. Life is like a foot race. In the bad old days the aristocrats got a head start (or were declared the winners by fiat), but now everyone starts together so that the best win. Moreover, it is the inner biological nature of a person that determines whether he or she comes out ahead. In this scheme, society is seen as composed of freely moving individuals, social atoms, who, unimpeded by artificial social conventions, rise or fall in the social hierarchy in accordance with their desires and abilities. Social mobility is perfect or may require, at most, a minor adjustment, an occasional regulatory act of legislation, to make it so. Such a society has produced about as much equality as is possible. Any remaining differences constitute the irreducible minimum of inequality, engendered by natural differences in true merit. The bourgeois revolutions succeeded because they were only breaking down artificial barriers, but new revolutions are futile because we cannot eliminate natural barriers. It is not clear what principle of biology guarantees that biologically 'inferior' groups cannot seize power from biologically 'superior' ones, but it is clearly implied that some general property of stability accompanies 'natural' hierarchies.

By putting this gloss on the idea of equality, biological determinism



converts it from a subversive to a legitimising ideal and a means of social control. The differences in society are both fair and inevitable because they are natural. So it is both physically impossible to change the status quo in any thoroughgoing way and morally wrong to try.

A political corollary of this view of society is a prescription for the activity of the state. The social programme of the state should not be directed towards an 'unnatural' equalisation of social condition, which in any case would be impossible because of its 'artificiality', but rather the state should provide the lubricant to ease and promote the movement of individuals into the positions to which their intrinsic natures have predisposed them. Laws promoting equal opportunity are to be encouraged, but artificial quotas which guarantee, say, 10 per cent of all jobs in some industry to blacks are wrong because they attempt to reduce inequality below its 'natural' level. In like manner, rather than give the same education to blacks and whites or to working-class and upper middle-class children, schools should sort them by IQ tests or 'eleven-plus' exams into their 'natural' educational environments. Education especially is seen as the chief institution for promoting social assortment according to innate ability. 'The power that is destined to overthrow every species of hierarchy' is 'universal education'.<sup>7</sup>

The second, crucial, step in the building of the ideology of biological determinism, following the claim that social inequality is based on intrinsic individual differences, is the equation of *intrinsic* with *genetic*. It is possible, in principle, for differences in individuals to be inborn without being biologically heritable. In fact, a considerable proportion of the subtle physiological and morphological variation between individuals in strains of experimental animals can be shown to be the result of accidents of development which are not heritable. Nor does the everyday understanding of inborn differences necessarily equate them with what is inherited. The conflation of intrinsic and inherited qualities is a distinct step in building the idea of biological determinism.

The theory that we live in a society which rewards intrinsic merit is at variance in one important respect with common observation. It is apparent that parents in some way pass on their social power to their children. The children of oil magnates tend to become bankers, while the children of oil workers tend to be in debt to banks.\* The probability

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\*This correlation was first pointed out in the nineteenth century by Francis Galton, the inventor of a host of anthropometric techniques for quantifying aspects of human performance. Galton is the progenitor of intelligence-measuring techniques and of theories of its hereditary nature. In 1869, in his book *Hereditary Genius*, he traced the family trees of a large number of eminent Victorian bishops, judges, scientists, etc., and by showing that their fathers and grandfathers had also tended to be bishops, judges, scientists and so forth, he concluded comfortingly that genius was inherited and that it was concentrated disproportionately among Victorian upper-class males. Other classes in Britain and other nationalities in Europe possessed a lesser quantity of genius, and the non-white 'races' least of all.

that any of the Rockefeller brothers would have spent their lives working in a Standard Oil garage is fairly small. While there is certainly considerable social mobility, the correlation between social status of parents and children is high. The often-quoted study of the American occupational structure by Blau and Duncan, for example, showed that 71 per cent of the sons of white-collar workers were themselves white-collar workers, while 62 per cent of the sons of blue-collar workers remained in the blue-collar category. The British figures are not dissimilar. Such figures, however, vastly underestimate the degree of fixity of social class, since most movement between white- and blue-collar categories is horizontal with respect to income, status, control of working conditions and security. The nature of particular jobs changes between generations. There are fewer workers in primary production and more in service industries today. Yet clerks are no less proletarian because they sit at desks rather than standing at benches, and salespersons, one of the largest groups of 'white-collar workers', are among the lowest paid and least secure of all occupational groups. Can it be that parents pass on their social status to their children in defiance of the meritocratic process? Unless bourgeois society has, like its aristocratic predecessor, artificial inherited privilege, the passage of social power from parents to children must be natural. Differences in merit are not only intrinsic but biologically inherited: they are in the genes.

The convergence of the two meanings of *inheritance*, the social and the biological, legitimises the passage of social power from generation to generation. It can still be asserted that we have an equal opportunity society with each individual rising or falling in the social scale according to merit, provided we understand that merit is carried in the genes. The notion of the inheritance of human behaviour, and therefore of social position, which so permeated the literature of the nineteenth century, can thus be understood not as an intellectual atavism, a throw-back to aristocratic ideas in a bourgeois world, but, on the contrary, as a consistently worked out position to explain the facts of bourgeois society.

The claim of inherited differences in merit and ability between individuals does not complete the argument for the justice and inevitability of bourgeois social arrangements. There remain logical difficulties that must be coped with by the determinist. First, there is the naturalistic fallacy that draws 'ought' from 'is'. Whether or not there are biological differences between individuals does not, in itself, provide a basis for what is 'fair'. Ideas of justice cannot be derived from the facts of nature, although, of course, one may begin with the *a priori* that what is natural is good provided one is willing to accept, for example, that the blinding of infants by trachoma is 'just'. Second, there is the equation of 'innate' with 'unchangeable' which seems to



imply some dominance of the natural over the artificial. Yet the history of the human species is precisely the history of social victories over nature, of mountains moved, seas joined, diseases eradicated and even species made over for human purposes. To say that all these have been done 'in accordance with the laws of nature' is to say nothing more than that we live in a material world with certain constraints. But what those constraints are must be determined in each case. 'Natural' is not 'fixed'. Nature can be changed according to nature.

These are not simply formal objections to determinism. They have political force. Intrinsic differences between individuals in ability to perform social functions have not always been regarded as leading necessarily to a hierarchical society. Marx summed up his vision of communist society in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' as 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his need.' In the 1930s geneticists like J.B.S. Haldane, who was a member of the British Communist Party and a columnist for the *Daily Worker*, and H.J. Muller, who worked in the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution and who, at the time, identified himself as a marxist, argued (along lines that we would not) that important aspects of human behaviour were influenced by genes.<sup>8</sup> Yet both believed that social relations could be revolutionised and classes abolished despite individual intrinsic differences. Social democrats and liberals have expressed the same idea. One of the leading evolutionists of the twentieth century, T. Dobzhansky, argued in *Genetic Diversity and Human Equality*<sup>9</sup> that we may build a society in which picture painters and house painters, barbers and surgeons, can receive equal psychic and material rewards, although he believed them to differ genetically from each other.

It seems that the simple assertion that there are inherited differences in ability between individuals has been insufficient to justify the continuation of a hierarchical society. It must be further claimed that those heritable differences necessarily and justly lead to a society of differential power and reward. This is the role played by human nature theories, the third of the components to the biological determinist's claims. In addition to the biological differences said to exist between individuals or groups, it is supposed that there are biological 'tendencies' shared by all human beings and their societies, and that these tendencies result in hierarchically organised societies in which individuals

... compete for the limited resources allocated to their role sector. The best and most entrepreneurial of the role-actors usually gain a disproportionate share of the rewards, while the least successful are displaced to other, less desirable positions.<sup>10</sup>

The claim that 'human nature' guarantees that inherited differences

between individuals and groups will be translated into a hierarchy of status, wealth and power completes the total ideology of biological determinism. To justify their original ascent to power, the new middle class had to demand a society in which 'intrinsic merit' *could* be rewarded. To maintain their position they now claim that intrinsic merit, once free to assert itself, *must* be rewarded.

### **On human nature**

The appeal to 'human nature' has been characteristic of all political philosophies. Hobbes claimed that the state of nature was 'the war of all against all', but Locke, to the contrary, saw tolerance and reason as the human natural state. Social Darwinism took 'nature red in tooth and claw' as the primitive state for humans, while Kropotkin claimed cooperation and mutual aid as basic to human nature. Even Marx, whose historical and dialectical materialism are hostile to a fixity of human nature, took the basic nature of the human species to be the transforming of the world to satisfy its own needs. For Marx, one realised one's humanity in labour.

Biological determinism, as we have been describing it, draws its human nature ideology largely from Hobbes and the Social Darwinists, since these are the principles on which bourgeois political economy are founded. In its most modern avatar, sociobiology, the Hobbesian ideology even derives cooperation and altruism, which it recognises as overt characteristics of human social organisation, from an underlying competitive mechanism. Sociobiology, drawing its principles directly from Darwinian natural selection, claims that tribalism, entrepreneurial activity, xenophobia, male domination and social stratification are dictated by the human genotype as moulded during the course of evolution. It makes the two assertions, inevitability and justice, that are required if it is to serve as a legitimisation and perpetuation of the social order. Thus Wilson writes in *Sociobiology*:

If the planned society – the creation of which seems inevitable in the coming century – were to deliberately steer its members past those stresses and conflicts that once gave the destructive phenotypes their Darwinian edge, the other phenotypes might dwindle with them. In this, the ultimate genetic sense, social control would rob man of his humanity.

Before trying to plan society, then, we must await the most definite knowledge about the human genotype. Moreover, 'A genetically accurate and hence [sic] completely fair code of ethics must also wait.'

### **Cultural reductionism?**

Critics of the biological determinist position are frequently challenged



as to the alternatives that they espouse. While we must emphasise that we are not *required* to provide such an alternative in order to expose the fallacies in an argument, we shall, nevertheless, accept that challenge. But we should make clear the framework within which we accept it. When biological determinists discuss their critics, they tend to label them as 'radical environmentalists'. That is, the opposition to biological determinism is claimed to be arguing that it is possible to divorce an understanding of the human condition and of human differences entirely from biology. There are indeed schools of thought which have argued in this way. We are not among them. We must insist that a full understanding of the human condition demands an integration of the biological and the social in which neither is given primacy or ontological priority over the other but in which they are seen as being related in a dialectical manner, a manner which distinguishes epistemologically between levels of explanation relating to the individual and levels relating to the social without collapsing one into the other or denying the existence of either. Here we wish to look briefly at some of the major modes of culturally reductionist thinking and the fallacies which underlie them. They may be grouped into two types. The first gives ontological primacy to the social over the individual, and is hence the complete antithesis of biological determinism. The second, while reinstating the individual against the social, does so as if the individual had no biology at all.

The first type of cultural reductionism may be exemplified by certain tendencies in 'vulgar' marxism, in sociological relativism and in anti-psychiatry and deviancy theory. Vulgar marxism is a form of economic reductionism which locates all forms of human knowledge and of cultural expression as determined by the mode of economic production and the social relations that this engenders. Knowledge of the natural world, then, is no more than an ideology expressive of an individual's class position relative to the means of production, and it changes as the economic order changes. Individuals are ultimately shaped in all but the most trivial ways by their social circumstances: the iron laws of economic history determine an historically infinitely plastic 'human nature' and mechanically cause human actions. The only 'science' is economics. This type of reductionism, which discounts human consciousness as a mere epiphenomenon of the economy, is of course in a strange way a close relative of Social Darwinism: one finds its expression in the line of social and political writing which runs from Kautsky through to some contemporary Trotskyist theorists (for instance, Ernest Mandel<sup>11</sup>) on the left.

To this economic reduction as the explanatory principle underlying all human behaviour we would counterpose the understanding of marxist philosophers like Georg Lukacs<sup>12</sup> and Agnes Heller,<sup>13</sup> and of revolutionary practitioners and theorists like Mao Tse Tung<sup>14</sup> on the



power of human consciousness in both interpreting and changing the world, a power based on an understanding of the essential dialectical unity of the biological and the social, not as two distinct spheres, or separable components of action, but as ontologically coterminous.

The bourgeois manifestation of economic reductionism takes the form of a biological pluralism which maintains that all forms of human actions or belief are determined by 'interest'. The 'reality' of the natural world is subordinate to beliefs about it, and there is no way of adjudicating between the claims to truth made by one group of scientists compared with those made by another. What Wilson, Dawkins or Trivers write about sociobiology reflects their interests in advancing their own social position. What we write reflects ours. We and they may be the objects of anthropological inquiry by sociologists of knowledge whose own position relative to 'truth' seems strangely unaffected, though where they find the rock on which to stand among these quicksands of 'interest' seem unclear. The most explicit formulation of this 'science as social relations' argument may be found in, for instance, the writings of the Edinburgh historians, sociologists and philosophers of science, Barnes, Bloor and Shapin.<sup>15</sup>

The workings out in practice of this type of theoretical position may be seen in the strong development of a sociological theory of deviancy and of antipsychiatry over the last two decades. For these cultural reductionists, individual behaviour does not exist except as a consequence of social labelling. While biological determinism sees a child's unruly behaviour in school as determined by his or her genes, ghetto violence as caused by abnormal molecules in the brains of 'ringleaders', or male dominance in society as part of evolutionary survival mechanisms, deviancy theory dissolves away all such phenomena as mere labels. A child is labelled as 'stupid', a schizophrenic is labelled as 'mad' because society needs to scapegoat individuals.<sup>16</sup> The cure is then merely to *relabel* the child, or the schizophrenic, and sweetness and light will flow. The famous account of child relabelling, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*,<sup>17</sup> in which children's IQ scores improve by telling teachers that they are 'later developers', or the Laingian approach to the interpretation of schizophrenia flow from such a viewpoint. Individuals are again infinitely malleable, defined merely as the products of the expectations of their society, and have no separate existence. Their own ontological status and their own biological nature have been dissolved away. Without in any way wishing to deny the importance of labelling as helping shape social interactions and individual's definitions of themselves, again we would insist that a child's classroom performance is not *merely* the result of what his or her teachers think; a schizophrenic person's existential despair and irrational behaviour are not *merely* the result of being labelled as mad by his or her family or doctors.



The second type of cultural reductionism to which we wish to refer is one in which explanations of behaviour are still sought at the level of the individual, but an individual who is nonetheless regarded as biologically empty, a sort of cultural tabula rasa on which early experience may mark what it pleases. The later developments of such an individual are then seen as largely determined by such early experiences. Like biological determinism, this sort of reductionism ends up by blaming the victim, but victims are now made by culture rather than biology.

Part of this approach is centred upon individual psychology, part on cultural anthropology and sociology. In psychology, the approach is through psychometry, a procedure which relies heavily on measurement of responses of individuals to questionnaires and performance of simple tasks and an elaborate array of statistical procedures. It reduces human action itself to individual reified lumps objectified in the black box of the head. Whether with Spearman, Burt and Eysenck it argues that intelligence, for example, is a unitary lump, or with Guilford that it can be broken down into 120 different factors, the procedures are analogous. The elusive dynamic of human action, purposes, intentions and interrelations is nailed down into multiple correlations of mathematical elegance and biological vacuity. The measurement of this black box is theorised by Behaviourism, a school which dominated American psychology from the 1930s to the 1960s, into a system in which specified inputs are connected to specified outputs, and which can change its behaviour adaptively; that is, learn in response to contingencies of reinforcement of reward and punishment. The apparent extreme environmentalism of this school, which developed around Watson and later B.F. Skinner, serves merely to hide its impoverished concept of humanity and its manipulative approach to the control of individual humans, evidenced by Skinner's concern with the control and manipulation of behaviour, in children or prisoners, by a superior cadre of value-free demigods in white coats, who are to decide on the correct behaviour into which they will coerce their victims.<sup>18</sup> The novel and film *A Clockwork Orange* portrayed one possible consequence of this mode of thinking about and treating humans. The reality, in numerous correctional institutions throughout the US, the notorious Behaviour Control units in British prisons, in institutions for the 'educationally subnormal' and in the thinking of many school teachers trained on a version of theory, may yet approach such fiction.

In cultural sociology and anthropology, cultural reductionism is embedded in theories which postulate ethnic and class subcultures which are propagated across generations by purely cultural connections, and which provide different patterns of success and failure for their members. The 'culture of poverty' is an example. The poor are characterised by the demand for immediate gratification, by short-term planning, by violence and unstable family structure. These



characteristics, because they are maladaptive in bourgeois society, doom the poor to continued poverty, and the children of the poor, being so acculturated, cannot escape from the cycle. This theory of the cycle of deprivation has been explicitly espoused by Sir Keith Joseph, as one of the key ideologues of the Thatcher government in Britain.\* His eugenicist concerns have led him to use the cultural argument rather than a genetic one to support a policy recommendation of easing contraceptive availability for the poor. (A similar conclusion was arrived at from a more explicitly genetic point of view in the 1930s by the architect of the British welfare state, Lord Beveridge, who argued that if poverty ran in the genes, sterilisation for workers on the dole would help eliminate it.)

At the other extreme from the 'culturally deprived', the disproportionate representation in the United States of Jews among professionals, and particularly among academics, is explained in this type of thinking by a culture that places emphasis on scholarship and the need for a base of occupational expertise as a hedge against the economic consequences of anti-semitism. The recent appearance of large numbers of people of Japanese and Chinese ancestry among professionals is given a similar explanation. Because they are unable to appeal to physical principles as a mechanical basis for cultural inheritance, cultural reductionists are thought of as representing a 'soft' science, or even humanistic speculation, and their legitimacy is under attack from the 'hard' biological determinists (who themselves, of course, are at the 'soft' end of the scale of natural scientific texture). But cultural reductionism suffers from another, more damaging, softness as an underpinning for political action. If inherited social inequalities are the result of ineluctable biological differences, then the elimination of inequality requires that we change peoples' genes. On the other hand, cultural reductionism only requires that we change their heads or the way others think about them. Thus, the political action that flows from cultural reductionism is an emphasis on general and uniform education.

Unfortunately for this type of cultural reductionism, however, the immense equalisation of education that has occurred in the last eighty years has not been matched by a great equalisation of society. In 1900 only 6.3 per cent of the 17-year-old population of the United States were high school graduates, while at present it is about 75 per cent, yet the unequal distribution of wealth and social power remains.\*\*

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\*The failure of Britain's Social Science Research Council to commission research which could 'prove' Sir Keith's theory correct is widely regarded as one reason for his attempts to abolish the Council during his term as Thatcher's Minister of Education.

\*\*A seminar by a well-known French sociologist was once held with the remarkable title, 'Why is a better educated France as unequal as ever?' That is indeed a problem for cultural, not for biological, determinists.



Indeed, cultural reductionism is directly under attack for the apparent failure of wholesale public education to destroy the class structure. The motivation for Arthur Jensen's 1969 article on IQ in the *Harvard Educational Review*, which signalled the renewed surge of biological determinism, was provided in its opening sentence: 'Compensatory education has been tried and has failed.' Whether or not compensatory education has really been tried, and whether or not it has failed, it seems likely that if every person in the western world could read and understand Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the ranks of the unemployed would not ipso facto be decreased – though they would be more literate.

Cultural reductionism of this individual kind shares with biological determinism an assumption that the proportion of persons in given roles and with given status in society is determined by the availability of talents and abilities. That is, the elasticity of demand for, say, doctors, is infinite, and only the paucity of talent available to fill this role controls the number of physicians. In fact, the reverse seems to be true. The 'demand' for persons to fill particular jobs, however, is determined by structural relations that are almost independent of the potential 'supply'. If only bankers had children, there would be no change in the number of bankers, although both biological determinism and cultural reductionism predict the contrary.

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We have described here the ideological underpinnings of bourgeois society, based on the twin planks of freedom and equality. Elsewhere, we have shown how natural science emerged as an essential feature of the capitalist mode of production which is the economic base of bourgeois order, and how it became the major ideological legitimator for this order. The concerns of this natural science are therefore those of bourgeois society, a class, race and sex-divided social order. The view of nature which these concerns have generated is an essentially reductionist one, whether culturally reductionist or biologically determinist. This view of the natural and social worlds, whilst powerful, is fundamentally flawed; to achieve a better understanding of these worlds will require that reductionism be transcended. In the meantime, biological determinism serves to legitimate the inequalities of the social world, to maintain that the contradictions between the ideologies of freedom and equality and the realities of an unfree and unequal society are not social but natural. In this way, biological determinism serves as a weapon with which to disarm by delegitimising those who would wish to contest these unfreedoms and inequalities, just as it is the generator of techniques of manipulation, control and force which are in the last analysis available to bourgeois society to protect itself.

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# Racism in Science

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# Class formation and underdevelopment in nineteenth-century Haiti

As is well known, Haiti is the only former slave colony to have waged a successful slave revolution which culminated in the independence of Haiti from France and the formation of the first black republic in the 'New World'. Yet, in spite of this glorious beginning, the Haitian economy was not able to create the conditions for a relatively self-sustained, independent industrialisation, thereby escaping foreign capitalist domination and economic backwardness. The new society that emerged after independence in 1804 assumed the characteristics of a feudal economy, but with a well-entrenched, relatively self-subsistent peasantry. Given the absence of a viable industrial infrastructure, the bulk of the wealth of the country had to be derived from agriculture, and the conflicts between classes were essentially around the possession and distribution of land as the basis for the production and appropriation of the surplus product. In time, however, an urban-based commercial bourgeoisie emerged. Because of its ties to foreign capital and with foreign markets for the export of Haiti's agricultural products and the import of manufactured goods, from which the majority of the financial resources of the commercial bourgeoisie and of the state came, this bourgeoisie occupied a dominant position in the economy. At the same time, the weakness of both the Haitian ruling class and the state vis-à-vis foreign capital made it possible for the latter to reassert its grip over the Haitian economy and subordinate it to its interests. As such, the Haitian economy, even though it was essentially feudal in

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terms of its dominant relations of production, became integrated into and articulated with a dominant capitalist world economic system which largely determined the rate and pattern of economic development in Haiti throughout the nineteenth century and after.

The purpose of this article is not a detailed analysis of nineteenth-century Haiti, but to outline the main characteristics and patterns of development of the economy, and the main contradictions among the different social classes and social groups, in order to demonstrate 1) why the new ruling class which emerged after independence was unable to create a viable industrial infrastructure; and 2) why, given the economic, and hence political, weakness of the Haitian ruling class, it became vulnerable vis-à-vis foreign capital, and even facilitated the latter's repenetration into and control over the Haitian economy, thereby promoting the dependent underdevelopment of Haiti.

### **Independence and the formation of new class relations**

It is not my intention here to recount the complex factors, contradictions, struggles and forms of class alliances which caused the Haitian revolution and its outcome. This has been done masterfully by others, most notably by C.L.R. James.<sup>1</sup> I mainly want to point out the incipient *Haitian* national class forces which emerged during the revolution and which, after independence, became the principal actors on the Haitian scene. During the revolution two potentially dominant class factions emerged which, after independence, battled it out for control over the state, economy and society. These were the group of *ex-affranchis*<sup>2</sup> mulattoes and blacks, and that of the leaders and military officers of the revolutionary slave army. As is known, the *affranchis*, the majority of whom were mulattoes, had, during the eighteenth century, grown into a significant economic and political force which challenged the supremacy of the French in the colony of Saint-Domingue. The *affranchis* numbered 28,000 in 1789, and were over half the number of whites (40,000).<sup>3</sup> Though some *affranchis* were in the trades and commercial sectors (as carpenters, tailors, shoe- and cabinet-makers, barbers, small shop owners and small merchants), a significant number had risen to the ranks of a property- and slave-owning middle class. Though they never owned more than 25 per cent of the productive land of the colony, their holdings were significant in certain areas, mainly the south, and were almost exclusively devoted to coffee production. And some, a minority, even became large sugar planters who owned as many slaves and were as wealthy as any of the large white planters in the colony.<sup>4</sup>

The other group consisted of the leaders and military officers of the slave army who, during the course of the revolution, took over the properties abandoned by the white planters who fled the island, and thus



became a new property-owning class alongside the already established *ex-affranchis* property owners. At the same time, the former slaves sought to establish their own autonomy as property-owners by taking over and redistributing land among themselves. Taking advantage of the vacuum created by the civil war, the former slave masses abandoned the plantations to cultivate their own plots of land on the verge of the old plantations, or migrated to the hills and engaged in self-subsistence production on unoccupied lands.<sup>5</sup> These masses stubbornly resisted all attempts by the leaders of the slave army to restore discipline among the population and retain a labour force for the plantations to resume production once the civil war had ended. Thus, there was a tendency towards the formation of a classless economy based on the ownership of land by the former slaves, a prospect which both factions of the newly-emerging ruling class found quite alarming.

This tendency towards the formation of a self-subsistent peasant economy was facilitated, if not necessitated, by the immense damage caused by the civil war. Sugar production, the main export of the colony before the revolution, was practically brought to a standstill. The production of 'white' (refined) sugar fell from 70m *livres* in 1791 to 16,500,000 *livres* in 1801. 'Brown' (unrefined) sugar production was reduced to one-fifth of its former level. In 1789 production had reached 95.5m *livres*; in 1801 it was 18.5m. Cotton and cacao production barely reached a third of the 1789 level. Coffee production, however, did not fare as badly. In 1789 the level of production was 77m *livres*, and in 1801 it was 43.5m.<sup>6</sup> As a result, coffee production became the principal crop during the revolution, to the benefit of the coffee plantation owners, a large number of whom were *ex-affranchis*, as noted.

Thus, by the time Haiti became independent in 1804, the contours of the new class relationships had been outlined; emerging as a new ruling class was the group of *ex-affranchis*, and the group of ex-revolutionary army officers and leaders who had transformed themselves into a property-owning class during the civil war. Both these groups sought access to an exploitable labour force, and were thereby opposed to the transformation of the former slave producing masses into an independent, self-subsistent, land-owning peasantry. It is these classes in formation and their struggles which shaped the future pattern of development of Haiti during the nineteenth century.

No sooner was independence declared than the rivalry between the principal factions of the new ruling class led to open conflicts for the redivision of the land and control over the national economy. However, under the brief reign of Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1804-06) – who had emerged as the uncontested leader of the former slaves after the betrayal and imprisonment of Louverture by Bonaparte, and had led them to independence – measures were taken which, for the first time, could have given the masses and the new state the means to secure



their economic independence. Owing his allegiance mainly to the former slaves, and in order to provide the new state with its own means of generating wealth, Dessalines nationalised all the property of the former colonial masters who had fled the island, and created a special state organ, called the Administration des Domaines de l'Etat, empowered to centralise sugar production, administer and control production of agriculture in all nationalised properties, and devise a plan for the economic development of the nation. This was one of the most advanced forms of state intervention in the economy ever conceived at the time.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Dessalines sought to secure the real independence of the producers through an ambitious programme of land reform aimed at an equitable redistribution of the land to the tillers.<sup>8</sup> But this attempt to nationalise the property of the former colonial masters and redistribute the land to the masses obviously clashed with the interests of the propertied classes – of *ex-affranchis* and officers of the revolutionary army – who instead sought to redistribute the land amongst themselves and subjugate and exploit the labour of the former slaves for their own benefit. Dessalines, therefore, was an obstacle to the realisation of their class objectives, and he was assassinated in October 1806.

No sooner was Dessalines eliminated than the rivalry between the two main factions of the new ruling class led to open conflict. A civil war broke out which ended in the partition of Haiti from 1807 to 1820, with the north falling to Henri Christophe, and the west and south to Alexandre Pétion.<sup>9</sup>

Both Christophe and Pétion used their respective political positions to redistribute large properties to their respective supporters, as well as putting up for sale the former colonial plantations which had been nationalised by Dessalines. Those with sufficient wealth and/or high political positions were thus able to consolidate their economic position. These consisted largely of the high administrative functionaries and high-ranking military officers, along with the wealthy landowners. Thus, the state, as the possessor of large amounts of land, soon became the site of intense conflicts between the factions of the dominant class for the possession and redistribution of national lands. In the north, Christophe was proclaimed king in 1811, and even though it was to be a short-lived monarchy, he proceeded to transform the members of his class into a landed nobility, complete with titles and fiscal privileges, including the right to appropriate feudal dues and taxes from the peasantry.<sup>10</sup>

Pétion, under stronger pressure from below, adopted a more 'liberal' land reform programme, which included lower-level officers, and even non-commissioned officers, getting land. For example, a battalion commander was to receive 45 hectares (1ha. = 3.2 acres), a captain 38 ha., a lieutenant 32 ha., and a sergeant 25 ha. Although these



measures gave rise to a middle class or landowners, they were too limited and restricted nationally to alter seriously the concentration of the largest lands in the hands of a small minority. At any rate, when Jean-Pierre Boyer assumed power in 1820 and reunified the country, these 'liberal' land reform measures were ended.<sup>11</sup> National reunification, however, did not necessarily put an end to the rivalry between the two factions of the dominant class, each seeking to consolidate its position at the expense of the other.

The peasantry, for its part, did not accept the consolidation of landed property by the dominant class passively. For twenty years, following the presidency of Boyer (1820-40), the peasants waged a relentless struggle against the large landowners to gain their independence, to achieve effective ownership over the land, and to control the process of production and appropriation of the surplus product. The effects of this struggle were felt in the entire economy. By 1840, the country's economy was severely hit by the agrarian crisis. The state was on the verge of bankruptcy, as it was unable to repay the 60m francs indemnity imposed on Haiti by France (reduced from 150m francs in 1825) for the recognition of Haiti's sovereignty. It was also unable to obtain new credit. At the same time, usurers and landlords attempted to squeeze more surplus out of the peasantry, causing several popular uprisings in the form of *jacqueries*, as well as a revolt against Boyer led by the (predominantly black) landed oligarchy grouped around the powerful Salomon family.<sup>12</sup>

The struggles waged by the peasantry against the large landowners forced the latter to make concessions that were on the whole favourable to the various categories of peasants. Many large landowners divided and sold their lands by parcels of 25, 10, 8, 5 and 3 *carreaux* (1 *carreau* = 1.29 ha.). Others with 10 *carreaux* would subdivide them into 3 and 1 *carreaux* parcels.<sup>13</sup> Many peasant families, without obtaining titles to the land, nevertheless occupied and subdivided large properties amongst themselves, and cultivated the land individually or collectively by forming peasant cooperatives. But most peasants, unable either to buy or effectively occupy land, became *métayers*, by leasing lands of 2 to 5 *carreaux* for a rent to be paid in kind or in money. In addition, the state, as the largest landowner, rented small parcels of land to *métayers*, and thus became the largest landlord in Haiti.<sup>14</sup>

Whether as legal landowners, as occupants without titles or as *métayers*, the majority of the peasantry gained access to and effective control over the essential means of production and the process of production. In addition to their own subsistence, it is these small peasant producers who produced the products sold on the local, regional and national markets. It is because of the control which the peasants had over the means and processes of production/distribution that they



could effectively resist their expropriation and their exploitation by the ruling class, and assume a relative independence vis-à-vis that class, though this was the case mainly for the titled landowners, and much less so for the *métayers*. In cases where the landed oligarchy succeeded in extorting a surplus from the peasants, this was at such a low rate as to prevent any significant accumulation by the landlords. As such, the landlords were unable to effect any transformation of the relations of production, or develop the productive forces to make possible an increase in the levels of production and in the surplus product.<sup>15</sup> While it is not possible to give exact percentages of the peasant population which had legal property ownership or effective control over the land (but without title) during the nineteenth century, it is estimated that approximately one-third of the peasant population was in that category.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, while only a fraction of the peasantry had legal ownership of the land they occupied, the stubborn struggles which the peasantry as a whole had waged against the dominant classes had made it possible for a significant proportion among them to occupy and/or rent lands which belonged either to the state or the landed oligarchy. There had emerged, then, three categories of peasants with access to land: the titled landowners, the titleless but effective occupiers of state-owned lands, and the *métayers*. Though the latter two categories were more vulnerable vis-à-vis the dominant classes than were the titled peasants, the *métayers* were the most vulnerable of all because of the more directly conditional nature of their tenure. At any rate, continued access to land for all peasants depended on the balance of class forces between themselves, the state and the landed oligarchy, i.e., on the effects of class exploitation and class struggles. Thus, while *legal* ownership of land was not the only way for the peasantry to gain access to land, those who possessed such legal rights were more effective in resisting expropriation than those who did not have such legal rights. Juridical property, therefore, was not inconsequential. Having or not having property rights not only stratified the peasantry, but it also meant that the effects of exploitation and of class conflicts were not the same for all strata within the peasantry.

But if a significant proportion of the peasantry had become titled landowners, or effective land occupiers, and thus were relatively independent from the dominant classes, the majority of peasants were in a much more vulnerable position and subject to a greater degree of exploitation. These were the *métayers* and the landless peasants or *manouvriers* (day labourers). The *métayers* could effectively possess land on the condition of a payment of a rent to the landowner, whether this rent was paid in kind or in money. When paid in kind, the rent usually consisted of a fourth, a third, or half of the crop produced by the peasant, whence the origin of the system of *de moitié* so common throughout rural Haiti.<sup>17</sup> The rent paid by the *métayer* to the landlord constituted the surplus product appropriated by the latter, no matter



how large or small that surplus actually was.<sup>18</sup> Several measures were taken by the landlords to prevent the *métayers* from leaving the land. In addition, the *métayers*, usually devoid of significant savings, were often indebted to the landlords, thus reinforcing their dependence on the latter. Those unable to pay their rents or their debts faced possible evictions, and becoming landless. Though they were not in the great majority, the landless peasants were always a permanent category within the peasantry. Along with those peasants with insufficient land, they constituted a rural proletariat. Hiring themselves out (as day labourers) to the small, middle and large landowners by the day or by the week, they were subject to the harshest forms of exploitation.<sup>19</sup> The famous *piquets* of Jean-Jacques Acaau, who led the popular uprisings of the years 1843-8, were drawn from their ranks. The struggles waged by these landless and poor peasants were not only aimed at ending the abuses of local government authorities, but constituted class struggle against the landed classes, large, middle or small, and their state. They also signalled the emergence of a *prise de conscience* among the landless and poor peasants, a factor which all the ruling-class factions which succeeded Boyer were united in suppressing.<sup>20</sup>

Above the categories of small peasants and landless peasants were those of the middle property-owners who produced mainly for the national and export markets. In spite of certain measures taken by the state to encourage large-scale sugar production for export, the inability of the landed oligarchy to expropriate a large sector of the peasantry and transform it into a permanent plantation labour force meant the almost complete decline of sugar plantations by the mid-nineteenth century. By 1845, Haitian exports consisted mainly of coffee, cotton, logwood and mahogany.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, and particularly between 1870 and 1890, Haitian agriculture for export, particularly coffee, showed a certain vitality, due in large part to the demands of the foreign markets. In 1860 coffee production reached 60m pounds, in 1875 72.5m and in 1890 79m. Cotton production for export also increased considerably. These activities in turn stimulated the growth of coastal port cities and of urbanised social classes.<sup>22</sup> It is from the taxes obtained from the domestic and export sale of these agricultural goods that the state derived most of its financial resources.

While these middle agricultural producers were part of the land-owning peasantry, they constituted in effect a class of rich peasants, or a rural middle class, in that they exploited the labour of the landless or poor peasants, as day labourers or as *métayers*. These middle-class peasants, however, did not themselves market their products. For this they depended on the urban commercial bourgeoisie who were tied to the import/export international markets. It was these merchant capitalists, as intermediaries between the producers and the buyers of the export agricultural goods, and as creditors of the middle peasants, who in effect organised and controlled that sector of agricultural



production. It was the key position which these merchant capitalists occupied in the economy that made them a dominant element within the national economy.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, unable to defeat the majority of the peasantry and expropriate and transform them into a landless and exploitable labour force (i.e., a rural proletariat), the landed oligarchy, unable to live off the surplus of their lands alone and accumulate sufficient wealth, migrated to the urban centres to engage in commerce and/or to entrench themselves within the prebendary state administration as public functionaries. The latter had become one of the most effective mechanisms for the accumulation and distribution of wealth within the dominant class. Control of the state became almost the unique concern of the ruling class, and was the source of incessant internecine conflicts between the principal factions of that class. Entry into the civil bureaucracy was also the primary avenue for social promotion open to members of the middle classes. The members of the civil bureaucracy formed the backbone of the political patronage system from which the dominant elites drew their supporters, for bureaucratic positions largely depended on which faction was in power at any one time.

The incessant conflicts for control of the state by the ruling-class factions often expressed themselves in terms of a struggle between blacks and mulattoes. By redefining the terms of the racist ideology of the old colonial order, the new 'ideology of colour' became the expression of the new social relations and division of labour, and of the conflicts among the factions of the dominant class and their allies within the middle classes. In that the mulattoes tended to be overwhelmingly represented in the dominant commercial classes, they redefined the racist ideology of the colonial order by arguing that power should be in the hands of the 'competent', and posed themselves as the 'legitimate' and 'natural' heirs of the former European masters on the basis of their more 'advanced level of civilisation' and their 'competence'. By contrast, the largely landowning black faction and its allies, frustrated by the mulattoes in their attempt to control the state, had recourse to a *noiriste* or black nationalist ideology, claiming to be the sole representatives of the people because of their common skin colour. But in spite of the endless political and ideological conflicts between them, the members of the dominant class shared a common class interest vis-à-vis the subordinated classes whose exploitation they never opposed. These two factions and their middle-class allies often formed power blocs to prevent the balance of class forces from swinging in favour of the peasant masses, for example, during periods of popular uprisings.<sup>24</sup>

Largely unconcerned with the reinvestment of their accumulated wealth to expand the productive base of the economy, improve the techniques of production and create a home market for the development of national manufactures — since, as we have seen, the dominant



class factions did not accumulate the bulk of their wealth directly from the sphere of production – the dominant class factions enriched themselves largely by controlling the sphere of circulation, viz., through commercial profits or through political means (i.e., extortion, taxes and the prebendary state apparatus). At the same time, the state, as the site of the intense conflicts between the ruling-class factions, could not assume a relative autonomy from them and therefore could not effectively intervene in the economy to provide the necessary supports for the formation of an industrial infrastructure and the expanded accumulation of capital. That is why, too, the parliamentary form of government, though constitutionally established – Haiti was declared a republic – could never really take hold, because the factions of the ruling class could effectively rule only by directly controlling the apparatuses of the state, since they lacked a viable basis of accumulation ‘outside’ the state. Thus, the *coup d’état* became the most common method of settling accounts and of deciding which faction of the ruling class and its allies would govern at any one time, a fact which tended to militarise the government. Between 1804 and 1915, Haiti had twenty-six heads of state, twenty-nine insurrections to overthrow or install a leader of one of the two factions, with twenty-five of the insurrections led by high-ranking military officers.

In other words, unlike in the advanced capitalist countries, the state could not use its revenues created by the wealth generated from the process of production and circulation in the private sector to expand the infrastructure of the economy – such as the construction of national transportation and communication networks, the adoption of new technologies, the development of educational institutions, the creation of a credit system, and the adoption and implementation of protective tariffs for the domestic industries, etc. – and hence facilitate the accumulation of capital and the development of national industries.

It is at this juncture that the key to Haiti’s continued infrastructural backwardness is to be found. For, in effect, Haiti did not have a ruling class which possessed the direct means of generating and accumulating wealth from within the sphere of production. Divided within itself into antagonistic factions, the Haitian ruling class was a totally parasitic class, which could enrich itself essentially by extortion. In this, too, lay the country’s vulnerability to the repenetration and dominance of foreign capital.

In effect, the only true means of commercial exchanges with foreign countries whence came the manufactured goods were the export crops. From the taxes levied on the goods imported and exported came the financial resources of the state. The finances of this fundamentally rural, non-industrialised, and agriculturally based state,

with a bureaucratic and commercial sector ill from excrescence, were absorbed by extortionaries to pay big and small functionaries, and to repay foreign indemnities.<sup>25</sup>

### **From independence to dependent underdevelopment**

Thus the Haitian ruling class was essentially confined to control over the state, landownership and commercial enterprises. The Haitian bourgeoisie involved in commerce became the principal organisers of the rural production of the agricultural goods demanded by the export markets. It was the commercial bourgeoisie which acted as the intermediaries between the rural agricultural producers and the export market. It is their intermediary position which conferred on the Haitian commercial bourgeoisie a relatively dominant position in the economy. Because the production of goods for export and for exchange did not characterise all sectors of agriculture, the control over the export sector by commercial capital did not have the effect of transforming the extant social relations of production, i.e., induce the process of separating the producers from their means of production. Given also that the dominant class did not appropriate the bulk of its wealth from the exploitation of an industrial proletariat, there did not emerge until later in the century a significant conflict of interest between landlord and/or merchant capitalist class, and an industrial capitalist class for access to an exploitable labour force. As such, the dominance of the merchant capitalist faction over the export-oriented agricultural sector reinforced the rural social relations and patterns of land ownership, rather than acting as a catalyst for significant social change and industrial development.

But the Haitian merchant capitalists, dominant as they may have been vis-à-vis the rural producers, became subordinated to the foreign capitalists, who in time came to gain a near-monopoly control over the Haitian market. The repenetration of foreign capital – following a period of relative isolation after independence – began under the reign of President Boyer, who was obliged to pay an indemnity of 150m francs to France to compensate the latter for the damages suffered by its citizens during the War of Independence, and as the price to pay for the recognition of Haiti's sovereignty and the resumption of trade. Because of the inability of the Haitian ruling class to accumulate its wealth through the development of viable national industries, the Haitian state borrowed money from foreign governments and financial capitalists. It is in this way that Haiti accumulated a huge foreign debt, which stood at 120,296,000 francs in December 1916. This practice of borrowing money from foreign governments and capitalists, usually at very high rates of interest (15-30 per cent), had the effect of seriously undermining the autonomy of the Haitian state vis-à-vis foreign



capitalists, who demanded that important concessions be made to foreign commodity imports into Haiti, such as removing protective tariffs. These measures inevitably weakened and/or destroyed any attempt to develop national industries and further opened the door to the dominance of foreign capital over the Haitian economy. These are the reasons why, by 1880-90, foreign merchants (primarily French, English, German and North American) had almost completely taken over the Haitian import/export market, and why among the list of financial firms operating in Haiti there were only two Haitian-owned firms, whose financial weight was weak in comparison with those of foreign firms (for example, Olivier Cutts and Co., Th. Luders and Co., d'Aubigny and Co., and Miot/Scott and Co.).

Moreover, the foreign capitalists, fully supported and protected by their governments, never lost the opportunity to capitalise on the internal turmoils of Haiti. Several times foreign powers sent warships to Haiti to force compensation to their citizens, or to pay accrued debts. For example, in 1850, the United States sent three warships to demand a compensation of \$1m. In 1872 the German government sent two warships to impose the payment of 15,000 marks for damages allegedly suffered by two German merchants. In 1877 England demanded payment of £682,000 to an English merchant. The most dramatic and long lasting foreign intervention was that of the US marines' invasion and occupation of 1914-34, among whose first actions was the transference to the National City Bank of the entire monetary stock of the Haitian National Bank, founded in 1880.<sup>26</sup>

It is here, then, that the subordination of the Haitian economy to foreign capital through the medium of commercial capital is located. The subordination of Haitian merchant capitalists to foreign capitalists occurred through the latter's control of the commodity import/export sectors, as well as the sources of finance to the Haitian state. The necessity to produce agricultural goods for export had the effect of reorienting a sector of agricultural production towards the export market, as we have seen, while at the same time blocking the process of internal capitalist accumulation through the transformation of the relations of production in agriculture and the simultaneous creation of an integrated industrial sector to produce the means of production to transform agricultural and other raw materials into consumer goods. Since the primary orientation of the commercial agricultural sector was for the export market, the commodities produced in Haiti entered the circulation of commodities in the advanced capitalist countries and contributed to their accumulation of capital.

By contrast, the commodities imported from the industrial capitalist countries into Haiti did not contribute to the capitalist industrialisation of its economy because of the blocking of the process of capitalist transformation by the dominance of merchant's capital over

agriculture. Thus, the process of commodity production in Haiti was contributing to the development of capitalist industries in the advanced capitalist countries without itself undergoing such a development. The contents of Haiti's imports and its exports reflect clearly the underdeveloped and dependent nature of its economy. Manufactured and consumer goods rather than raw materials were its chief imports, while its exports consisted almost exclusively of agricultural products and raw materials, and less than one per cent of manufactured (mainly handicraft) goods. The United States and France were Haiti's main trading countries during the nineteenth century. Haiti imported 80-90 per cent of its manufactured and consumer goods from France and exported to France 70-90 per cent of its agricultural products.<sup>27</sup>

At this juncture it becomes possible to argue that while the Haitian social formation of the nineteenth century was in its essential characteristics a feudal economy, it was nonetheless integrated into and subordinated to a larger world capitalist economic system. To the extent that the advanced economies to which Haiti was subordinated – through the medium of commercial capital – were dominated by the capitalist mode of production, it was the laws of motion of that mode which determined the articulation of the world economic system as a whole.<sup>28</sup> Thus, even though the Haitian commercial bourgeoisie derived its export goods from essentially non-capitalist productive structures, both that bourgeoisie and, through them, the productive sectors directly linked with the export markets articulated with capitalist circulation processes and were subject to its laws of motion. As Amin puts it,

Only under the capitalist mode of production does trade become a capitalist activity like industrial production, and, consequently, does commercial capital appear as a fraction of total capital. Thenceforth, commercial capital participates in the general equalization of profit. Commercial capital's profit thus arises from the redistribution of the surplus value generated within a formation, from the transformation of this surplus value in its specific form as profit on capital.<sup>29</sup>

This is why a non-capitalist economy like that of Haiti during the nineteenth century could articulate with the dominant capitalist economies, since the commodities produced in Haiti and exported to the advanced countries entered the general circuit of capital there and were redistributed as profit on capital. On the other hand, it was precisely because of the form of dominance to which Haiti was subjected, as well as the nature of its class structures, that its articulation with the capitalist world economy did not have the effect of causing the large-scale development of capitalist relations in agriculture and in industry.



Nevertheless, there did emerge a small sector of the dominant class which invested its wealth to develop capitalist industries in Haiti. Industries for the treatment and commercialisation of wood, for the production of soap and essential oils, for the production of refined coffee, for brick-making, and some tanneries, were established. This sector was to form the embryonic capitalist sector, employing a fully proletarianised labour force. But it suffered from a lack of active state support and was not protected from competition by foreign products imported by the domestic and foreign commercial capitalists. Worse yet, some of these domestic industrial capitalists suffered great losses during periods of political turmoil between the squabbling factions, and from which some would never recover.<sup>30</sup>

Embryonic as it may have been, this emerging industrial capitalist class did form its own political party to advance and struggle for its class interests. Grouped around the Liberal Party, this class faction included some of the most far-sighted elements of the Haitian elite, who wanted to create a genuine Haitian industrial economy. Among some of its well-known spokesmen and leaders were Edmond Paul, Brénor Prophète, Emile Nau, Edmond Roumain and Boyer Bazelais. Essentially, this embryonic industrial bourgeoisie sought to transform the extant social structures and relations. It called for state protection of national industries and commercial enterprises against foreign capitalists and businessmen, a parliamentary form of government and a state which would promote the development of national industries. To achieve these goals, the liberal bourgeoisie launched a bloody and costly struggle against the landed oligarchy and the bureaucratic middle classes under the leadership of Salomon and the National Party, which was supported by foreign merchants with strong interests in Haiti.<sup>31</sup> Defeated, the liberal bourgeoisie attempted to regain political power at the beginning of the twentieth century. But these initial decades were also the period for the almost complete penetration and dominance of foreign capital, particularly North American capital in Haiti, expressed in the famous McDonald contract for the construction of the national railroad and the establishment of sugar-cane plantations and manufactures and, finally, in the US marines' invasion and occupation of Haiti.<sup>32</sup>

It was this legacy, the absence of a manufacturing infrastructure after independence, the development of essentially feudal relations in agriculture, the struggles of the peasantry to remain landed and self-subsistent, the growth of a landed rural middle class, the creation of a prebendary state bureaucracy, the inability of any of the dominant warring factions of the ruling class to achieve a decisive and long-lasting political and economic hegemony, and the penetration and dominance of foreign capital, which seriously blocked all attempts at the capitalist transformation and development of Haiti during the

nineteenth century. In short,

So many pulls, conflicts of interests, social shocks, reveal, in the midst of the economic structure, the search for a new equilibrium. It is not unsafe to say that this violent crisis of development, caused by the play of indigenous forces, would inevitably end up in a new equilibrium: a strong state, a consolidation of the feudal regime, as was the case in Venezuela with the dictatorship of Vincent Gomez, or in Mexico with Porfirio Diaz? A bourgeois democratic state, as Boyer Bazelais had perhaps dreamed? A state power with strong popular tendencies, where the peasantry would emerge as a conscious socio-political force? The historical process did not have the time to consummate itself. The United States had already entered the era of expansionism. The 'Manifest Destiny' had condemned the countries of the Gulf of Mexico to receive the Marines, or American capital, or both together.<sup>33</sup>

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- 1 See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo revolution* (New York, 1963).
- 2 *Affranchis* were freed slaves or their descendants who, though 'free' and owners of property, were denied the rights of citizens, such as the right to hold office or to vote, etc.
- 3 Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols (Paris, 1797), Vol.1 p.85.
- 4 Gabriel Debien, *Les colons des Antilles et leur main-d'oeuvre à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1958), p.20.
- 5 See Benoit Joachim, *Les racines du sous-développement en Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, 1979), pp.31-3; and Paul Moral, *Le paysan haïtien: étude sur la vie rurale en Haïti* (Paris, 1961), pp.18-19.
- 6 Gabriel Debien, 'Toussaint Louverture et quelques quartiers de Saint-Domingue, vus par des colons', *Notes d'histoire coloniale* (No. 23, 1954), p.119.
- 7 Gérard Pierre-Charles, *L'économie haïtienne et sa voie de développement* (Paris, 1967), pp.23-4.
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- 9 For a very detailed account of the events which led to the partition of Haïti, see Beaubrun Ardouin, *Etudes sur l'histoire d'Haïti*, 6 vols. (Port-au-Prince, 1958), Vol. 6, pp.87-122.
- 10 Pierre-Charles, op. cit., pp.29-30.
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- 12 Moral, op. cit., pp.42-3.
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- 15 Marion Léopold-Hector, 'La résistance paysanne en Haïti: éléments pour une analyse', *Series G: Working Papers No. 9* (University of Ottawa, March 1977), p.7.
- 16 Joachim, op. cit., p.126.
- 17 Moral, op. cit., pp.36-7; Joachim, op. cit., p.128.
- 18 Jean Luc, *Structures économiques et lutte nationale populaire en Haïti* (Montréal, 1976), p.36.
- 19 Joachim, op. cit., pp.129-30.



- 20 Pierre-Charles, op. cit., pp.40-41.
- 21 Moral, op. cit., p.45n.
- 22 It is not possible to give exact population figures for the nineteenth century. But at the beginning of the twentieth century the population was estimated at 3,100,000, of which 83 per cent were rural (Dantès Bellegarde, *La nation haïtienne* (Paris, 1938), p.159). Of the urban classes which developed, the majority consisted of unemployed rural migrants; a small proletariat employed in commerce, as dockers, hand-truckers, street porters, domestics, or as workers in the small industrial sector which emerged after the mid-century; a class of artisans, such as tailors, shoemakers, retailers, carpenters, cabinet-makers, masons, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, hat-makers and sellers, etc.; a smaller middle class of small merchants, civil bureaucrats, and those in the liberal professions; and the small minority of the dominant political and commercial/entrepreneurial class (see Joachim, op. cit., pp.133-5). In Haiti, in other words, the development of capitalist relations and of an urban industrial proletariat was embryonic in the nineteenth century, but there was a viable and prosperous petty-commodity and commercial sector.
- 23 Luc, op. cit., pp.44-5.
- 24 Benoit Joachim, 'Sur l'esprit de couleur en Haiti', *Nouvelle Optique* (No. 9, 1973), pp.149-58; Gil Martinez, 'De l'ambiguïté du nationalisme bourgeois en Haiti', *Nouvelle Optique* (No. 9, 1973), pp.1-32; Micheline Labelle, *Idéologie de couleur et classes sociales en Haiti* (Montréal, 1979), pp.52-6. It should be noted here that while the 'ideology of colour' was used to justify the social and class divisions, affirm and sanction the objectives of each class faction and their allies, not all members of the mulatto or black factions of the dominant and middle classes espoused the ideology of their respective group. Neither can it be argued that any one version of this 'ideology of colour' was the dominant or hegemonic one, as this depended on the balance of class forces in power at any one time. The 'ideology of colour', therefore, does not define the ideology of the ruling class, but rather the divisions within it and the struggles to take over and control the state.
- 25 Joachim, op. cit., pp.132-5.
- 26 Pierre-Charles, op. cit., p.40; Joachim, op. cit., pp.184-5.
- 27 Joachim, op. cit., pp.195-6.
- 28 See Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London, 1977), p.43.
- 29 Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: an essay on the social formations of peripheral capitalism* (New York and London, 1976), p.32.
- 30 Joachim, op. cit., pp.146-7.
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- 32 Ibid., pp.43-4.
- 33 Ibid., pp.45-6.

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## The state in West Malaysia\*

Cabral once observed that 'the problem of the nature of the state created after independence is perhaps the secret of the failure of African independence'.<sup>1</sup> This can also be said to be true of the Malaysian case. The last decade has seen the meteoric rise of the state in Malaysia. Yet, there has hardly been any systematic attempt to study this problem. Studies dealing indirectly with the state have, on the whole, tended to view the state narrowly, as a political system responsible for maintaining harmony amongst the three races in a plural society. More important problems such as the functioning of the state and its relationship to economic processes and social structures have yet to receive the attention of serious researchers. The present study hopes to begin to fill this gap in politico-economic analysis.

### **The formation of the national state**

In the period prior to the establishment of colonial rule in 1874, the states in Malaya were characterised by internecine wars, the absence of any form of centralised administration or adequate communications system. Sultans exercised very little power beyond their own royal districts and territorial chiefs had a free hand in appropriating whatever little surplus there was in an economy with a very low level of productivity. Confronted with this chaotic state of affairs, the first task the British advisers set themselves was to 'create the government

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\*Hereafter referred to as Malaysia.

to be advised'.<sup>2</sup> The monarchical institution was strengthened and power centralised in the hands of British 'advisers'. Members of the ruling class were either pensioned off, given stipends commensurate with the loss of revenue from customary means of supporting themselves (such as *corvée* labour, tribute from trade, poll tax, etc.), co-opted into state councils whose role was merely nominal or relegated to minor roles in the rural administration. (Prudence dictated that Malays be associated in name if not in the actual process of government.) In this way, the creation of an autochthonous class of landlords was prevented, for control of land would have given the traditional ruling class control over the producers on the land. The majority of the Malay masses were confined to the subsistence sector.

The wage labour force, on the other hand, was made up primarily of Chinese and Indian immigrants engaged in the mines, plantations and a network of domestic trade. Imported under a system of indentured labour, ruled closely by tightly knit organisations of secret societies and labour contractors and tied to patron-employers, these immigrant workers were immobilised and isolated, particularly where vast jungle expanses separated the mines and plantations.

The first quarter of a century of British rule saw rapid and far-reaching changes in the Malay states. The basic infrastructure was laid to facilitate the export of rubber and tin, and the import of food for the largely immigrant labour force – the subsistence sector could scarcely cater for its own needs. Government administration burgeoned into an elaborate bureaucracy with the executive ranks held wholly by Europeans. But once the material conditions allowing for the free movement of labour had developed (i.e. the gradual increase of Malayan-born wage labour not tied to contractors, the gradual strengthening of security forces able to deal with the secret societies that monopolised the Chinese labour force, a rapidly expanding economy and a fast developing communications system), the indentured labour system became increasingly unprofitable and was abolished in 1914. With the removal of such restrictive labour practices, the bargaining power of labour increased correspondingly – and labour organisations, aimed at improving conditions of work, began to emerge.

Labour unrest was first manifested among Chinese workers in the early 1920s in the face of the first severe price slump in the international market for rubber. Such strikes were repeated during the recession of the 1930s, became increasingly widespread and came to a head during the post-Second World War depression when rice rations were drastically reduced. That these strikes were confined to one racial group was largely the result of objective circumstances. To neutralise the threat posed by an over-concentration of Chinese workers in the early tin mines, the colonial administration consciously fostered a scheme to assist the immigration of Indians into the then rapidly



expanding plantation sector. In 1913 the Malay Reservation Act was passed to forbid the sale of Malay peasant land to non-Malays. This was done after Europeans had already acquired nearly half of the agricultural and mining land (leaving the rest to be nearly equally divided between the Malays and the non-Malays).<sup>3</sup> The Act was actually aimed at stabilising the Malay agricultural population and succeeded in freezing the process of proletarianisation of the Malay peasantry.

Thus the three races (Malay, Chinese and Indian) were confined separately in different sectors of the economy. In the handful of situations where the labour force was multiracial in character, as in the Batu Arang coal mines, the strikes had involved more than one racial group. For the vast majority of the Malays, however, their affiliation to the state apparatus and security forces coloured the way they viewed these disturbances, that is, mainly as insurgency among alien Chinese. It was not surprising, then, that the membership of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), formed in 1930, was rarely below 90 per cent Chinese.

Because the strikes were confined in the main to the Chinese, they were not widespread enough to engender the industrial chaos that was hoped for by the MCP. However, under pressure from hysterical commercial groups, the British government responded in an increasingly restrictive and authoritarian fashion.

Using the Essential Regulations Proclamation of the former British Military Administration, a number of Emergency measures were taken to give the police extraordinary powers of search, detention (without trial), curfew, the control of movement of persons and traffic, and to reintroduce the death penalty for the simple, unlawful carrying of arms.<sup>4</sup>

The MCP and other left organisations, including Malay nationalist organisations, were banned indiscriminately and militant unionists and left sympathisers driven underground. Restrictive employment regulations were easily enforced by twice amending the Trade Union Ordinance (An Enactment for the Registration and Control of Trade Unions, 1940). These enactments were supplemented by, among others, the Printing Presses Ordinance (1948) for the control of publications for public consumption, and enactments concerning detention, national registration and deportation of 'undesirable' elements.

Although the MCP's premature efforts to turn the genuine grievances of workers into revolutionary struggle failed, they marked the beginning of Emergency rule, which lasted from 1948 to 1960. Up to the present, the same coercive administrative legal framework set up by the colonialists to protect British interests and to deal with 'subversion' remains, heavily reinforced and strengthened, not only to contain the communist threat but other voices of dissent as well. State defence

in 1980 took up nearly 21 per cent of the expenditure budget.<sup>5</sup>

In view of the relative weakness of the colonial military set-up when the Emergency was first declared, it is interesting to offer some explanations for the failure of the MCP. From the start, the MCP was incapable of pursuing a nationalist line but was forced to adopt a China-oriented outlook. Since the Party was founded by the immigrant Chinese who constituted the bulk of the early wage working class, it was 'natural' for the Party to speak out consistently in defence of Chinese language and Chinese culture. And, in more recent times, the Party has tended to lean heavily towards China for leadership. The state was, of course, quick to exploit this situation. By judicious manipulation of data on MCP arrests, the state was very successful in reinforcing the 'Chinese' image of the MCP.

The practical consequence of the Party's relatively chauvinistic stance was that it failed to win the support of the Malays who constituted about half the population and were concentrated amongst the poor rural classes.\* And instead of attempting to raise its own consciousness of Malayan nationalism, the MCP made use of Chinese nationalism and anti-Japanese feelings to further its revolutionary aims. Even today, the MCP's propaganda does not systematically aim at correcting the Chinese attitude of cultural superiority nor at wiping out the mistaken belief in the inherent 'primitiveness' of Malay culture — forfeiting, thereby, the solid backing of the masses.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the MCP gave the British a 'legitimate' reason for prolonging their stay in Malaya — and provided the opportunity for western-educated Malay elites and aristocrats to turn the initially ideologically diverse waves of Malay nationalism into a movement wholly concerned with fighting for and demanding Malay special rights. Ironically enough it was this 'Chineseness' of the MCP which compelled the British to accept a pro-Malay policy for independent rule, for in the last analysis Malay unrest would have been more fatal to the stability of the social order. In return, the British got the full support and cooperation of the Malay elites in their fight against communism; but there was only slight liberalisation of non-Malay citizenship rights. The British then sought to organise a more pliable corps of English-speaking Chinese leaders to substitute those who had fled to the jungles. It was intended that this group should share power with the English-educated Malay and Indian leaders under the Alliance Party (made up of the three ethnic parties) to ensure the smooth running of the capitalist system after independence (which was granted in 1957).

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\*This is not to say that the MCP has never attempted to organise the Malays. The liberation army of the MCP has a wholly Malay regiment — the Tenth Regiment — and the Islamic Brotherhood Party (Parti Persandaraan Islam) was established in 1965 as a unit of one of its regiments.



Even after independence, development continued to be carried out within the overall domination of imperial capital, with the surplus being drained out of the country and out of the capitalist sectors for the benefit of monopoly enclaves rather than for the full industrialisation of the economy. Up to 1970, foreigners owned two-thirds of the Malayan share capital, while the Chinese and Malays owned around 27 per cent and 2 per cent respectively.<sup>7</sup> Existing economic expansion was, therefore, not only inadequate to meet rising demographic pressures, but was also erratic and swung very much in accordance with the rise and fall of capitalist cycles. Although economic indices recorded healthy growth rates for the whole economy, the trend was towards increasing inequalities and widespread poverty in the rural areas.<sup>8</sup> Pressures towards inequality were much more intensely felt within the Malay community which was largely rural in location.

The policies of the state during this early period reflected those of the colonial administration. The state was expected to provide the administrative and infrastructural services to promote economic development, which was undertaken largely by British companies, a handful of the Chinese rich and sundry state collaborators. However, this required the training and appointment of appropriately qualified local staff who would be committed to applying technocratic criteria in the determination of policy. In times to come, this was to bring them into conflict with the dominant comprador fraction of the administration.

The forces of class dissatisfaction were easily realigned into racial hatred and utilised by the new fraction of bureaucratic Malay bourgeoisie in their struggle with their 'traditional' Malay, Chinese and foreign counterparts. Using the general interests of all Malays to advance their specific interests, this newly emergent fraction of the Malay bourgeois class was able to put forward claims for its own hegemony (as against Chinese and foreign capitalists) as a necessary condition for the continued stability of the social order. The crisis peaked in the May 1969 racial riots.<sup>9</sup> This was the spark which initiated and legitimised the penetration of the state into various sectors of the economy.

Prior to the riots, the state was careful to avoid any interference with the existing pattern of the production of surplus value by foreign and Chinese capitalists – contenting itself with appropriating part of the surplus to subsidise peasant agriculture and the Malay special rights programme. But communal carnage and divestment of both Chinese and foreign capitalists after the riots saw a dramatic diminution in the role of these bourgeoisie who had till then dominated the trade, commerce and what little import substitution industrialisation there was in the country. Even today, productive entrepreneurship is discouraged by the pre-emptive concentration of foreign firms and the availability of more profitable alternatives such as commodity trading and share

market speculation. In this vacuum, the Malaysian state has had to play an active role of entrepreneurial support. The state intervened not only to restore economic stability, but also to establish a more viable pattern of accumulation and distribution of surplus so as to accommodate Malay petty-bourgeois aspirations. A precondition for this task was the acquisition and combination of smaller companies to form more competitive and larger conglomerates (the resources for which only the state could command) and the creation of an internal market through agricultural development which would, in the process, take care of rural unrest. Hence the state in Malaysia in the decade of 1970 was characterised by extensive efforts at business acquisition and agricultural development.

### **The state and the bourgeoisie**

The policy of state acquisition of foreign and Chinese enterprises was at the forefront of nationalist agitations. This was embodied in the NEP (New Economic Policy) which seeks to create a viable Malay middle class and to ensure 30 per cent Malay participation in equity and employment in all sectors of the economy by 1990. Due to a combination of fortuitous circumstances, mainly good commodity prices and the discovery of petroleum, the state was able to embark on an aggressive course of acquisition. Whereas in 1951 there were only ten public agencies, by 1979 the number stood at 701.<sup>10</sup> Through these public agencies the state was able to acquire a major stake in all sectors of the Malaysian economy.<sup>11</sup> By the end of 1980, the state had become the dominant investor in the private sector.

The main legal weapons used to penetrate the private sector were the ICA (Industrial Coordination Act, May 1976) and the PDAA (Petroleum Development Amendment Act, 1974).<sup>12</sup> It would be instructive to follow the passage of one of these two enactments to understand the different interests of international capitalism and the politically powerful groups among the Malaysian petty bourgeoisie, the conflicting and complementary relations among them and to compare the specific policies of successive groups dominating the state apparatus.

Petronas (the National Petroleum Corporation) was established in 1974 as the institutional means for securing state participation in the oil industry. It was headed by a hardline nationalist who master-minded the take-over of Malaysia's largest corporations and tin mines. In 1974 the Petroleum Development (Amendment) Act was introduced to provide Petronas with powers to acquire broad control (through management shares, each to carry voting rights equivalent to that of 500 ordinary shares) of all companies in the downstream and marketing ends of the oil industry for very little outlay. To register their opposition to



these interventionist policies, Exxon, the major oil-producing company in Malaysia, decided to suspend exploration and development activities despite the bright outlook for oil discoveries. The deadlock lasted for a year and it took the personal intervention of the prime minister to reactivate the stalled oil negotiations. It became clear that the position taken by Petronas was not that of the dominant fraction in the government.

Hence, Malaysia had to shift its emphasis on oil policy from overall control to income derived. The most obnoxious section of the Act (to the oil companies), the management shares clause, was finally repealed in 1976. The multinationals won several other major concessions. Malaysia's total share of oil production was decreased from 81.2 per cent to 68.4 per cent. The usual 50 per cent corporate tax was reduced to 45 per cent.

Although the Act was repugnant to international capitalism, it could not, for political reasons, be repealed altogether. But neither could the nationalist stance be sustained any longer, for a number of reasons which all stemmed from the weakness and dependence of the Malaysian economy on outside sources for generating internal development. Petro-dollars were urgently needed to implement the NEP. This was especially true for poorer states, such as Trengganu, which had already signed away their rights to Petronas eighteen months earlier, and were eager to get their share (5 per cent) of the proceeds from the oil profits. The states were understandably jealous of the power and control wielded by Petronas over mining issues which traditionally had always been under local state control. They would naturally have preferred to deal directly with foreign companies.<sup>13</sup>

The delay also held up the natural liquefaction project (LNG), which was the cornerstone of Malaysia's petroleum development programme. This would have resulted in enormous losses to Petronas and its two foreign partners, Mitsubishi Corporation and Shell Gas BV (each holding 65 per cent, 17.5 per cent and 17.5 per cent respectively of Malaysia LNG Sdn. Bhd.). The national shipping line had already ordered six LNG carriers to be delivered from 1979 onwards in expectation of the launching of the LNG project and increased oil production. Further delays in negotiations could only mean laying up charges for the vessels, since they could not readily be deployed elsewhere because of the current tanker glut. The amendments to the Act thus represented an attempt to accommodate conflicting interests between various groups including foreign capitalists and fractions of local bureaucrats as well as pressures from below.

Moves to take majority ownership neither challenged continued western access to national resources nor their continued high profits. In fact, most foreign companies had come in asking for minority participation in order to take advantage of government financing and its

low interest rate. Although corporate capital had expressed its displeasure at Malaysia's initial display of nationalist tendencies, firms finally responded with alacrity to the government's policy of import substitution industrialisation.

The Malaysian state has in fact become the entry point for these development projects. Many government policies run parallel to the plans of imperial capitalism. Expansion of ports, roads, power, telecommunications and industrial complexes all contribute to strengthen and stabilise the private sector. Moreover, such projects not only create demands for machinery plant equipment and agro-chemicals, they also increase Malaysia's orientation to western standards. The state also plays an important ideological role in cloaking such investment projects with a rich rhetoric about the need for aid and technological assistance because of its shortages of capital and lack of technology.

Although the state has stressed that foreign participation is welcomed and only foreign domination is to be constrained, there apparently has been no concern about the technical and management contracts remaining with the minority share-holders. For instance, Pernas owns 71.4 per cent in Malaysia Mining Corporation (MMC), but has a smaller share of the company managing the MMC group. Similarly, Petronas has a certain amount of control over the oil industry, but only on paper. As demonstrated recently, due to the lack of competent personnel to monitor and police the implementation of the oil production agreement effectively, the government had to forego millions in revenue.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the oil industry is totally dependent on foreign expertise, as indicated by the fact that the master plan for oil development was commissioned to C. Itoh Co. of Japan. Pernas, the acquisitive arm of the government, has as its main advisers the London Merchant Bankers, N.M. Rothschild & Sons. With transfer pricing and an array of book-keeping mechanisms at their disposal, this ensured for the transnationals continued control combined with the added security of state participation.

As we have seen, then, after 1969, the offensive of international monopoly capital took place against a background of heightened struggle amongst bourgeois fractions and the increasing political mobilisation of the working class, peasants and the fractions of the petty-bourgeois class. Both the local and foreign bourgeoisie competed eagerly with each other for access to state officials with the power to grant them licenses and government business. With the development of the state as a major market and producer the comprador role was easily assumed by public officials whose position allowed them to influence state spending and government policy. In such circumstances it was only to be expected that most state ventures would become bankrupt after a time. *Instability was endemic in the struggle among intermediaries*



for state patronage, and in the competition among officials. Furthermore, conflicts also arose between public officials charged with technical implementation of state capitalism and those who were at the political helm.

### **The state and the peasantry**

The agricultural sector has been singled out for special mention because about two-thirds of the Malaysian labour force are employed in it. Precisely because of the preponderance of this sector in the Malaysian economy, the state has had to intervene massively to arrest the spate of rural unrest which has occurred with increasing frequency since 1970. If a massive state presence in peasant agriculture was dictated by deteriorating conditions, the solutions chosen were much more related to struggles waged between fractions of the dominant class. Instead of attacking the structural causes of poverty head on, and in the process alienating the class of rich landlords from whom the Malay bourgeois class draws its main support, the state prefers to adopt the World Bank type of solution to rural poverty. Such a solution attempts mainly to raise productivity through imported technology, which in Malaysia's case consists of rubber replanting, state-managed land schemes and the so-called integrated approach to agricultural development, embracing a whole panoply of agro-chemical, bio-technological and credit inputs channelled through numerous state agencies. In the process, the state creates new classes dependent on it for access to all kinds of subsidies and allocations and hopes in this way to extend its own chances of survival.

While it cannot be denied that some poor farmers have genuinely benefited from improvements in productivity brought about by state programmes, poor farmers as a group actually now hold less power vis-à-vis landlords and the state. Ultimately, such state subsidies actually help enhance the accumulative potential of the well-to-do peasants and bureaucrats and extend their areas of exploitation.

Improved overall productivity brought about by massive injections of state funds into the agricultural sector has actually exacerbated the problem of rural poverty, and radically changed class relations in this sector. First, improved productivity was inevitably followed by increased demands for agricultural land. Consequently, both the price of land and rentals have escalated. This trend was further aggravated by the fact that rich Malay peasants and other members of the Malay bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes, with access to loans subsidised by the state, inflated salaries and political connections, can now easily purchase land from an economically depressed peasantry. The Malay Reservation Act 1913 and the NEP make it much easier for the better-off Malays to buy land off the farmer. Not only have greater returns on

land encouraged existing landlords to retain the land and work it for themselves, using machines bought on subsidised credit, this has also meant the incursion of Chinese mercantile capital into the traditional subsistence farming sector.

Moreover, traditional obligations tying landlords to tenants no longer hold as transactions increasingly take on a cash value. It is now much more difficult for landlords to mobilise support for the ruling party. Indications of such disaffection include the mass demonstration of farmers in the Muda Scheme in January 1981, the strong support given to opposition Malay parties such as PAS, and the rise of government-labelled 'deviationist' Muslim groups, who refuse to worship in government-built mosques (because they are considered '*tidak sah*' – not valid) or to send their children to state schools).<sup>15</sup> All this has given rise to a Malay proletarian class which has no choice but to migrate to the towns to look for wage work.

Peasants who want access to improved means of production are now forced to place their labour directly under the organisational control and direction of the landlord and officers of state agencies. And in so far as these agencies can direct, energise and control production and marketing with greater efficiency, they can raise the productivity of labour and hence ultimately raise the rate of surplus appropriated. But in the very processes of such production and marketing, the peasants have lost effective control of the means of production. For instance, in the state irrigation schemes, schedules for land preparation, transplanting and harvesting are now determined by MADA and other state agencies. The farmer who has a direct interest in production has no say over water management and control. All the operations from deciding how much water to discharge from the dam to the regulating of the inlet operation and the weeding of irrigation canals are done by labourers employed by the Drainage and Irrigation Department. With increasing mechanisation, a farmer with a very small piece of land very aptly described himself as 'redundant' on his own farm, for he now has to sell more of his labour power in order to pay for the fertilisers, insecticides, rental for tractor, increased water rates, land rentals and so on. As peasants become more integrated into the cash economy, it is evident that 'fuel shortages and rising fuel costs will be traumatic issues in heavily mechanised agriculture'.<sup>16</sup>

Approximately one decade after the implementation of the NEP and after millions have been allocated to the agricultural sector, rural Malaysia is still in the doldrums. According to one government report, 'the farmers outside the Muda are poverty stricken in both relative and absolute terms.' In fact, per capita GDP for Kedah and Perlis (two of the poorer states) declined from 67 per cent of the national average in 1970, to 56 per cent in 1975 and to 54 per cent in 1978.<sup>17</sup>

With the majority of the agricultural population dependent



upon fluctuating commodity prices, there is inherently a great deal of instability in the political and economic system. Mass protests and mobilisations have become more frequent since the early 1970s. The first of these was the Baling demonstration which occurred on 21 November 1974, when about 12,000 peasants took to the streets. It was the first time in twenty-eight years that peasants had staged a march of that order. This was essentially and predominantly a confrontation between the Malays and their Malay government and was therefore the more significant for, till that time, racial identification had more often than not prevented the crystallisation of class conflict. Students of all the universities held simultaneous demonstrations in sympathy with the peasants and almost caused a state of emergency to be declared in the capital city. The immediate government reaction was to ban student groups from 'doing anything which can be construed as expressing support, sympathy, or opposition to any political parties and trade unions'.

In 1978 and 1979 there was widespread settler unrest in government-organised land schemes (Felda). The burning of property, the holding of supervisors to ransom and even murder were reported.<sup>18</sup> Recalcitrant settlers were unceremoniously evicted. From December 1977 to the first quarter of 1978, the country was further shocked by events following the go-slow action by 4,000 workers of the national airline MAS. This resulted in the sacking of eleven members of the union, suspension of 221, deregistration from union membership of 874, the detention of twenty-two union members under the Internal Security Act<sup>19</sup> and the grounding of MAS flights. Since then the state has revamped existing labour laws to close any loopholes which allowed for workers' initiative and control.<sup>20</sup> At the same time that workers were registering their protest over the new amendments to the labour laws, approximately 10,000-15,000 rice farmers were mounting a stormy protest in the Muda Scheme for higher padi prices. This demonstration was effectively halted by the arrest of farmers, charging ninety-two in court and detaining them under the ISA.<sup>21</sup>

This list of anti-government action could be extended indefinitely. It is difficult to say to what extent these militant acts of violence were communist inspired, but 'the guerrillas are still active in the jungles ... nearly 20 years after their armed revolt was crushed'.<sup>22</sup>

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- 7 See, mid-term review of the *Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975*.
- 8 The income of the lowest 40 percentile decreased from \$86 per month in 1957/58 to \$75 per month in 1970. D.R. Snodgrass, 'The fiscal system as an income redistribution in West Malaysia', *Public Finance* (No. 1, 1974), p.58. Approximately 50 per cent of all households in Malaysia were living under the government-designated poverty line and 86 per cent of all households in poverty were from the rural areas (*Third Malaysia Plan 1976-80*, p.161). According to D.R. Snodgrass, in *Inequality and Economic Development in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), the poverty line as defined by the government was held constant at \$120 per month from 1957/58 to 1970. The GDP was growing at rates of 7.3 per cent and 8.5 per cent during 1971-5 and 1976-80 respectively, Bank Negara Malaysia, *Money and Banking* (Kuala Lumpur, 1979).
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- 12 Developments related to the passing of the ICA and the PDAA are collated from *FEER* (7 April 1978, 1 October 1976, 16 June 1978, 13 January 1978, 29 August 1975); *NST* (10 October 1979); *BT* (29 August 1979); and *FEER* (29 October 1976-12 December 1976; 13 April 1979-23 March 1979).
- 13 See *FEER* (1 August 1980), *The Star*, Kuala Lumpur (18 December 1980) and *Watan*, Kuala Lumpur (19 December 1980) for two specific examples.
- 14 For details, see *FEER* (31 October 1980).
- 15 For instance, see *Utusan Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur (4 July 1981). See also the government's struggle to control the interpretation of Islam, *NST* (24 November 1980), *FEER* (28 November 1980), *The Star* (22 October 1980), following the attack of a police station by Muslim 'deviationists'.
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- 17 As reported in *BT* (16 January 1980).



- 18 In one incident, a Felda scheme manager and thirteen members of his staff were held captive for five hours by 300 settlers before they were rescued by the police, *NST* (3 July 1978). *New Sunday Times* reported on 9 December 1979 that 260 settlers had detained eight Felda Officers in the office on 13 November that year. That these incidents were widespread was confirmed by interviews with a group of personnel from schemes located in various parts of the Peninsular.
- 19 Detention without trial; for the more vivid details, see *FEER* (4 May 1978 and 23 February 1979), *NST* (3 September 1979 and 30 August 1979), and *Star* (4 May 1979 and 31 January 1980). Despite these labour problems, MAS made a record profit of \$42.66M million for the year ending 31 March 1979. See also *Suara Buruh*, newsletter of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, MTUC (May 1979).
- 20 *Watan* (16 January 1981), *Suara Buruh* (May, 1979), *NST* (22 March 1980, 23 March 1980 and 16 April 1980), *Star* (6 March 1980), *Business Times* (1 March 1980) and *Asia Week* (15 February 1980) contain details of how the nation-wide picketing plans of the MTUC (The Malayan Trade Union Congress) to protest the amendments was finally squashed and the leaders satisfied with wearing black arm-bands. The *Report of the General Council of the MTUC 1979-80* also contains organised labour's stand on this hot issue, now turned completely cold.
- 21 See *Asia Week* (5 February 1980, 8 February 1980 and 15 February 1980), *Star* and *NST* (27 January 1980), *FEER* (22 February 1980). Refer also to *Watan* (8 February 1980).
- 22 *NST* (22 November 1979).

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## Class antagonisms and black migrations: a review article

Coming to terms with the recent works of black American history seldom involves a matter of fact. The scholar-descendants of blacks in that land have been aware of the additional burdens for some time. Black historians in America, to put it too simply, have never had the occasion to work as historians who happened to be black. Their project was and continues to be somewhat more substantial. Nell Irvin Painter's *Exodusters* and Douglas Henry Daniels' *Pioneer Urbanites* are two cases in point.<sup>1</sup> Each of these works, indeed, is a quite conscious attempt not merely to reconstruct a social experience but to *write history*; to extend the ledgers of black continuity in the face of what Painter declares 'the lack of a strong Afro-American historiographic tradition' (p.266). Yet neither Painter nor Daniels is a 'contributionist', to use Orlando Patterson's diminutive for black scholars convinced that black mimicry is the sincerest form of civil breeding. Both, rather, are conscious rebels against the schools of American history in which they could find little security – a history whose own history has been infrequently grasped. As they both readily demonstrate, the place of black history in that development was always central. Perhaps we should also start from that point.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century – the moment when the slave system in North America acquired its greatest commercial significance – popular journals were increasingly favoured with

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illustrations of black men, women and children drawn to the tastes of minstrelsy. Round comic bodies became *de rigueur*, topped by black spheres for heads punctuated with blank faces scarred by bacon-strip mouths seasoned by button-round eyes – almost totally anonymous beings except for the clues of age and sex suggested by relative size and dress. Such was one of the graphic imprints of American racism, an art which in the post-bellum period almost erased the naturalism of depiction which earlier graced abolitionist literature, travelogue and *memoir*.<sup>2</sup> In some sense, the displacement of black humanity by caricature in the (white) American eye merely mirrored what was taking place in their historiography. Indeed, as American history finally began to assume a recognisable form towards the end of the nineteenth century (at the instigation of John Burgess, William Dunning, Herbert Adams and Franklin Jameson), the race-consciousness which it displayed was a most natural consequence of the Anglo-Saxonist and slavocratic sympathies exhibited by its developers and their environs.<sup>3</sup> American historians, as a corollary, required that blacks (and native Americans) assume an anonymous image bereft of fully human capacities for thought, feeling and the comprehension of social experience. Not surprisingly, this mind-set persisted well beyond the era of the flowering of the professional historians. In 1935, W.E.B. DuBois put it quite plainly when he characterised the attitude of most of his contemporaries in the field: ‘they cannot conceive Negroes as men; in their minds the word “Negro” connotes “inferiority” and “stupidity” lightened only by unreasoning gayety and humor.’<sup>4</sup>

Because of this foundation and its persistence, if not dominance, into our own century, the writing of American history has shown a predilection for legend, as Wesley Frank Craven has put it.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since one of its functions was the legitimising of American society as it stood to subsequent generations, it was a discipline largely unprepared to investigate in depth itself, its mythology or the republic which it purported to describe. Instead, its practitioners were celebrants. They celebrated America’s colonial origins, its victories over the native savage, its revolution against monarchic tyranny, its paternalistic hegemony over its neighbours, its convulsive resolution of slavery, its manifest destiny, its reception of European immigrants, its industrial growth and transformation, its triumphs in war, its domination of the world, its democratic institutions, and always, of course, its great men.

As one might expect, black historians were never of much use to this academy. Scholars such as George Washington Williams, Joseph Wilson, Carter Woodson and DuBois were explicitly antagonistic to the fibre of national fables, analytically contesting its sins of omission and fabrication, while others remained too isolated for even their intellectual submissions to count for much. Earl Thorpe has recounted how academic racism was sufficient enough to disabuse all of them of



*any real significance.*<sup>6</sup> Progressive historians found in racism little with which they were prepared to argue.<sup>7</sup> Radical historiography, often linked with organisational politics, was also easily dismissed, by reason of its 'alien' cast and concerns. Only the fractious struggles between the members of the American Historical Association and the Mississippi Valley Historical Society (now the Organization of American Historians) seemed to matter. Though some of their preoccupations were weighty (e.g., the historical significance of immigration in America's history) and some were less so (whether national history began in the colonial period or with the revolution), still others were simply curious (e.g., Washington's love life). Blacks had no history though slavery did. Both of those societies ignored the questions being raised by the Association for the Study of Negro (now Afro-American) Life and History organised by Woodson in 1915. Such was the state of blacks in official American history until well past the Second World War: mainstream minstrelsy occasionally interrupted by a protest history inspired by racial identity and/or political consciousness.

When change came to the discipline, its origins were outside the pallid halls of conventional repartee. The occasion was the black rebellion launched in the early 1960s by young black intelligentsia. Though the initial thrust was against the petty apartheid of the social order (the niggling segregations which had become customary in inter-state travel, public eating places and conveniences), it was almost inevitable that the dialectic of the movement and the violent opposition it engendered would propel that generation of black petite-bourgeoisie towards a broader social purpose. The result was a black consciousness movement which shook American society almost to its foundations. As this social process distended, the contemptible, child-like figurines of black people which had been nurtured for so long in the official past were of little use in this crisis. The emergent ideological, emotional and material power of the black movement could hardly be traced to the spooks which inhabited the texts of the American past. The powerful and their minions were confused and justifiably disappointed. Moreover, the black intelligentsia, politically and analytically armed with the shreds of the hidden history and the revolutionary ethos of the movement, found these phantoms irreconcilable with their emerging social and historical consciousness.

The academy did not break but it did bend. The thin line of black students (and black faculty) in higher education was appreciably augmented. It was meant as an accommodation. Nevertheless, members of the American academy were now frequently confronted with nuclei of students formulating novel intellectual demands issuing from their political experience. One result was the intrusion of black history into institutions from which it had been effectively excluded for nearly a century. The study of black history became acceptable (though



not universally recognised) and no era more so than that of the Reconstruction. And since Painter and Daniels were a part of these events, it is natural that their works bear the marks.

Painter's study of the 'Kansas Fever Exodus' of the spring of 1879 is much concerned with the more contemporary movement. In this sense her work coheres with that of DuBois (*Black Reconstruction*) and C.L.R. James (*Black Jacobins*), who evoked past revolutions for the instruction of their contemporaries in the 1930s. In Painter's instance, though, it is not so much the phenomenological similarity of the two black movements separated by nearly a century which stands attention. Rather it is their autochthonous significance. Each of these mass actions – the one following the Civil War and Reconstruction, the other, the expansion and subsequent contraction of American capital in the wake of the Second World War and the Korean War – arose even as a collectively-held vision of liberation was shattered.

In the post-Reconstruction period (for convenience, let us say between the years 1871 and 1889), the freedmen in the South reluctantly began to realise that their hopes for a true liberation were no longer congruent with the national agenda. The occupying Federal Army, with which almost 200,000 of the freedmen had served – for a time some as 'confiscated' or returnable property and others as soldiers – seemed as often an instrument of their former masters as a guarantor of their legal freedom; the Freedmen's Bureau, too, became progressively inept, subverted by incompetence and corruption as much as by the mammoth task of relief of poor blacks and whites; and the fraction of the Northern ruling class upon which the ex-slaves were unwittingly dependent, having achieved its primary mission of disciplining its Southern complement, was now primarily concerned with securing the new opportunities for its capital in the reconstituted national economy.<sup>8</sup> The Federal initiative, slowed by the 'twice sick soul' of Andrew Johnson, and then by General Grant's indifference to governmental administration, was entirely dismantled in 1877 when Hayes bargained away military intervention and political oversight in exchange for the presidency. The South's 'Redemption' from social democracy was now complete.

From the vantage point of 1877, Reconstruction appeared to falter in about 1871 in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Black solidarity and a real, if guarded, optimism ... marked the period preceding 1871, but nightriding and a corresponding loss of hope among rural blacks prevailed in the later years. By the late 1870s the South had begun to take on the feudal usages which shaped race relations economically and politically throughout the rest of the century (p.16).

What DuBois had characterised as the counter-revolution to destroy



the political freedom of blacks and their allies among the white proletariat and peasantry, to abort their right to their own labour, to land and to security from physical violence, had become a reality. Black people now understood that they could either live once again as slaves in the peonage of indebtedness, or leave.

In the first of the three parts of *Exodusters*, Painter traces the familiar outlines of this historic tragedy – but with a difference. What concerns her is the effect of these times on the social development of the former slaves and their world-view: the political and social habits they created in response, their evolving awareness and ability to conceptualise what they were experiencing, the conflicting judgements which underlined the individual differences among them; and finally the forms assumed by their collective resolve to be free. She intends this to be a history of ‘plain’ black people. It was they, she begins, who produced ‘the migrants [who] together registered the first, massive repudiation of the Democratic South’ (p.4).

At the base of the social formation of the black peasantry, Painter maintains, was their culture:

In the South ... where most Blacks were slaves, they shared a rural, non-literate folk culture, which of course endured well past the Civil War. Firmly egalitarian and marked by strong racial cohesion, they commonly spoke of ‘our race’, ‘the colored people’, and ‘our color’, manifesting an enduring communal identity (p. 14).

Their culture was the measure by which they distinguished themselves from ‘the representative colored men’ who presumed, and were assumed by non-blacks, to be their leaders. According to Painter, there was no cultural identity between the black masses and ‘the representative colored men’, little social and physical proximity, and only the barest of common ideological and political ambitions. Though Painter asserts these presumptive leaders ‘by no means constituted a class’ (p.15), her treatment of them (pp.15f, pp.40f) comes close to Marx’s description of the French petite-bourgeoisie of the same century.<sup>9</sup> The immediate point, however, is that they were largely irrelevant to the black masses as the latter took upon themselves the project of evolving vital political structures:

In actual fact, when uneducated Blacks needed to take public community action, they invariably reached commonsense conclusions hammered out in mass meetings ... the meeting would reach a consensus and decide upon a course of action, designating an able speaker or organizer to execute policy on its behalf ... but the role of executor ... was tenuous, and it was strictly conditional ... (p.22).

The costs of effective black organisation, however, were substantial:

Black solidarity, especially in interracial confrontation, frightened whites and, by extension, furnished a pretext for their binding together in White Leagues and Ku Klux Klans (p.10).

Working-class Blacks were far from ignorant of their self-interest in political issues. In fact, it was their correct understanding of the use of suffrage which drove the Southern whites to extralegal means of distorting the Black vote (pp.30-31).

The Leagues and the Klans assassinated 'executors', 'bulldozed' (night-riding) Republican Clubs and meetings, lynched and intimidated black voters.

The black masses in the rural South recognised that behind the bulldozers stood the 'class of rich men'. Unlike some 'representative colored men', whose charge was that 'the more respectable white people' were merely negligent in not opposing the terror, the rural masses assumed that the ruling class was the ideological, financial and political support of the white terrorists. And as the early years of formal emancipation passed, the masses were forced into recognising further the more systematic vengeance the ruling class was exacting from them: landlessness, indebtedness and political oppression – the reconstitution of a captive black labour force.

Painter argues that one of the last phases of secular black resistance to re-enslavement was the resort to underground organisation. In Louisiana,

After five years of freedom and seemingly endless victimization, a group of ex-soldiers assembled to form what they called simply 'the Council' or 'the Committee' ... The Committee functioned as a secret intelligence-gathering body between 1870 and 1874, when as many as five hundred men took part. Although the Committee played a significant, grass roots organizing role, its members did not think of it as 'political'. They organized Republican clubs and advised voters, but they did not run for important offices (p.76).

Elsewhere, but with fewer formal opportunities, the protective colouring of secrecy prevailed – at least for the masses. The elections of 1876 and 1878, specifically their violence, corruption and betrayal, ended the viability of even this desperate tactic of political organising. The black petite-bourgeoisie, Painter implies, could continue to convene their conventions of supplication, could still retreat to the relative (but certainly not consistent) security of the cities and their artisanship, but the 'anonymous' black masses possessed no cover to shield them from the ravages of reaction. As early as 1876, Committee members, surveying and cajoling among their people in the countryside, reported 'many working people ... had already lost hope' (p.85). By 1877, the Committee could no longer find a constituency for electoral politics, it was now



appropriate and necessary for its members to metamorphisise it into the National Colored Colonization Society. Compelled even further by the force and immediacy of mass despair, it moved to public meetings for the first time in its history. In that first year, 98,000 people (mainly from Louisiana, but some from Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi) signed its petitions indicating to the Federal government their intention, with its aid, to emigrate to Liberia. In South Carolina, the Liberian Exodus Joint-Stock Steamship Company pursued a similar solution. In Tennessee, emigration was also in the wind, leading to the inauguration of such organisations as the Edgefield Real Estate Association. But as that organisation's name implied, here there was an important difference in the ultimate objective. That objective was Kansas.

The Edgefield Association was one of several organisations with which Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton would be associated. In time, from the mid-1870s to the late 1880s, Singleton would be involved with a number of groups, the majority concerned with emigration. But Singleton and his associates, Painter maintains, despite their attempts at appropriation of the movement, played only a partial (and secondary) role in the black migration to Kansas, which by 1870 had brought almost 16,000 blacks to the state and in another decade would swell that population to over 43,000. This migration, she argues, like the one which would grip several thousand blacks in the Spring months of 1879, was 'a spontaneous, popular movement' (p.147). Neither had required a 'single great leader' (p.207). Kansas itself was their inducement, just as post-Reconstruction society was their catalyst. For the landless black agrarians, the bitter struggle which had marked the securing of the state's Free Statehood, the abundance of the state's fertile land, and the memory of John Brown sufficed.

For her treatment of the sudden and resolute belief which characterised the Kansas Fever Exodus of that extraordinary Spring, Painter has apparently been influenced by Hobsbawm's study of 'archaic' and millenarian movements. In her bibliography she has also cited Lantenari's classic study of 'the religions of the oppressed'.<sup>10</sup> She might have made more use of them (and Rude, Sundkler, James, DuBois, Levine and Cabral), but no better or more correct one. The faith (Painter uses the word 'idea', 'as a synonym for myth') which sustained those peoples as they trekked overland to Kansas or to the banks of the Mississippi river to await forlornly (and for many disappointingly) for transport to their freedom was indeed spun in gossamer. There was no historical or material basis for their vision of freedom. They possessed only their human communion and their culture to substantiate it. Still, they had long prepared metaphysically for the objective necessity of escape. That history is also required.

Nevertheless, their movement shocked the white ruling class. It feared the total loss of its black labour when it had only intended to

destroy the blacks' will to be free. Painter's description of the more circumspect deposition of social and economic repression which followed is deadly specific. Having already eradicated black political leadership for the most part, as Painter argues, the ruling class was able to come to an uneasy accommodation with what remained: religious activists. This was the historical residue from the exhaustion of black political aspirations and the infrequent eruptions of black millenarianisms.

Interestingly, the bare possession of the Kansas migrants was substantially greater than the dreams which obsessed the subjects of Daniels' study. *Pioneer Urbanites* is 'a social and cultural history of Black San Francisco' from the 1850s to the close of the Second World War. Some of these men and women, then, were the contemporaries of the exodusters, but they seemed to differ in the extreme. In a way, though, each community was the other's complement (or counterpoint); one's liberation was essentially collective, the other's persistently individualistic, the first nationalistic, the other (though race-conscious) integrationist.

As a black historian, Daniels has chosen his primary intellectual or ideological antagonists from among the contradictory traditions which, on the one hand, treat the study of urban blacks in the terms of 'ghetto pathology', and on the other, in terms of the heroic achievement – the dualistic set of passive/active. Daniels argues that the past of his subject community can only be comprehended in the reconciliation of these opposing perspectives. He set out to accomplish this in these terms:

White westerners, through deliberate actions or as a result of apathy, aided those individuals and institutions who sought to keep Afro-Americans in the south, shackled to the plantation system during slavery and to share-cropping and tenant farming after emancipation. The successful efforts of a few thousand Blacks to reach the city, to find jobs, to combat discrimination, to form their own institutions, and to create images of themselves represent the creative and heroic aspects of Black history (p.5).

This is quite literally what he has done, and how he achieves this is one of the remarkable aspects of this work. The other, perhaps, is the revelation of just how spare the *raison d'être* which served as the basis for those images could become.

Daniels' historiographic tools range beyond the expected inventory to the 'oral, musical, and photographic records ... as significant in Black history as the traditional kinds of written documents' (p.5). He has meant that in no casual sense, he does not intend to illustrate but to illuminate. His discussion of his discovery of 'photographs [which] dramatically contradicted the cruel stereotype of the popular press' (p.9) and the significance of oral history, is arresting:



Oral history and photography taught me to view the pioneer urbanites through their own eyes, by their own standards, and as a result of their own words and the visual images by which they wished to be remembered. None of them expressed the ideas or myths of Negro pathology presented by scholars (p.10).

The photographs of the Black San Franciscans enabled me to visualize individuals' dress, posture, and bearing, and to compare their images with the stereotypes found in popular and scholarly literature, in cartoons, and in their written records (p.11).

In their own fashions, both Daniels and Painter have declared that the characteristic absence of the articulation of black consciousness in American history has fundamentally debased that discipline.

For the near century which Daniels' account covers, the numbers of blacks in San Francisco were modest. Between 1852 and 1890, the total black population for the city only increased from 852 to 1,654, according to census materials. In the same period, the total population of the city mushroomed from 34,776 to 342,782. Even by 1940, with San Franciscans numbering nearly 640,000, blacks only accounted for 4,846 among them. Daniels reasons:

A number of factors kept the Black population small in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Blacks' lack of power and influence in San Francisco and the distance from the south accounted for the size of the population before 1880. After 1880, powerful white labor unions prevented Negroes from winning jobs, while white immigrants took many of their traditional service positions ... Finally by 1900 Oakland grew and attracted Blacks, including San Franciscans, but then other new Pacific coast cities offered more opportunities...

The story would not significantly change until after 1940. In a way, these 'Afro-San Franciscans' were a graphic representation of the allowable limits of black social mobility in American society and its culture.

The earliest black pioneers had migrated to the 'Paris of the West' filled with the sorts of aspirations they assumed might be obtainable in the physical remoteness and financial volatility of the far west. Most, it seems, had determined that their worth would be measured in terms of petty capitalism. In 1862, the editor of one black newspaper, the *Pacific Appeal*, put it bluntly: '[Black Americans] are moved by the same impulses, guided by the same motives, and have the same Yankee-like go-aheadativeness of the white Americans' (p.44). At least, this may very well have been true for the blacks in San Francisco. Predominantly male and single, some were sailors or maritime and, later, railroad workers, but many were service workers (barbers,

seamstresses, janitors, laundrymen, waiters and cooks) and personal servants. Coupled with their characteristically Northern origins (pre-1900), even though many were slaves, they hardly resembled the majority of black Americans in any part of the nineteenth century. They were more literate, more cosmopolitan, more mobile, more varied in their skills, and certainly in the peculiar dimensions of materialism, more ambitious. Some were extraordinary entrepreneurs. In 1870, for one exceptional example, Richard Barber (a porter by occupation) declared his personal value at \$71,800 (real estate). Others did well in speculation or manufacturing (soap and tallow, hydraulic hose factories), and others in gambling. But most black businesses were confined to 'second-hand or repair shops, house-cleaning businesses, barber-shops, restaurants, saloons, and boarding houses' (p.45). Black capital accumulation, in any case, tended to be short-lived and soon incapable of withstanding the arrival of industrial monopolies by the late 1860s. Nevertheless, Daniels asserts that their marginal successes had significance: 'Although the competition afforded Blacks few business opportunities, the importance of their enterprises cannot be overlooked. They gave Afro-Americans the independence and status that every American desired, and provided employment for their Black citizens' (p.46).

An identical optimism accompanied those who, in the search for financial security, rooted about the gold fields and among the mountain towns of California, wandered along the coast line, or re-settled in British Colombia. A good number of them could be found even further afield: advising their fellows in the city by long-distance letter about the conditions of Haiti and the advisability of emigrating to that country ('not the place'); insisting from a Japanese retreat on why a broader knowledge of the world might be critical to future black development in the US; even 'spitefully' suggesting that, in the flush of emancipation times, being in Chicago was an experience 'far in advance of San Francisco'. These opinions, and the more practical, necessary and mundane intelligence they gathered as itinerants subject to discriminations and other hardships of the road, amounted to what Daniels calls 'travelcraft': 'The outlook and complex of skills that facilitated both long-distance travel and residency in the Bay Area' (p.59).

Their leaders took to politics in the same ways, organising clubs, churches, convention movements and other civil rights groups in San Francisco and the Pacific hinterland. The more than a dozen newspapers they established through the first several decades heralded their achievements and decried their setbacks, always ending the message with encouragement to further strides. But still something was amiss. Daniels warns: 'While Black people viewed these individuals as "representative", they mainly exemplified self-flattering qualities which were thought to be lacking in the group' (p.116). Despite the



energies and talents of their elite and themselves, black San Franciscans were enduringly powerless in political terms. More disturbingly, the little community was internally fractious: some light-complexioned blacks choosing to 'pass' as whites, other blacks shying away from black businesses in order to favour those of non-blacks. Frustrated away from sustained political action, uncertain often of a shared social identity (despite the constant rhetorical claims to one in their newspapers), jealous and angered to the point of xenophobia by their frequent displacement by newer immigrants from Europe and Asia, and despite their impressive efforts, black San Franciscans understood that their individual welfares often depended on the racial whims or goodwill of the whites. They attached themselves to them through public association or friendship.

San Francisco – black San Francisco – was on several scores during the nineteenth century precisely what the rest of the American nation could deliver to these 'representatives'. It was the very best the republic had to offer to a strata of men and women who welcomed the judgement that they were different from (better) and consequently more acceptable than the mass of black workers who remained trapped in peonage in the South and the growing labour ghettos of the North. Through the first decades of this century, the westerners sustained themselves on this minimum currency. But in the 1940s, when the needs of national war production finally brought substantial numbers of the other blacks' descendants to San Francisco, the self-indulgent race-consciousness of the alienated 'representatives' became obvious:

The southern migrants viewed the older residents with favor. But the non-migrants' attitudes toward the newcomers were at times as unfriendly as the traditional attitudes of natives toward migrants in any American city or region (p.171).

Even thirty years after the fact, most of Daniels' informants still recalled the period with embarrassment. San Francisco, which for more than a century had avoided the ghettoisation of blacks (but not of Chinese, Japanese or Mexicans), now could sport black ghettos and caste divisions.

It is interesting that both these historians, in their own particular fashions and following the specific dynamics of their chosen subjects, have found it necessary to draw the developing boundaries between the partially proletarianised black masses and black petite-bourgeoisie. The dramatic class confrontations they have reconstructed are several generations apart and under radically different conditions, but this does not entirely explain the differences which have arisen between the scholars' interpretations. Painter, expressly critical of the 'representative' strata, largely dismisses it as irrelevant to the struggle of the black masses for survival and has further determined that its

ideologues were consistently wrong-headed (Frederick Douglass, a frequent target, is described in the late 1870s as expressing opinions 'by that time ... unswervingly conservative and often anti-Black' (p.26)). Daniels, on the contrary, is much more sympathetic, indeed he acknowledges the absence of a proletariat during the longer part of his story. The several explanations which present themselves are instructive.

For one, Painter's primary interest is in the organisational forms which evolved among blacks during the desperate era when the very terms of their future lives were being determined. In 1879, while the bulk of black people in America was directly confronting its re-enslavement, black spokesmen too frequently met that horror with moral and philosophical platitudes, eschewing the harder and perhaps no more sanguine choice for involvement in organised resistance. Another basis for her antipathy might be the fact that those years were truly devastating for the conception of America which had sustained the majority of the antebellum freedmen. This majority had forsaken its emigrationists (e.g., Martin Delaney), choosing instead a position closer to that of Douglass which claimed the American heritage. For this majority, the direction the nation had taken in the post-Reconstruction had been bewildering. Stunned, many had sought the refuge of resignation, others in more favourable circumstances retreated into 'hard-headed' materialism. It would be some time before the black middle class could again generate the heroic efforts which had produced the revolutionary resolve which had been achieved for an instance at the Chatham convention (1858), or the unambiguous commitment which Osborn Anderson, Dangerfield Newby, Lewis Leary, John Copeland Jr. and Shields Green had demonstrated with John Brown at Harpers Ferry (1859).<sup>11</sup> Painter's harsh portrait has not entirely recognised that the contradictions of the black petite-bourgeoisie have produced revolutionaries as well as self- and class-serving bluster. Finally, we must remind ourselves that Painter is of a generation when another black movement revealed the faults and ambivalences of its elitist spokesmen. The temptations for these leaders were possibly greater, the machinations of cooptation infinitely more sophisticated, the self-delusions more seductive – it is fruitless, however, to attempt to measure the extent of ideological and analytical misdirection.

It is Daniels' generation too. He seems, however, less to have misread the character of the developing black petite-bourgeoisie than to have been appropriated by it. His method, we must remember, drew him to them; he spoke with their living, rummaged through their memories, their photographs, their precious scraps from the past. Whether he intended to or not, he has not only brought their self-produced images to us, he has placed their social portraits in a setting of their own making. Such are the truer canons of liberal historio-



graphy. Daniels has exhausted the important possibilities of that form as they pertain to his little community. Painter, having chosen a group of people who had no opportunity to write such a history of themselves nor were expected to ever warrant that sort of attention, has been led to the greater suspicion. She has judged that this historical silence was the ominous product of bourgeois intent as well as racism. This is the fuller crime of American history.

## References

- 1 Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (W.W. Norton, 1979, originally published by Alfred Knopf, 1976); Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites* (Temple University Press, 1980).
- 2 The work of Thomas Nast, the Radical Republican illustrator, was an important exception for a while. See Ralph Shikes, *The Indignant Eye: the artist as social critic* (Beacon, 1969), p.316.
- 3 Wesley Frank Craven, the noted American historian, remembers: 'Many of the most influential of our early university professors of American history were German-trained, and from their German professors they had taken over much of the Teutonic view of history ... This, of course, was a racist concept of history and it should be said that by no means all our historians accept it. But many of them did ...', *The Legend of the Founding Fathers* (Cornell University Press, 1956), p.175.
- 4 DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (Meridan, 1969, original 1935), p.726. Of public school history textbooks, Frances Fitzgerald would write: 'In the vast majority of books, there were only "the slaves" — slaves who had appeared magically in this country at some unspecified time and had disappeared with the end of the Civil War.' *America Revisited* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1979), p.83.
- 5 Craven writes: 'We tend to preserve or restore only that which by some artistic or other standard seems worth preserving, and so the picture can be distorted. Who among us can wander down the streets of Williamsburg, with promptings on every side to remember Washington and Jefferson, and still remember that it all rested originally on the back of a Negro?' op. cit., pp.212-3.
- 6 Thorpe, *Black Historians* (William Morrow and Co., 1971).
- 7 Of the progressives, Staughton Lynd comments: 'In their indifference to the Negro, Turner and Beard were typical of Northern liberals at the turn of the century. This attitude was also common among historians.' 'Charles Beard did not share the quasi-racist attitude toward the Negro expressed by the older, more provincial Turner. He did view the Negro's role in American history as altogether passive: thus he characterized the attitude of slaves during the Civil War as a blend of contentment, affection for their owners, inertia, and helplessness.' 'On Turner, Beard and Slavery', in Dwight Hoover (ed.), *Understanding Negro History* (Quadrangle, 1968), p.107 and 112.
- 8 Lynn remarks: 'the Negro's betrayal by the Republican Party had been engineered by the same force which Turner and Beard denounced: capitalist finance'. op. cit., p.107.
- 9 Characterising the ideology of the French petite-bourgeoisie during the revolutionary activities of 1848-49, Marx declared: 'it believes that the special conditions of its emancipation are the general conditions under which modern society can alone be saved and the class struggle avoided.' 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (W. W. Norton, 1972), p.462.
- 10 See E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (W. W. Norton, 1965); and Vittorio

Lantenari, *Religions of the Oppressed* (Knopf, 1963).

- 11 See Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom: blacks and John Brown* (Oxford University Press, 1974).

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# Notes and documents

## The formation of an African working class: some problems\*

In this short paper I will try to illuminate some of the circumstances under which a working class was formed in Africa. Consequently, certain regions of the continent – South and South Central Africa, for example – will be discussed in more detail than those where capitalist penetration sought more to benefit from rather than transform existing relations of production, particularly where these relations encompassed large-scale agriculture and handicraft manufacture organised along lines approaching economies of scale.<sup>1</sup>

What I have to say has also been limited by the nature of available evidence on the process of proletarianisation in Africa – colonial annual reports, depositions of civil and criminal courts, government and private company archives and so on. Conjecture and speculation, therefore, have played an inordinate role in my conclusions about what the people who actually became proletarians thought about the whole affair; and, if some aspect of their lives that seems genuinely authentic emerges here, it is perhaps because, like a crafted piece of wood, I am obeying the urgent insistence of an intelligence closer to the actual events.

The comparability to other parts of the world of many of the trends and events examined here will be painfully obvious to many. But if, in the process of examination, some appreciation of the different idiom and rhythm that the process of proletarianisation took in Africa is established, what follows will have accomplished some of its initial purpose.

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*Investing in 'law and order'*

As much as we might like them to, the working classes of no country act out their life experiences through a standard set of formulas. They are often as much prisoners of custom and tradition as other classes in society, despite the unpredictable manner in which the market for their labour power and what it produces treads on the more parochial manifestations of these traditions.<sup>2</sup>

But the ambivalence of the working class about the prospect of changing society derives less from its own particularistic conception of bourgeois culture in the form of a 'culture of work' – that is, a way of life centred around the workplace and the household as a vector for the reproduction of labour power – and more from its apprehension of the field of political power in capitalist society. For, within this field of power, its own possibilities and strengths are determined by the relative weakness of the ruling and exploiting classes. Coercive force and ideological consensus or hegemony as means of class rule combine, diverge and recombine on the basis of this political calculus.<sup>3</sup>

In Africa, force and violence executed by agencies of the colonial state were initially the chief means of procurement of wage labour, and remained important factors in the process of proletarianisation until the eve of independence in many parts of Africa. The coercive state machinery was further buttressed by an ideology of racial superiority which strongly militated against African access to the institutions of the colonial state or to actual state power. Thus, in marked contrast to the European working class, which acquired its basic contours within the framework of fierce intra-industry competition and the drive of the employers to achieve a maximum level of production on the basis of demand, the African working class grew to maturity under conditions of monopolistic economic organisation and colonial overrule. Moreover, capitalist enterprise in Africa was labour intensive and export oriented; and few, if any, of its benefits found their way back to the African workers or the vast generality of the African population.<sup>4</sup>

Colonial expansion in Africa was marked by two important and determining phases. The first – beginning at the end of the 1860s and culminating with the Chimurenga War of 1897 in Rhodesia, the Anglo-Asante War of 1898 on the Gold Coast and the Boer War of 1899 in South Africa – was a purely military form of expansion which established the geopolitical boundaries of the colonies, quelled the first instances of resistance by the indigenous people and prompted the possibility of a major war among the European powers on the African continent. The second, which began around 1900 and ended with the close of the First World War, was characterised by the pillaging of the rural African economy and the use of forced labour for either the collection or extraction of strategic raw materials for European industry. After 1904, this second phase became even more attenuated by the



dramatic increase in the price of industrial raw materials and the advent of Germany and the United States as industrial powers rivalling Great Britain's manufacturing capacity.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, after the early 1900s, large-scale wars with precolonial African political leaders gave way to more calculated offensives against the general African population. All of this was done with an eye towards making up for the low organic composition of capital invested in the African colonies through greater social control over the rural African population and increasing the pool of African labour at the disposal of the new colonial regimes and private European companies by force.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the differential in actual numbers from one region of Africa to another, the prospect of a stratum of Africans that would come to work for and be dependent upon wages was implicit from the outset of colonial occupation. Pierre Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, perhaps the most eminent European economist of the era after Alfred Marshall, put it thus:

Commerce will grow and extend itself in this region of the world only insofar as the Europeans establish their effective authority and political suzerainty; where they will cause peace to reign with the support of a pliant and disciplined military force; where they will prohibit local wars, massacres, pillage, and slavery; where they will open lines of communications whether they be simple routes, canals or railroads; where, through the example and initiative of their own nationals, they will make the native peoples accustomed to having more needs – that is to say, to work more and to pay for goods with money. It has been rightly said that the most characteristic sign of civilisation is the multiplicity of needs.<sup>7</sup>

Like Beaulieu, almost all of the European protagonists of the colonial occupation – from bush trader to colonial administrator – genuinely believed in the myth of African savagery and prepared for the consequences of this belief with armed plans to impose 'law and order' on Africa. From the standpoint of intellectual history, European colonial policy in Africa at this point was the genesis of an illusion – a very powerful one, however, inasmuch as it shaped many of the actual experiences of penetration. Moreover, 'civilisation' had to have its African adherents, even if they were garnered by force.<sup>8</sup>

### *Forced labour and the seizure of the land*

Few Africans escaped the social consequences of the transformation of the colonial model from one of outright plunder to one that depended on a more comprehensive plan of economic exploitation.<sup>9</sup> Because of long standing commercial ties with Europe, a favourable ratio between land population and longer instances of initial resistance to European incursion, West and North Africa were perhaps the least scathed by

forced labour; but neither colonial administrations nor the concession export companies gave the peasantry there much rest; and, by the mid-1900s, cocoa, oil palm, peanuts, wheat, grapes and government marketing boards, which appositioned the economic advantage of metropolitan buyers and processors, batted down on the rural cultivators of these regions as oppressively as rubber, gold, diamonds, tin, copper and labour recruiting agents in the other regions of the continent.<sup>10</sup>

In the main then, forced labour as the primary means of drawing the African into the colonial mode of production was more characteristic of East, Central and South Africa. Wherever the mining site, the plantation or the white settler farm blocked the aspirations of African peasants or compelled them to sell an ever increasing portion of their produce on a capitalist market, forced labour and/or a taxation system designed to nudge the more marginal strata of African farmers into wage labour became necessary components of colonial political economy.

Colin Bundy, writing about the plight of the African peasantry of the Ciskei region of South Africa in 1903, shortly after that country's gold industry reached its second peak under the Milner government, stated the problem thus:

All sorts of expedients were resorted to. Land was divided and subdivided within the family far past the point of declining returns for all involved. Marginally productive and hitherto undesired land was ploughed and reploughed, until it was leached of its limited fertility; hillsides, ridges, dry and stony patches were sought out; reports are replete with phrases like 'every available inch of land is cultivated'. Commonage was encroached upon by men anxious to sow and reap a modicum of grain, often provoking bitter feuds ... Landless men sought to use any and all of the feeble political devices which they might have at their call, both of traditional and colonial varieties ... Others turned to stock theft or vagrancy; many entered wage labour with the express intention of accumulating enough cash to buy or lease land a little later. With the twin pressures of increasing population and rising land prices, fewer and fewer were able to achieve this aim.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of the First World War thousands of Africans had been either coerced or driven by circumstances into the towns and on to the mines and plantations of the southern half of Africa. All this was accomplished under duress, and with much popular protest from hinterland Africans.<sup>12</sup> In many instances, popular unrest threatened to turn into resistance wars aimed at dislodging the occupying European powers. Such was the case with the Bambata Rebellion, of which Shula Marks has written so ably, and which sought to keep the Zulu from



being pressed on to the gold mines of the Rand after the Boer War; the Maji Maji Rebellion of 1904-5 in German East Africa; the Kyanyangire Rebellion of 1907 in Uganda; the Chilembwe Rebellion of 1915 in Nyasaland; and the Watch Tower Rebellion of 1917-19 in Northern Rhodesia.<sup>13</sup>

Other instances of what amounted to anti-labour impressment protest spread across the southern half of Africa in one undulating wave; and, in some instances, they were complemented by flight, sabotage and incipient strikes by Africans on the work sites. In 1912, for example, a strike by African workers took place at the Wankie Colliery. A large part of the strike's significance rested with the fact that it took place during the apogee of the reconstruction period of the mining industry in Rhodesia, a period when the mine owners felt they had successfully beaten back the challenge of African workers with gruelling workloads and inadequate diets.<sup>14</sup>

Much of the short term success of African protest on the work sites was conditioned by the protracted labour crisis and successive labour shortages that plagued European industry in Africa from 1904 to the recession of 1921, and which gave rise to the myth of a backward bending labour supply curve.<sup>15</sup> But, in the end, both the workers on the industrial work sites and those they left behind in the rural areas were gravely affected by the burden that the selective industrialisation of this part of Africa imposed on them: precolonial towns and villages were abandoned; entire ethnic groups became squatters on their own land or rack rented tenants of white settlers; women and old people as opposed to able-bodied men felled trees and broke the ground for crops during the rainy season; taxes in money were demanded at the same time that land and labour were expropriated on a wholesale basis. From the Africans' vantage point, more than just the land and its sons had been 'eaten' during this phase of colonial occupation – the world had been turned upside down.<sup>16</sup>

### *African workers and the migrant labour system*

Throughout the southern half of Africa, between 1904 and 1919, forced labour was the chief means of getting more men to the colonial work sites. Despite the brutality associated with it, those men affected by it managed to create a rich set of traditions in the form of songs, dances and forms of organisation that entered into the more general stream of African labour traditions and working-class culture. Songs sung on the road to the mines or the rail camps by workers conscripted by force were often taken up by men who had come to the industrial work sites voluntarily. Often, working and living conditions for both groups were not markedly different. Death and disease stalked both forced and contracted worker, and accidents and hazards to life and limb failed to distinguish between the two groups of workers.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the single

most important difference between the two groups of them was the initial hesitance of forcibly conscripted workers to engage in work actions or strikes, but this difference was also mitigated in time, once African workers began to form mutual aid societies and lodges as a defensive means of negotiating the harsh circumstances on the work sites.<sup>18</sup>

In this period, from one end of this part of Africa to the other, among conscripted and freely contracted worker, the circumstances of a life wrung from wage labour contained the same ironic resonance and texture as these excerpted stanzas from '*Tulime Shamba*' ('Perhaps we should farm'), a popular working-class ballad from East Africa, and '*Mabandawi*', a song from South Africa, illustrate so graphically:

*Tulime Shamba*

Since I left home, my brother  
I have wandered round  
I have gone all around  
Without work,

Oh, Nairobi, Tanzania, Uganda  
There is no work

Don't think that when I came here  
I was happy,  
My life is troubled  
And miserable

Oh, I'm crying  
I'm thinking of going back home...<sup>19</sup>

*Mabandawi*

Master, we have return'd.  
Hard was the work, the food was very bad,  
Our Masters were unkind, and would not hear  
Our hymns and psalms.

From Bulawayo came we by the paths,  
Hoping to save some money by the same;  
But food was very dear. Christo has brought  
His children pretty safely here – but yet  
Aaron and Matthew died upon the way.  
Here is their wealth; master, make note of it,  
That we may show their brethren in Blantyre  
Lest that they say we murder'd them to steal.  
Now stamp our passes, master, let us go.  
Johannisber will never see us more,  
And we will turn our weary footsteps North.<sup>20</sup>



Forced labour and later, in the 1920s, a more generalised condition of labour migrancy, seemed to have their economic advantages for the industrial employers of African wage labour; for, on balance, it seemed that drawing on workers whose homes were far removed from the work sites would be a successful hedge against proletarianisation and rising wages.<sup>21</sup> In fact, from 1922 to the Depression, just the opposite obtained everywhere except for the gold mines of South Africa; and there the efficacy of the system was based on political dominance of the mine-owners over successive colonial governments in Mozambique. As early as 1904, over two-thirds of the African manpower on the gold mines of the Rand came from Mozambique.<sup>22</sup>

By the recession of 1921, the migrant labour system had been badly shaken by the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918-19. Thousands of African workers died on the work sites between Johannesburg in the south and the Kambove mining site of the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* in the north; thousands more fled the charnel-like conditions obtaining on the work sites; but the system remained intact. For the next ten years, though, the African workers were slowly able to turn many of its features to their advantage. As the rail lines came to connect work site after work site, and as the routes to the work sites that the workers themselves created traversed the home regions of different ethnic groups, many of the cultural differences that the migrant labour system attempted to exploit through the manipulation of wages and working conditions began to break down. Thus, by the mid 1920s, instead of a cushion against proletarianisation, the altered migrant labour system became its cutting edge.<sup>23</sup> The above quoted songs, with their implicit references to workers' networks of communication that imparted information about the prospects of work, working and living conditions and wages across colonial boundaries, bear powerful witness to this transformed state of affairs.

Contained within the labour migrancy problem of the 1920s, once the African workers had learned how to defend themselves against its more negative effects, was the more complex problem of social control and the use of various forms of social control as a means for the employers to retake the initiative against African labour. One police magistrate in Katanga Province, Belgian Congo put it thus:

I have just indicated that it is through the existing personnel that control over the native workers must be assured. It behooves us to spell out precisely measures which would impose rigorous moral and financial guarantees on labour contractors and recruited natives alike. There should be a strict observance and control of visas in general; better census and statistical records should be kept and employers should be exhorted not to be late with information and forms that aid in these endeavours ...<sup>24</sup>

By the mid 1920s, the migrant labour system then, had been stood on its head by African workers or, in some instances, overturned altogether. In Katanga, Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika and Southern Rhodesia, European employers began to opt for a 'stabilised' African workforce. More than just cost effectiveness was at the root of this managerial shift: rural ideologies of protest such as *kitawala* (literally, 'a means of rule' in Swahili) and *mcapi* were beginning to have a compelling effect on urban and industrial workers in the 1920s and early 1930s; for, at this point, these workers – by means of the strike, the boycott and other forms of work actions – were moving rapidly from protest aimed at the agents and subordinates of their employers (labour contractors, company store merchants, camp managers, etc.) to protest aimed at the nature of work itself and the whole system of colonial capitalism.<sup>25</sup> Initially, *kitawala* or African Watch Tower and other such millenarian ideologies mediated the process; but during the Depression and the mid 1930s, African workers took over such ideologies and refashioned them with the discipline and organisation of the factory and the mining site.<sup>26</sup>

*Conclusion: ideology, organisation and the maturation of the African working class*

From the mid 1930s to the end of the Second World War, the industrial core of African working class in the southern half of Africa was completely transformed from *washamba* to *wakiwandaje*, from country people to proletarians. In 1934, Beia Andre, a factory operative from Jadotville in the Belgian Congo, accounted for this transformation thus:

Many whites are astonished when they hear us ask for better housing and to be treated better on the work sites. They maintain that we are stretching their good will and asking for too much or, more often, that we desire to live like them ...

Allow me to draw attention to the fact that while a small hut might have been suitable for our needs in the past, it is altogether unsuitable now ..., we can no longer live as we did in the past; we are obliged to live in houses that are fit for receiving our relatives and friends.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, between the Depression and the end of the Second World War a dramatic change in outlook had swept over large portions of the African working class, even in the most politically repressive colonial situations. With the Depression and the subsequent resumption of business activity in 1937, the actual experiences and outlook of African workers took place in a matter of years. The number and intensity of strikes by African workers after 1937 is certainly evidence of this.



Much of the change in the sensibilities of African workers was forwarded by a change in the character of African worker organisation. By the end of the 1930s many of the adepts and millenarian bush prophets, who had found a ready constituency among the workers during the late 1920s and in the troubled first years of the Depression, were replaced by men from the workers' own ranks. With the rapid phase of industrialisation that set in during the Second World War, African workers sought leaders who could not only speak to God or the ancestors, but to their employers as well; and, if need be, lead them in strikes and work actions against their employers.

Skilled workers played a prominent role in all of this; for, as numerous work actions and strikes during the latter 1930s and 1940s point out, the most proletarianised of African workers became the men of the hour under such circumstances. Their intuitive grasp of how to turn the work routine and workplace organisation to the advantage of the workers convinced thousands to follow their lead and their new conceptions of organisation.

As we have tried to show, African workers rarely saw themselves as agents of their own empowerment in political terms until the latter part of the 1930s, although the yearning for mastery over the circumstances of work and town life was quite common from at least the 1920s. Their outlook on their employers and on the prospects of colonial rule changed rapidly during the Second World War. Moreover, how the African workers managed to transform themselves from wage workers to proletariat and thus condition the terms of eventual political independence in many of the African colonies is one of the most enduring problems of our era.

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## The December intervention and the current situation in Ghana

On the 31 December 1981, the rank and file of Ghana's military forces deposed the corrupt regime of President Hilla Limann and his Peoples National Party (PNP) and abolished the parliamentary system. Since then the country has been embroiled in an intensifying class struggle which could seriously threaten the structures and relations of neo-colonialism. The overthrow of Limann's government has not come as a great shock to many people. At the end of its second year in office, inflation was running at well over 300 per cent and a currency 'black' market, within which one British pound could be exchanged for eighty cedis (Bank rate approx £1 = ₵5.30), was gradually becoming the dominant national medium for financial transactions. A trade liberalisation policy effectively nullified price controls, creating dependence on overseas sources for industrial goods and promoting a pervasive national 'buying and selling' ethos. This had serious consequences on the already low living standards of the working people. The minimum daily wage for workers was pegged at ₵12, even though an item like a loaf of bread cost between ₵10 and ₵15. The national papers frequently carried reports of desperate mothers abandoning their babies with pitiable notes tied to them. Corruption had eaten into the fabric of society and government officials and leading ruling party personalities signed contracts with multinational companies according to how much 'kickbacks' (bribes) they received from them. Top PNP officials are alleged to have received ₵6m from a British company in a currency printing contract, and Marino Chiavelli, an Italian business tycoon with interests in South Africa, is also alleged to have 'loaned' 800,000 South African rands to the ruling party. Presently, the Citizens' Vetting Committee (CVC) and the National Investigation Committee (NIC) are revealing the extent of these corrupt practices and recommending antidotes – confiscations, repayments of illegal company profits, etc.

On the economic front, an investment code made Ghana virtually a speculator's paradise, and to keep the economy going the government resorted to printing money which intensified the spiral of inflation and produced excess liquidity. (The new government has had to take the drastic action of withdrawing all 50 cedi notes from circulation to combat this.) At the last parliamentary session a dominant issue was the increase in MP's salaries and the importation of subsidised cars for them. When over 3,000 peasants were killed in the north in an armed conflict over land and the persistence of feudal relations of production, parliamentarians could only call for police reinforcements, and a committee of enquiry to produce yet another report. The consequence for

working people was mass disillusionment with the parliamentary system. The exercise to register voters for the next general election became a fiasco and in some areas teams from the electoral commissioner's office met with violent opposition. When the military rank and file took over on the last day of last year, thousands of people flooded the streets of cities and towns supporting the action and calling for an end to '*kalabule*' (a popular word epitomising all forms of corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and social exploitation by the few).

In a very important sense the December action cannot be classified as a coup d'état in the contemporary African sense, i.e., the seizure of state power by one dominant faction of the petty bourgeoisie from the other. As a popular intervention of the lowest and oppressed strata of the military it seeks to secure the fundamental conditions for a general democratisation of Ghanaian society by involving the broad masses in the national decision-making process through their own institutions, to consolidate on the gains of national independence by challenging the hold of foreign capital on the economy and creating a culturally resilient and socially egalitarian nation.

The military is not in to take over. We simply want to be a part of the decision-making process in this country.

*(Fl. Lt. J.J. Rawlings, Chairman of the National Defence Council – PNDC 1st Broadcast, 31 December 1981)*

The alternative that now lies open before us is for you, the people, to take over the destiny of this country, your own destiny and shaping the society along the lines that you desire, making possible what has been denied to you all these years.

*(2nd Broadcast, 5 January 1982)*

The ultimate goal is 'nothing less than a revolution, something that would transform the social and economic order of this country'.

The concrete processes unleashed since December 1981 have indicated that these are more than declarations of intent. The December action is very similar to the military uprising of 4 June 1979, which culminated in the overthrow of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of General Akuffo and the setting up of an Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Two factors and processes, however, distinguish one from the other. Firstly, the present intervention is guided by a general realisation of a crucial limitation of the first: that within the dominant structures of neocolonialism no 'revolution' can succeed if it is so dependent on a moralist ideology. And, despite the elimination by firing squad of eight top people, including two corrupt former heads of state, the persistent attacks on '*kalabule*' and the often dubious accumulation of personal capital by the petty bourgeoisie, the 'house-cleaning exercise', failed to grapple with the concrete and



objective social relations of neocolonialism. Just before the AFRC handed over power to Limann's party, J.J. Rawlings made an urgent appeal to Limann to purge his ranks of corruption and well-known '*kalabule*' elements. This was diplomatically warded off and within a few months after the hand-over the '*kalabule*' ethos was re-established and pursued with added intensity. The underlying principle for the current formation of Peoples Defence Committees all over the country, therefore, is the creation of new popular institutions of the working people to serve as the basis for social transformation and a proposed future People's Government. This perspective is partly a product of the last two years, a period of fruitful interaction and cooperation between leading elements of the AFRC and the democratic organisations of the Ghanaian left – the June 4th Movement, New Democratic Movement, African Youth Command and others. J.J. Rawlings himself was dismissed from the Air Force after the hand-over and he was instrumental in the formation of the June 4th Movement and remained its leading cadre till the December action.

The second distinction is that unlike the 4 June uprising, which produced a strictly military regime, the December action reflects a fusion of generally identical views on the national situation and a collation of interests between the rank and file of the Army and political forces representing popular aspirations. The membership of the PNDC is illustrative of this point. There are four military personnel and three 'civilians'.

Fl. Lt. J.J. Rawlings first came into the national limelight when he led the 1979 military uprising. Brigadier Nunoo-Mensah was the Chief of Defence Staff dismissed by the PNP government. Warrant Officer J. Boadi and Sergeant Akata-Pore came from the military rank and file. Reverend Dr Damuah is a Catholic priest who had a long history of radical political activity, having been detained in the 1960s for criticising Nkrumah's regime and one time ex-communicated by the Catholic Church for his attacks on the hierarchy. Together with Reverend Josephus Viser, a Dutchman, he is well known for social and conscientisation work among workers living in the slums of Madina and Nima in Accra. J.A. Kwei was a trade union activist and National Secretary of the Ghana Industry Holding Corporation (GIHOC) Workers Union. In June 1980, when striking workers of the Union were dismissed, he led over 4,000 workers to storm parliament and seek immediate redress. Chris Atim, who is the General Secretary of the June 4th Movement, comes from the generally radical Student Movement. He was previously an executive member of the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) and an editor of its paper *ALUTA*. Of the eight secretaries appointed to head and re-structure various ministries, only one comes from the military. These secretaries include the well-known Ghanaian writers Ama Atta Aidoo and Atukwei Okine.

The most important organs of the progressive December intervention are the People's Defence Committees(PDCs), now formed by working people all over the country, at workplaces and in the community. If one thing is clear about PNDC's intentions, it is that power will not be handed over to any faction of the petty bourgeoisie, and whether the intervention succeeds or not depends on the extent to which the PDCs are developed into effective organs of people's power. The idea of a future People's Assembly made up of representatives from local and regional PDCs has already been suggested by Chris Atim of the PNDC. The formation of PDCs at workplaces has generally intensified the struggles going on there between workers and management. Workers met initially with obscurantism and hostility from management, but the general political atmosphere and a vigorous campaign for accountability in public life have given workers a basis from which to confront management and redress lopsided power relations at the workplace. Some of these struggles have had unpredictable results – the desertion of management and workers' take-overs. Workers of the Subin Timbers Company, led by their Defence Committee, for example, have taken over the running of the Company due to desertion by management personnel. According to the PNDC guidelines on the formation of PDCs, workers are to be brought into the decision-making process of the workplace and this is one of the burning issues around which much of the struggle is centred. As the PDCs consolidate their present gains, the signs point to more worker participation in decision-making or even take-overs of the workplace, despite the long-standing ideological and technical problems derived from the historical oppression of the Ghanaian workers which inhibit their full participation in these processes.

The intensification of the struggles within the Ghanaian trade union movement has effectively rendered it impotent in the face of these new processes of self-emancipation. The rank and file membership has succeeded in throwing out the executives of the top hierarchy, and has abolished the constitution of the Trade Union Congress. This is mainly a reaction to the sycophantic and supportive role the TUC has played vis-à-vis past governments and its bad record in defending workers' rights. At one stage in the struggle, Issifu, the former head, was manhandled at a mass rally, and top executives were kidnapped by workers for a couple of days. The impotence of the TUC has meant that worker leadership is now coming from the rank and file in the PDCs and the Interim National Co-ordinating Committee of PDCs (INCC), set up by the PNDC to supervise general development and orientation.

In the communities, the PDCs have been organising and mobilising people for various types of communal labour, identifying local problem areas and issues, helping to implement government policies on



cheap fares, housing and food, and generally defending the December action. Two important problems confronting community PDCs are the possibility of infiltration by former party activists and agents of a latent counter-revolution, and the conditions inhibiting the fullest participation of women in them. The PNDC guidelines for the formation of PDCs acknowledge women's historical oppression and emphasise their fullest involvement in local decision-making. In the recent past, women have been wrongly perceived as responsible for high prices, hoarding and other '*kalabule*' activities of the distributive sector of the economy. This is because with the historical monopolisation of work in the productive sectors of the economy by men and the recent trend towards 'buying and selling', many women came to be employed in the distributive sector. Thus they appeared to be the immediate agents of an exploitative chain which emanated from multinationals, like the United African Company, G.B. Olivant, Kingsway Stores, CRAO, which imported goods. For the worker who spent his daily wage to buy a tin of sardines the 'exploitative' role of the woman was real enough and reactions to them have generally been hostile. It may be recalled that even during the last AFRC period the biggest market in Accra, Makola, was bulldozed to the ground. Recently, a few markets have also been burnt down in reaction to the persistence of high prices of goods or their sudden disappearance from the stalls. These negative perceptions of Ghanaian women also stem from the fact that historically the heroic roles played by Ghanaian women in the country's political struggles have never been reflected in effective national political representation and intervention. Most of the dominant women's organisations, like the National Council of Women and Development, are creations of the state and led by women who are petty bourgeois in social outlook and reformist in their politics. The urgent need to lay a basis for a more radical change in the traditional status of Ghanaian women and give an effective voice to the aspirations of women has led to the recent formation of the Federation of Ghanaian Women, which is bringing all women's organisations under one umbrella. One of its most immediate tasks is to address itself to the problem of thousands of women who have been displaced from the distributive sector due to present attempts to destroy the 'buying and selling' ethos and rationalise the distributive function in the economy.

Another problem, more general to the progressive intervention as a whole, has been the molestation of civilians by soldiers. Incidents have been reported in places like Kumasi and Takoradi and areas of the Ghanaian countryside where PDCs are taking a longer time to take root because of the dominance of feudal aristocrats. Generally, they are by-products of instances of social confrontation in which disputed issues can range from acts of economic sabotage, counter-revolutionary activity or sheer misunderstanding. There is also a major



problem confronting the army, which is one of purging itself of its image as an instrument of coercion derived from a colonial militaristic tradition. It is also true to say that some of these reported molestations are the work of anti-December soldiers who, having been blocked of all effective intervention in national politics, are spreading disharmony and confusion. Criticisms of these acts have come from members of the PNDC itself, and they have already been the subject of an editorial by *Graphic*, the national paper, and organisations like the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) and the New Democratic Movement; PDCs have also added their voices in open and growing opposition. The PDCs in the Army have been called upon to combat the molestations. There is, however, an important dynamic underlying this issue which has to be made clear: imperialism and its local allies are presently using this as one of their main foci of opposition to the December action in order to isolate and crush it, and it is clear that instances of molestations have been exaggerated to serve this purpose. There is a realisation by the PNDC and progressive forces that for the present intervention to consolidate itself effectively, the traditional division encouraged by past governments between working people and the military rank and file has to be bridged and the two forces united. However, it is precisely this unity and alliance which imperialism has to break in order to defeat it.

The December action has been supported by the entire student body and its contribution has been crucial. For the past three months, students have closed down their universities and constituted themselves into a task force to evacuate cocoa locked up in the countryside because of the rapid deterioration of the country's transportation system and the general decline of the cocoa industry. Due to the efforts of the student task force, the country has for the first time in several years met its export commitments. A major difficulty will be to organise a replacement for them when they go back to the campuses.

General outside reaction to the December action has ranged from the muted disapproval of the neocolonial regimes in the immediate West African sub-region to open hostility from their patrons in the West. Nigeria has since stopped all oil supplies to Ghana. The only country that has come out in open support of the December action is Libya, which is expressing its solidarity in concrete acts – free supplies of oil and medicine and food. The western press is making a lot out of the so-called 'Libyan Connection', but this is only part of Reagan's policy of isolating Libya and stripping progressive interventions in Africa of their possible sources of support. With their general denial of African autonomy and initiative, the western imperialist bourgeoisie only sees acts of self-emancipation such as the December intervention as products of outside manipulation. The December action is essentially a Ghanaian phenomenon, against imperialism and its domination of



Ghana through local allies, and it is hard to imagine how such an act of self-assertion can be controlled from the outside. It is important for the world revolutionary and progressive community to understand this and express its solidarity accordingly. For imperialism the December action has got to be aborted. An alleged planned invasion by the US, Britain, Nigeria and Togo led to the storming of the US Embassy in Accra and a massive anti-imperialist demo and rally at the Black Star Square. Recently, two US citizens and a West German, all employees of VALCO, a multinational aluminium company, have been expelled from the country for alleged espionage. Apart from sophisticated communications systems found on them, they also had tape-recordings of messages transmitted on the intelligence network of the deposed government, coded messages from former President Limann's security agents as they tried unsuccessfully in the first 48 hours after the December action to organise a resistance and to plan escape routes for top PNP personalities and intelligence operatives (*Graphic*, 5 March 1982). It is said that vigilant working patriots in the industrial town of Tema were instrumental in their arrest. The activities of VALCO are fast becoming a focus of national concern over multinationals in general. In 1979 alone, this US company made a profit of \$300m by utilising 70 per cent of Ghana's total electricity output at the rate of one cedi per unit (*Graphic*, 22 March 1982). If allegations by the United Nations Youth Association that aluminium from this plant has found its way to the South African nuclear industry are substantiated, it will precipitate a higher level of confrontation.

Multinational companies have come under severe criticism since the December action and the PNDC has promised to review all agreements and contracts with them. At a workers' rally at the Ashanti Goldfields in Obuasi, Chris Atim made the PNDC position clear: 'We can't allow multinational companies to continue to oppress and treat Ghanaian workers as sub-human beings to enable them to make their huge profits' (*Graphic*, 22 March 1982). The growing national mood is that the multinationals will have to be taken on sooner or later, since they secure the fundamental conditions of exploitation in the country. The general consensus within the progressive organisations, however, is that this can only be effectively carried through by the further consolidation of people's power through the PDCs, mass mobilisation and the deepening of the growing anti-imperialist consciousness.

The economy is in very poor shape and the country is virtually bankrupt. As of January, the Bank of Ghana had outstanding foreign exchange commitments to the tune of \$300m, whilst an extra \$550m was needed to keep the whole system going. Food is in very short supply in the urban centres, public transport is only now being saved from collapse but the shortage of oil has led to long queues for petrol. The hospitals are still suffering from years of neglect and the pilfering of

drugs by medical practitioners to private clinics. Despite these conditions and harsh realities, there is a new popular enthusiasm and determination to struggle to resuscitate the economy and develop the various potentials so insensitively repressed in the past. For the PNDC and its allies there are no illusions about the difficult road which lies ahead, but, as J.J. Rawlings stated recently: 'If it calls for having to put our hands into that tiger's mouth, hold it, grab it by the tail and turn it upside down, inside out, we shall do it' (Independence Rally speech at Black Star Square).

*Kwarteng Mensah  
Accra, March 1982*

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*"Leninism is the bridge. . . the key link in giving Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse-tung Thought its overall integral character as the science of revolution. To put it somewhat provocatively, Marxism without Leninism is Eurocentric social-chauvinism and social democracy. Maoism without Leninism is nationalism (and also, in certain contexts, social-chauvinism) and bourgeois democracy. . . .*

*"In fact there is nothing more revolutionary than Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse-tung Thought, if it's really that, really that synthesis."*

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# Book reviews

## *Vietnam: the revolutionary path*\*

By THOMAS HODGKIN (London, Macmillan, 1981). 336pp. £25 cloth.

Thomas Hodgkin is a historian *engagé*. He makes no secret about it. In the preface to his latest book, *Vietnam: the revolutionary path*, he says in conclusion: 'All historians I believe, must be somewhat *engagés*.'

For those who have known this Emeritus Fellow of Oxford as an expert on Africa, the question springs to mind: What road has brought him to the revolutionary path of a Southeast Asian country?

Thomas Hodgkin's option for the Vietnamese people, to whom he dedicates his book, is the logical outcome of his intellectual journey and no doubt the natural result of his anti-colonialist ethic. For nearly half a century he has been greatly interested in the national liberation movements in the Middle East, India, and especially Africa. He has taught in Africa, Europe and North America. From 1962 to 1965 he was Director of the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana and wrote three books, besides a number of articles on African history: *Nationalism in colonial Africa*, *African political parties*, *Nigerian perspectives*. A quotation from Caliph Muhammed Bello reveals much about the author's communion with black people's history: 'The soul continues to be ennobled in the study of the history of this generous age, especially when there is added to it the history of

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\*Excerpted from *Vietnam Courier* (January 1982).

the strange and wonderful events which have occurred in this land before.'

In the 1960s, events in Vietnam 'sent to the barricades' – the expression is David Marr's – Thomas Hodgkin and many other western intellectuals. In fact, he was prepared for this by the atmosphere in his own family. His wife, Dorothy Crowfoot, was awarded the Nobel prize for her work on the structural analysis of biochemical substances such as vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, and participated in medical aid for the Vietnamese people, which brought about their first journey to Vietnam in 1971 and the awakening of his interest in our history. His mother was active in the British-Vietnamese Friendship Association. His daughter, Elizabeth, worked with the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Hanoi, and his sister-in-law, Mary Cowan, made adaptations of Vietnamese poetry, and was a contributor to the English edition of *Vietnamese Literature*.<sup>1</sup>

But it was Thomas Hodgkin's second journey to Vietnam in 1974 which made him decide to work on the history of our country. He collected documents, visited temples, pagodas, citadels, communal houses, dykes, lakes, battlefields of ancient times, museums, towns, villages, and above all talked to people from all walks of life: historians, social scientists, writers, workers, peasants. What struck him first was, as is the case with many other people from the West,<sup>2</sup> the Vietnamese people's 'historical consciousness'.

The Vietnamese are, I believe, the most historically minded people in the world. True, all peoples who have been involved in prolonged and difficult struggles for national liberation – Greeks, Bulgars, Poles, Americans and Irish, for example – have acquired well developed forms of historical consciousness. But in the case of the Vietnamese the special difficulties of the struggle, the intensity and duration, combined with certain characteristics of Vietnamese history, have given rise to a particularly powerful and active interest in and enjoyment of their national past, at all levels, from peasants to prime ministers ... The purpose of understanding the past is to be better equipped to transform the present ... For the Vietnamese, all history is contemporary history.<sup>3</sup>

An article he published in *Race & Class*, one year after his second trip to Vietnam, looked at the lessons of the Vietnamese revolution.<sup>4</sup> The author raises, among others, the problem of the constants of the Vietnamese revolution which, in his view, are the following: frequent floods and typhoons, foreign invasions, the growing of wet rice, building and maintenance of river dykes, the need for effective centralised power with a view to water control and, above all, the village as the cell of society, communal land 'stimulating respect for the collective life and fostering ideas of solidarity and mutual help'. Another



noteworthy constant is the nation-class dialectical relationship embodied in the two themes of national resistance and peasant insurrection. Each in turn dominates. In any event, the relationship between these two components – nation and class – is of major political importance.

In *Vietnam: the revolutionary path*, Thomas Hodgkin comes back to the questions he posed in his 1975 article: 'How was the August 1945 Revolution in Vietnam possible? What was the character of the Revolution? How can it be explained historically? These are large and difficult questions leading to other questions. They are the themes of this book.'

Why did he pick that theme? The author gives the following reason:

It was possibly the most important event in world history since the October Revolution in Russia ... It was the first revolution which succeeded in overthrowing the power of a colonial regime. It occurred at a moment in history when the Second World War was ending – a fortnight after the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. Thus, the August Revolution marks the beginning of a new epoch – the watershed when the age of colonisation begins to give way to the age of decolonisation. It is at the same time a moment of critical importance in Vietnam's history. It is the point of vantage from which one can look backwards over two millennia of struggle against foreign aggression, state building and popular insurrection, and forwards over thirty years of restored independence, socialist construction and resistance to the panoply of modern imperialism – and beyond that to the coming centuries of advance towards communism ...'<sup>5</sup>

Those parallels call to mind Jules Michelet when he made 'a critical projection, on an analysis of the present, of cultural patterns inherited from the past, and again a projection on the past of questions raised by the present: historical objectivity is born of this double anachronism of the pre-dialectical synchronism.'<sup>6</sup> Like Michelet, Thomas Hodgkin could say, at least concerning the history of Vietnam: 'My thoughts most often originate in my heart. It makes my spirit fruitful.'

One must give him full credit for the scientific accuracy and objectivity of his investigations. Having patiently collected serious and plentiful documentation, he examines the history of Vietnam in Cartesian fashion: 'How was the August Revolution, the work of the Communist Party of Vietnam, possible?'

The author gives eight direct causes, for the period between 1939 and 1945:

- 1 The establishment of the Viet Bac revolutionary base and other bases in the mountain region of north Vietnam.
- 2 The gradual building up of the Liberation Army, which existed in

embryo in the first units of National Salvation troops in 1941.

3 The mobilisation of the people by the Viet Minh National Front from May 1941 onwards.

4 The close relationship between the Party and the national minorities, in Viet Bac in particular.

5 The effective strategy of the Party, which refused all collaboration with the Japanese and other imperialists, and laid emphasis on the education of cadres.

6 The terrible consequences of the famine caused in north Vietnam by the French-Japanese alliance, during which two million people died of hunger.

7 The choice of the favourable historical moment (the result of the exacerbated contradictions among the imperialist powers and the weakening of the French and the Japanese) for launching the general armed insurrection.

8 The personal ability of Ho Chi Minh, his genius.

The historian, however, does not content himself with those direct causes, which in his view supply only a superficial answer. He goes deeper into the problem by posing other questions: What kind of a party was the one which led the August Revolution of 1945? How had it developed since its birth in 1930? Why was it the party and not some other bourgeois party which gave leadership to the national movement? How did it link marxism to nationalism? What was its social composition and its relationships with other social strata? What roles were played by the national minorities, the Buddhists, the Christians? What were the characteristics of the French colonial regime? Those of the anti-colonial movement as it evolved from the nineteenth to the twentieth century?

The '4,000 years of Vietnamese history', the backdrop of the August Revolution of 1945, are marked by the constant presence of a number of themes. Thomas Hodgkin re-examines and goes deeper into the ideas he put forward in his article 'The Vietnamese revolution and some lessons': the village and its egalitarianism, its relative autonomy, the existence of an intelligentsia bound to the people, the formation of the nation at an early date, hence a strong national consciousness, the revolutionary tradition resulting from the peasant insurrections, the role played by the scholars, the solidarity binding the sixty or so minority nationalities to the Viet majority people, the interdependence of Vietnamese history with world history (relations with other Southeast Asian countries, Chinese and Indian influence, implantation of European imperialism, liaison with the Marxist International, support from socialist countries and progressive forces in the world), victory of marxist ideology over Confucianism and the bourgeois ideal, the cult of the heroic founders and defenders of the country.

Of the ten chapters of the book, six are devoted to the period



preceding the French conquest (1858) and four to contemporary history (1858-1945).

Although a newcomer to the field of Vietnamese history, reading neither Vietnamese, the *nôm* demotic script, nor classical Chinese, Thomas Hodgkin nevertheless succeeds in mastering Vietnamese historical material, turning to good account the results of recent research and acquainting himself with problems which have preoccupied Vietnamese historians for the last three decades, by carefully studying documents in French and English and especially through his contacts and investigations in Vietnam. His book is full of original reflections which testify to profound historical intuition.

Some errors of detail can be pointed out. But these are minor blemishes which in no way detract from the great merit of *Vietnam: the revolutionary path*, a work of science and faith. Says the author in his preface: 'I believe in truth – and if my admiration and love of the Vietnamese have led me into error, I hope my readers will correct me.' We think, on the contrary, that his book will help correct many errors on Vietnam which have been, intentionally or unwittingly, spread by some western historians.

HUU NGOC and PHAN HUY LE

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- 2 Susan Sontag, *Journey to Hanoi – July 1969*: 'Here history is an immediate interest, the understanding of which ensures survival. History is lived and felt – it has nothing in common with the abstract exercise so often undertaken by Western intellectuals.'
- 3 Thomas Hodgkin, 'The Vietnamese revolution and some lessons', *Race & Class* (Vol. XVI, no. 3, 1975).
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## *Ethnic Segregation in Cities*

Edited by CERI PEACH, VAUGHAN ROBINSON and SUSAN SMITH (London, Croom Helm, 1981). 258 pp. £12.95

## *Social Interaction and Ethnic Segregation*

Edited by PETER JACKSON and SUSAN SMITH (London, Academic Press, 1981). 235pp. £16

These two books, both collections of Oxford conference papers, share much in common – one editor, about half of each other's contributors and, with very few exceptions, the same devotion to narrow empiricism

and socio-cultural apologetics for racial segregation. Indeed, one could read through either volume without realising that segregation has any but a scientific or academic significance, since it is treated by most of the authors as something to be measured by increasingly complex techniques or to be explained in terms of the arid 'choice/constraint' debate, with the emphasis very much on segregation as a product of the ethnic minorities' cultural choices.

Of course, there is good and bad empiricism. Ceri Peach, after all, once produced an excellent empirical account of the economic factors behind West Indian migration to Britain,<sup>1</sup> although, as Kevin Brown points out in his contribution to the Jackson/Smith volume, Peach's book 'stopped short of a class analysis which could have revealed the systematic process of exploitation'. Perhaps this is hardly surprising, since in his essay in the Jackson/Smith volume Peach launches a virulent attack on marxist analysis, portrayed by him as crude economic determinism, for its 'enthusiasm only for postdiction' rather than prediction, the only true goal of positive social science. Yet, it is difficult to see what worthwhile predictions could be drawn from Peach's own increasingly insular work, which is taken up with disproving the never very widely held 'triple melting pot' theory of inter-ethnic marriage in certain American cities in the early 1950s. Susan Smith's essay, in the Jackson/Smith volume, on the social geography of inner-city crime at least has the merit of dealing with a topic of contemporary relevance, although she makes every effort to obscure this fact by her use of esoteric jargon and excessive mathematical empiricism. In a statement accompanied by a half-page graph to prove the point, she informs us that:

during peak periods of property offending there was a higher probability for local residents to be absent. During peak times for personal offending, they were more likely to be present, in the sense that they would not be engaged in regular commitments.

In other words, burglaries happen when people are away from home, and personal offences happen when people are around to be offended against. Such are the wonders of positive social science.

We move from the irrelevant and absurd to the dangerous with Vaughan Robinson's essay in the Peach/Robinson/Smith volume, which manages to combine poor empirical craftsmanship with a purely culturalist account of South Asian settlement patterns in Blackburn. Interestingly, it is only in Sims' critique of this work in the Jackson/Smith volume that the pitifully small sample and other technical weaknesses of Robinson's research are revealed. More importantly, Robinson follows the 'ethnicity' school of urban social anthropology, and the Ballards in particular,<sup>2</sup> in seeking to explain the stages of Asian settlement, including the supposed 'internal sorting'



accompanying recent suburbanisation, by reference solely to factors internal to the Asian community itself, such as their 'myth of return' or fear of 'cultural contamination'. His explanation of the shift towards 'family reunion' in the 1960s is typical:

Several reasons may be suggested ... first, the need to have the father present to discipline children; secondly, the fear that unaccompanied residence in Britain might encourage the husband to leave his wife for an English woman; and thirdly, that the increasing complexity and completeness of the social networks of Asian males in Britain encouraged status competition solely within the arena of British settlement. As hospitality and the entertainment of guests was a crucial factor in determining *izzet* within the British arena, the presence of womenfolk became more important.

There is more than a hint of paternalistic racism (and sexism) in this statement, but this is compounded by Robinson's total neglect of the forces of institutional racism, particularly in the form of immigration controls, in determining Asian settlement patterns in this period and ever since. Similarly, while Robinson devotes a great deal of attention to the intricacies of Asian family finance, he says nothing of the exploitation of Asian workers in the general British economy.

In his contribution to the Peach/Robinson/Smith collection, John Rex once again adopts the stance of a self-appointed ombudsman,<sup>3</sup> in this instance attacking urban renewal housing programmes and inner-city planners for neglecting the needs and wishes of immigrant communities. But there is a decidedly one-sided flavour in Rex's advocacy, and perhaps his true sentiments are best revealed when he writes, in relation to Chicago in the 1970s, of how as 'the black ghetto decays further, its young unemployed population expand into the city and terrorise it'. Or, again, in his statement that:

Even if one were to accept the racist assumption that all West Indian children do badly at school, it is clear that Asian children of unskilled foundry workers are doing as well as or better than their English peers.

If the assumption is racist, why repeat it, let alone accept it?

Then again Rex may simply have been writing for his audience, since there is a strong Asian bias to both books, with only one article in the Jackson/Smith book dealing directly with West Indians (and then in a pure number-crunching manner). Nor is this bias accidental: it lies at the heart of the new racism that has been emerging in British society and British social science in recent years and which will have been given an additional impetus by the events of last summer. It is on the Asian community, with its national, religious, sexual and generational differences, that the social scientists can ply their craft in seeking to

construct culturalist rationalisations for British racism, hopefully dividing the community within itself and from the rest of the black working class in general. But, as Sivanandan has noted, the history of the West Indians, both in the Caribbean and in Britain, has 'produced a culture and a politics that [are] mortally anti-white and anti-capital', 'and such a culture must either be ignored or dismissed in terms of West Indians being 'unemployable', 'uneducatable' and 'anti-social'. The alternative is to adopt the type of structural conflict analysis represented here only by Brown and, to a lesser extent, Boal in his work on religious divisions in Belfast in the Peach/Robinson/Smith volume. As Brown points out,

White academics with an interest in race must relinquish their self-appointed role as the 'translators' of black cultures, in favour of an analysis of white society, i.e. of racism.

But on the evidence of most of the contributors in these books, this is a highly unrealistic aspiration.

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LEE BRIDGES

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## *Where is the Eagle?*

By WILLIAM E. COFFER (KOI HOSH) (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981). 271pp. \$12.70.

The myths and folk tales of North American Indians illuminate the traditions and wisdom of these complex people with rare accuracy. William Coffe (Koi Hosh) has collected current versions of these stories from each tribe and his claim that his transcriptions of the oral renditions are more accurate than those previously committed to print may well be true. Most of the tales are, however, remarkably like those already published elsewhere.

One advantage of a book that contains stories from every tribe is that the vast differences in culture and lifestyle may be offset against the similarities in the myths and tales about topics such as creation and the great flood, Corn Mother and Changing Woman, tricksters and



traitors. Unfortunately, Coffey comes close to throwing away this advantage by refusing to discuss these similarities in either his general introduction or the comments that precede each selection of stories from individual tribes. In a collection of this kind, it would have been unnecessary to have a scholarly evaluation of the controversy surrounding tale typing, but some brief analysis of the significance of certain types of stories would have added depth and understanding. As it is, the general introduction is too short and too vague and the specific introductions to the tribal selections are frequently wasted on inaccurate historical facts and figures. If figures were to be included at all, they should have been better researched and had at least some points of contact with modern scholarship. Where references are given, they are not to the most reliable statistical sources. The footnotes, incidentally, are haphazard, sloppy and often without page references. That one line of one footnote is used for some explanation of the trickster motif is little compensation for the lack of explanation elsewhere – especially since the stories often contain allusions confusing to all but those readers who are familiar with American Indian folklore. While it is true that some of these problems stem from the fact that the book has been organised according to tribal origins rather than tale type, this is not a fact that should have led to problems. This kind of organisation is perfectly valid and extremely useful. It is only made to seem inadequate by the absence of any kind of cross-referencing or even a decent index. The index, in fact, is notable only in that it is so unsatisfactory.

This is not a book that has done justice to its subject matter, but the subject matter is so spectacular and impressive that it transcends the treatment. The stories themselves are wonderful and full of imaginative wit and unsentimental irony. They show clearly how myths and folktales can provide a vision of the world that is life-enhancing and can help people cope with the multi-faceted problems of existence. That the author should have garnered so splendid a testimony to a people's indomitable spirit is an achievement that cannot be underestimated.

University of Keele

MARY ELLISON

### *Resistance and Caribbean Literature*

By SELWYN R. CUDJOE (Athens, Ohio, and London, Ohio University Press, 1981). 319pp.

Professor Cudjoe tells us in the introduction that his intention is to 'examine the artistic forms used to carry the ideological content of Caribbean literature forward'. In Part I, 'Caribbean resistance: an historical background', the materialist conception of history is brought to bear

on the historical struggle of a people settled by slavery or indenture on the 'plantation colonies' within the Hispanic, French and British Caribbean. The word 'resistance', at the centre of the book's main argument, is defined as 'any act or complex of acts that are designed to rid a people of its oppressors, be they slave masters or multinational corporations.' That is, within the scope of Cudjoe's thesis, Caribbean literature is to be given a comprehensive structural base embracing socio-economic and political-aesthetic artefacts.

This structural base in the historical process, with revolution as a dominant motif, subscribes to a deterministic logic in a sequence of chapters closely linked thematically in Part II. 'The beginning' represents resistance to foreign domination as dating back to the Incas' struggle against the Spanish conquistadors, then moving with chronological relentlessness into 'The liberation movement', through traumatic phases like the French and American revolutions with repercussions in local wars, revolts and rebellions within the Caribbean, right through to the Cuban revolution in 1959. Along a dialectical axis we move naturally into a chapter headed 'The transition', where representative Caribbean writers – Jean Price Mars, René Maran, Claude McKay and Aimé Césaire, to name a few – are shown as exploring themes with a common intention towards spiritual liberation. For it is important to the author's plan, above all, to integrate the dialectic in writers' works with events of Caribbean history. In the chapter, 'Towards self-government', V.S. Reid's conservatism in *New Day* (1949) is censured. In 'Towards independence', Lamming, because he is 'the first writer in the British Caribbean to explore seriously the relationship between them [the coloniser and the colonised] at the psychological level', is reprieved. However, it is in a novel like Bertène Juminer's *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri* (1963) with its theme of the efficacy of revolutionary violence, Fanonian style, in the chapter 'Smashing the ties', that a genuine 'socio-political realism' is achieved.

Such a concern in the writer, claims Cudjoe, is necessary if the debased victim of colonial history is to be restored to manhood – and the author turns to the poetry of Nicolás Guillén and to the novels of Alejo Carpentier and Wilson Harris to point the way to a necessary universality of vision. The inclusion of Wilson Harris, the least politically motivated of representative Caribbean writers, in this context is curious. In the very work, *Tradition and the West Indian Novel* (1965), from which Cudjoe quotes in an endeavour to demonstrate Harris' tentacular roots in the soil of Caribbean history, we find this manifesto: 'It seems to me vital – in a time when it is so easy to succumb to fashionable tyrannies or optimisms – to break away from the conception so many people entertain that literature is an extension of the social order or a political platform.' Harris' work then, in 1965,



and up to the present time, remains a welter of impressionistic responses in a surrealist vein lacking the dynamism of fellow Caribbean writers who, accepting the alienation between the artist and society as the central problem of realism, do not seek to deny this realism but to give it coherence and structure in a mythology of art linked to socioeconomic processes.

Also on the negative side as a value judgement is Cudjoe's categorical statement, unsupported by any documentary evidence, or even a footnote, that Caribbean writers such as John Hearne, Orlando Patterson and Derek Walcott embrace an 'anti-democratic and nihilistic Naipaulian tendency'.

However, in a final analysis, his reviewer has to allow that the Harvard professor's book is an outstanding work, well written and comprehensively researched and likely, in spite of its controversial areas, to be invaluable to scholars and critics in this field. Certainly, if Cudjoe set out to establish a holistic focus, as he states in the introduction, this premiss is validated by a plausible analytical method linking art to politics and history. Besides, Caribbean literature, by the uniqueness of the parallel historical experience, must lay claim to its own sociology. No useful purpose is served by writing it off merely as an appendage to European or American literary culture.

University of London

ANGUS RICHMOND

### *Law and Order: arguments for socialism*

by IAN TAYLOR (London, Macmillan, 1981). 234pp. £4.95 pb.

The blurb at the back of Ian Taylor's book describes it as 'a popular socialist criminology which foreshadows the transformation of our society'. Its audience is clearly seen as the Bennite wing of the Labour Party, sections of the independent left, the women's movement and other social groups whose interest in the role of law and order has been aroused by the numerous confrontations between police and youth over the last few years. It is written from an ostensibly radical position, and this is bound to ensure that its basic arguments gain some currency in left political and academic circles. Taylor is, after all, one of the main advocates of the 'new criminology' and has written widely against conservative theories of crime. His sympathetic references in this book to the real dangers which face black workers and women in many urban areas help to create an image of somebody who is trying to break new ground. His model of a 'popular socialist criminology', however, contains numerous assertions which logically point to quite reactionary political arguments. Since it contains little original research or analysis, it is on those issues that I shall comment.

Taylor takes as his starting point two basic propositions. First, that law and order need not always work in favour of the right-wing. Second, that one of the central demands of working-class communities (both black and white) and the women's movement is for greater protection from violence and crime. He then expands these propositions, in four brief chapters, with a discussion of how to transform the police, the prison system and the relation of the legal apparatuses to specific interest groups. From the start, therefore, Taylor asserts that demands for more 'law and order' are not only 'popular', but can be transformed into 'socialist' demands.

The problem, however, is that he is never very clear about what he means by 'socialist'. Take, for example, his treatment of the question of racism. While Taylor is forced to admit that racism is a structural aspect of British society, that the police are openly attacking black youth on the streets and failing to protect black communities against racist attacks, he still asserts that a greater 'democratic' input will change all this. His own references to white racist demands for protection against 'mugging' should have led him to question his simplistic assertions. But he evades this central problem by arguing that 'youth violence' is a threat to both black and white communities. The incoherent nature of his argument is clear from the following paragraph:

Sections of the white working-class populations living in particular parts of London ... have in recent years come to demand the kind of reactive fire-brigade policing that is provided by the Special Patrol Group, in the sense of having constantly appealed for police action against what they (the white population) see to be a threat to 'their' community, in the form of mugging and even simply in the form of rowdy street parties ... Metaphorical and misled though the racialism of some of these responses has been, there is no doubt that street crimes, and interpersonal violence have become a serious and fundamental problem in the life of black and white alike in many of the more dislocated inner-city areas and also in metropolitan London.

The imagery which Taylor uses to justify this assertion is 'indiscriminate violence', 'attacks on women' and 'racialist violence'. In reality, however, his tirade against 'rough working-class youth' turns out to be no more than a device for avoiding the reality of state racism, which is taking on ever sharper forms in the present crisis.

The last chapter makes the most depressing reading. It is truly amazing to see the criticisms of the police voiced by black communities brushed off as a sign of 'schizophrenia'. This has the effect of minimising the struggles against police repression by locating them as demands against racist policemen. Such an ahistorical perspective then allows Taylor to argue that: 'A police presence is a rational defence for



working class and bourgeois, black and white alike, against the unforeseeable expression of contemporary youth cultural nihilism.' To write this in the aftermath of the events of last July reflects a lack of vision and a failure to look more deeply than commonsense interpretations of 'violence'. This is why this book tells us more about the limited parameters of the Labour left than the reality of 'law and order' in working-class communities.

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JOHN SOLOMOS

*Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: diet, disease and racism*

By KENNETH F. KIPLE and VIRGINIA HIMMELSTEIB KING  
(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981). 295pp. £20.00

The impact of disease and ill-health on an individual can be devastating, but on a people it is far greater than the simple sum of the individual toll – just how much greater (for the blacks in the United States) is shown by Kiple and King in this useful work. The book concentrates on the antebellum period, but concludes with an assessment of the health of and health care for blacks in the US today.

The significance of disease for blacks is measured not only in terms of those by which they were struck, but equally by those to which they were resistant or immune relative to the antebellum white population. In both instances, disease came to be seen and used as evidence that blacks were inferior to whites, properly slaves, and even a gift which 'an all-wise Creator' had perfectly adapted to the labour needs of the South.

Kiple and King go to great pains to search out the reasons for these differences in susceptibilities – and herein lies the book's strengths and weaknesses. They have attempted to synthesise an enormous body of social, historical and scientific data in order to show how things as diverse as demography, diet, antebellum medicine, social attitudes and genetic variation accounted for a seeming 'racial preference' exhibited by various diseases.

The medical wisdom of the time was devoid of an understanding of nutrition, the etiology of most disease, and further handicapped by the failure of physicians to diagnose in blacks diseases which manifested symptoms such as jaundice or flushing of the skin in whites. Popular wisdom had it that the proper slave diet consisted of corn and pork fat and that the healthy slave child was 'fat and shiny'. Consequently, the slave diet was seriously deficient in virtually all of the major vitamins, even, Kiple and King argue, where slaves were allowed their own gardens. This left blacks vulnerable to a wide range of disease, from

ricketts to tetanus, many of which became identified as 'Negro diseases'. They further argue that the same deficiencies continue to plague blacks today and result in markedly higher frequencies of many diseases and a higher infant mortality rate than found among whites.

A significant part of their argument accounting for the differential black and white disease rate is genetic, though not crudely so. Nonetheless, their argument that innate differences exist between blacks and whites must be challenged, even if their intention in making it is to promote better contemporary health care for blacks.

Surely *some* blacks possess genetic traits not found in most whites (or blacks) – obvious, given that we are each genetically unique. And nowhere do the authors argue that all blacks possess traits absent in whites, or even that most possess a particular trait, with the possible exception of skin colour and lactose intolerance. But they do argue that blacks represented significantly distinct populations biologically at the inception of the slave trade, and that they remain distinct enough today to warrant special attention by the medical profession to black health and 'black-related diseases'. Noting that the majority of blacks brought to North America *embarked* from the West African coast, the authors go on to assume that they *originated* from those coastal regions. Further, they argue, the populations of that region lived in relative isolation in small self-sustaining village states resulting in a 'kind of genetic hothouse' with 'generation after generation emerging from common breeding pools'. Such an argument is unsupportable. First, slaves embarking from the coast had often been brought from well within the interior of the continent, as attested to by slavers and planters alike who distinguished between Ibo and Fulani, for example. Secondly, as West African empires generally stretched from north to south, it can be assumed that social intercourse moved in those directions. Finally, the destabilisation of those empires, the Bantu migrations and the Islamic incursions all resulted in enormous population movements through time.

But even if such hothouses could have existed two or three hundred years ago, they certainly no longer do. While the US may be no 'melting pot', it is hardly a locale for pristine racial purity. And just as the socially defined black population has changed, so has the white, which may have begun as western European, but through time has incorporated eastern Europeans, Mediterraneans and West Asians. And that does not even take into account Amerindians, Oriental or Pacific populations which are very real presences. If we consider even the grossest index of racial categorisation, skin colour, we are confronted with a biologically unmanageable range that is confusing even for purposes of social identification.

Finally, one must ask what is to be gained by a 'black medicine'? Every instance of recent attempts in that direction has, as the authors



note, resulted in as much harm as good, such as employers dismissing employees with sickle cell trait (not anaemia). Labels such as 'black-related diseases' carry the risk of decreasing diagnostic efforts as much as they allow for increased diagnostic precision. Medical treatment in the US is already too cursory an affair in other than obviously life threatening cases, and sometimes even then. Indeed, it can be argued that the primary problem with health care today is not the lack of professional knowledge, but rather that the quality of care for black and white is too often determined by ability to pay. The same is true of nutritional well-being, one must assume, when the chief executive wishes to define tomato ketchup as a vegetable for state subsidised school lunches.

Cambridge

ELIZABETH ROBINSON

*Beyond the 'Vietnam Syndrome': US intervention in the 1980s*

By MICHAEL KLARE (Washington and Amsterdam, Institute for Policy Studies, and London, Pluto Press, 1981). 137pp.

One of the hallmarks of the new militarism in the US is the willingness to engage once again in Third World interventions. Much of the current military build-up in the US is explicitly designed for this: the ships, planes, forward-basing facilities and troop reorganisations involved account for much more of the new military expenditure than do nuclear weapons. They also have a much more immediate and implementable military purpose than do the long-range missiles and nuclear bombs that could only be used in an all-out war. For the Reaganites, the recent history of the US is one of weakness in the Third World: from Vietnam, through Angola, Iran and Afghanistan, to Nicaragua, the middle and late 1970s have brought humiliation and retreat. The response they are preparing is to make it possible to check and reverse these events by a new military might.

As Michael Klare so cogently shows, this right-wing response has two prongs: the technical and logistical preparation of new intervention forces, and the political preparation of a climate in the US that will allow and encourage such measures. For the key result of Vietnam was not so much material damage to the US armed forces, or the encouragement given to revolutionary movements elsewhere, as the shift of opinion inside the US against intervention, the 'Vietnam Syndrome' or hostility to Third World wars and to US use of its power to bludgeon Third World peoples. As a result, much of the militarist effort of the late 1970s has gone into undoing the ideological impact of Vietnam at home so as to prepare the ground for new interventions abroad in the 1980s.

Reagan has already sent advisers to El Salvador, and has deployed forces in the Caribbean and Middle East to confront states such as Libya and Nicaragua and Cuba which are seen to threaten US interests. But as Klare writes, the new interventionism has several different kinds of target. Some are 'energy wars', designed to protect US interest in the Persian Gulf, others are 'resource wars', to protect other sources of raw material such as the metals of Southern Africa. Since the later part of the Carter presidency, US officials have been focusing on the dangers of 'turbulence' in the Third World, local insurgencies and conflicts which, whatever their causes, threaten US interests. All of these threats are independent of the Soviet Union, yet in public discourse they are amalgamated to a single Soviet 'threat' that legitimates US forward deployments, police actions and new interventions.

One of the most valuable parts of Michael Klare's study is his comparison of the Soviet and US capabilities for Third World intervention. He shows that although the USSR now has some ability to assist its allies in the Third World, this is diminutive compared to that of the US. The US obsession with its current Third World weakness is partly a delayed and displaced response to Vietnam, partly an attempt to squeeze all unwelcome Third World changes into a cold-war framework justifying a military response.

Klare's work is of great political significance, in Europe and the Third World as much as in the US. First of all, it sounds a warning: these people mean business, and they will strike if their interests are threatened. Reagan has said that he will not allow Saudi Arabia to go the way of Iran. He is openly menacing Cuba, and inciting South African attacks on Angola. A line of dictatorships, from Pakistan to Morocco, has received increased military help. But Klare's work is also important as a corrective to some of the more depoliticised and technicist writings on the arms race, which see it all in nuclear terms as some out-of-control doomsday process, one almost independent of political and class controls and one that is not intended for conventional use: what he shows is both the eminently usable nature of most new military equipment and the very concrete political functions it is designed to serve.

There are some areas where his analysis could be amplified. In his analysis of the US military role, he stresses the official US view of responsibility being delegated in the 1970s to Third World client states: but, whilst the Brazils and Irans played a part, this was at least equalled by other more powerful US allies who struck out where Washington felt temporarily unable to do so: France, which served as the gendarme of Africa, Britain, which still deployed forces in Oman and the other states of the Gulf as well as organising the right-wing counter-revolutionaries of the EDU in Ethiopia, and the US's newer ally, China, which in 1979 sought to 'punish' Vietnam on the US's behalf.



Klare makes the distinction between the interventionism of Reagan and the restraint of Carter: but he is slightly too indulgent to the initial policies of the former president, who from the very beginning of his presidency, as announced in a major foreign policy speech in June 1977, sought to rival the USSR in the Third World and in so doing provoked war in the Horn of Africa and encouraged conflict between Arabs and Israelis. These changes in US policy have been compounded by other factors that have encouraged right-wing sentiment in the US in the past few years, and in Washington's European allies. The recession, with its unemployment and inflation, has found a convenient scape-goat in Third World peoples, particularly OPEC states. Arabs and Persians have become the objects of imperialist and racist hatred at a time of floundering capitalism in the West, and this shift in popular attitudes has certainly made the prospect of interventions against them the more palatable.

The issue of intervention has become in the 1980s as important as it was in the late 1960s: it is linked, now, as it was then, both to the Third World peoples' political struggles and to the politics of the advanced capitalist countries themselves. Nine years after US forces left Vietnam, a monument to the US expeditionary corps is being erected in central Washington. The militarists learnt their lessons from the Tet offensive and are now on the march again: it may, tragically, be necessary to teach them the same lessons for a second time.

Transnational Institute

FRED HALLIDAY

### *The New Racism*

By MARTIN BARKER (London, Junction Books, 1981). 181pp. £4.95

Martin Barker has written a really valuable book which serious analysts of contemporary British politics simply cannot afford to ignore. The book has three concerns. First, it is a political intervention, in that his careful exposition of the pertinence of 'race' in British political life provides a series of rigorous and challenging answers to the question: what does it mean to be an anti-racist in 1982? Secondly, en route, Barker supplies a welcome corrective to the abstract excesses of recent 'marxist' debate over the mechanisms of ideology. Thirdly, he reiterates, in a fashion both novel and heretical in his own discipline, the philosophical and scientific incoherence of racist theorising in all its forms.

Barker's central achievement is to connect apparently innocent common sense instinctivism to the vitriolic nationalism of the Tory right and the pseudo-scientific pronouncements of biological determinists

and socio-biologists. He goes beyond describing their political relationship, which should already be familiar to observers of the British crisis, and has begun the painstaking task of revealing deeper conceptual and philosophical relations. This process is obviously far from complete, and though Martin Barker must be applauded for emphasising the need to approach the study of these ideologies in historical fashion, while those around him are fumbling with the problems of creating a pluralist national identity, he stops well short of demonstrating *why* the raw material of 'race' has supplied Britain's Tory politicians with a real mandate to manage the crisis. This also raises the question of how and in what senses the racism he has isolated is actually new. Its novelty may reside less in its precise content or in the way it invokes national cultures rooted in spurious biology as immutable natural facts which explain human difference and conflicts, and more in the political contradictions of British decline and in the fact that it confronts the militant resistance of black settlers.

It is, however, a rare pleasure to criticise a British writer on race for paying too much rather than too little attention to the internal workings of racist ideology. If there is a problem, then it is in the danger that readers may be left with the impression that the new racism is purely a phenomenon of the right, when in reality its populist character blurs simple class lines. The wealth of exceptional insights in Barker's chapter on the re-birth of Tory ideology left me regretting that this strand had not been pursued or expanded at the expense of some of the important but more straightforwardly philosophical content. It would have been exciting to see Barker's criteria applied to the discourses of the left, whose response to recent marginalisation from popular concerns has so frequently been to emphasise nationalist sentiments as a short-cut to power. Here too, 'the nation' and 'the national' can represent the first stage in a familiar mix of human nature, alien culture, race and biological determinism which may be even more dangerous when iced with working-class rhetoric.

Finally, this book is valuable because it conveys the idea that a credible materialism must be able to deal with the biological sphere. There is a sense in which the National Front is correct in its claim that 'socio-biology has buried marxism'. Sebastiano Timpanaro, among others, has pointed out that marxists have too often entered the economic groundfloor and ignored the biological basement in which important boundaries of human distinctiveness are determined. Martin Barker's book points to what this means for practical politics.

London

PAUL GILROY



*Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*

By B.H. SELASSIE (London and New York, Monthly Review Press, 1981). 211pp. £8.00

*Behind the War in Eritrea*

By B. DAVIDSON, L. CLIFFE and B.H. SELASSIE (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1980). 150pp. £3.50

The 'national question' in the Horn of Africa is the most burning one on the continent today apart from South Africa, yet literature on it is sparse and the situation too complex to lend itself to a simple straightforward assessment. Elsewhere in Africa the character of the state and of nationalism is clearly rooted in the history of colonialism and decolonisation. But the pivotal country of the Horn, Ethiopia, has had a different history.

The Ethiopian state expanded in eastern Africa in the nineteenth century, like Egypt and Zanzibar, in the wake of growing international commerce and the availability of efficient western guns. The social form of this expansion was expressed in tributary domination over newly-conquered peoples or an extension of the feudal relationships characteristic of the Ethiopian highlands. Unlike his compeers in Egypt and Zanzibar, Menelik of Ethiopia succeeded on the battlefield in preventing his empire from being swallowed up by Europeans, and Ethiopia survived into the twentieth century, the only African state to do so.

If we examine the means by which Menelik and then Haile Selassie ruled, the parallels for a westerner with the states of early modern Europe are striking. The independent judicial and military power of great feudal lords were gradually brought under central authority while the aristocracy began to enter a new state bureaucracy. Trusted or powerful underlings were bought off with land grants. The church was associated with the state and increasingly nationalised, while the beginnings of a national culture were underpinned by the growth of secular education and literature in Amharic. Haile Selassie was acutely aware of the limitations on his sovereignty imposed by the presence on all sides of Ethiopia of colonial entities, notably Italian-controlled Eritrea and Somalia, which blocked his access to the sea and secure supplies of armaments.

Such a history does not lack for comparisons elsewhere in the world, but it was the misfortune of the Ethiopian monarchy that it was attempting this process in the twentieth century on thin resources. In 1935, Fascist Italy, after provoking a border incident, invaded and conquered Ethiopia, which it ruled for six eventful years that disrupted Haile Selassie's plans while creating ultimately new possibilities for him. Roads and commerce expanded through the countryside, intensifying pressures on the peasantry. The growth of Ethiopian state

authority went hand in hand with the spread of oppressive cash relationships that evoked peasant hostility and led to the rise of militant urban working-class activity. Already in the immediate aftermath of the Italian surrender, Haile Selassie faced serious risings in Tigre and the Ogaden, requiring foreign help to suppress. In the context of a pinched, corrupt, distorted Ethiopian capitalism, whose limited benefits went either abroad or to the aristocrats and well-placed bureaucrats, feudal solidarities weakened and the emergent petty-bourgeoisie became increasingly hostile to the empire. Many were neither Christian nor Amharic-speaking and their opposition to the empire took on a 'national' character.

With the Italians defeated and the British temporarily in charge of their old colonies, Haile Selassie manoeuvred to incorporate both Somalia and Eritrea within his state. He failed entirely with Somalia, which the UN granted to Italy for a ten-year trusteeship leading to independence in 1960. Somali nationalism developed a strong irredentist quality. Independent Somalia sought to incorporate all Somali-speakers within its borders and particularly those of the Ogaden who lived within Ethiopia.

Largely through accommodation with US imperialism, as Bereket Habte Selassie effectively points out, Haile Selassie did succeed in gaining Eritrea in 1952 in the form of a federal union. Eritrea was a tough nut to swallow though. Eritrean nationalism had emerged under the contradictions of Italian colonial development and flourished under the British occupation. The hold of nomadic chieftains in the Muslim lowlands and of the church and feudal landlords in the highlands over serfs and peasants was already weakening. While the dominant strata in Eritrea at first largely collaborated with Haile Selassie, the bankrupt character of Ethiopian rule intensified social antagonisms and alienated even many of the collaborators. By the time the Eritrean assembly was forced to accept total amalgamation into Ethiopia in 1962 at gunpoint, armed struggle against the state had begun.

Close ally of the USA and of Israel, leader of the so-called non-aligned movement, elder statesman of African nationalism, Haile Selassie secured for himself a remarkable and enviable diplomatic niche. Internally his rule rested on no social base whatsoever and he was increasingly hated. He was finally overthrown in a revolutionary process of complexity that unfolded from 1974; it might be pointed out that there is no section of opinion among the peoples of the Horn that has since desired a return of the monarchy. The regime of the Dergue, in which Colonel Mengistu has come to play the dominant role, has expunged the feudal elements from the Ethiopian state. However, it has equally tried to continue the centralising Greater Ethiopian traditions of the monarchy. Lacking any firm class base in the masses, the post-revolutionary regime has had little to offer either the Eritreans or the



Somali of the Ogaden. The collapse of the monarchy engendered other liberation movements as well, which continue to oppose Mengistu, notably in Tigre and among the Oromo (Galla), who actually form the largest single element in the population of Ethiopia.

The character of the different movements fighting the Ethiopian state varies. There are several Eritrean movements, of which by far the most significant is the EPLF, formed in 1970 in a breakaway from the ideologically incoherent ELF. The collection edited by Davidson, Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie provides a copy of the EPLF programme and bears testimony to the impassioned support of sympathisers. Accounts of travellers to liberated zones in Eritrea, including those in this volume, provide evidence of the advanced revolutionary practice and democratic socialist commitment, as well as the resilience and toughness, of EPLF cadres. Originally the EPLF received training and support from Cuba and other socialist countries; since 1977, it has had to face their hostility. It was due to Cuban and, particularly, Soviet intervention in support of Addis Ababa that the EPLF, which had succeeded in occupying almost the whole of Eritrea, was driven back to guerrilla warfare. It has as well to operate with indifference, if not open antagonism, from other African and Middle Eastern regimes.

The Somali struggle has a different nature, due to the historic involvement of the Somali state, which is little more or less revolutionary than the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia. It is interesting to note from Bereket's informative book that the Western Somali Liberation Front of the Ogaden has increasingly distanced itself from the Somalia government and a position originally limited to irredentism and ethnic unity. He also provides the reader with some information on the struggle in Tigre and the burgeoning Oromo movement.

*Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* is a useful guide to the problems of the area by a partisan of the EPLF cause, but it has certain weaknesses and superficialities. Despite the title, it is inadequate in discussing the significance of foreign intervention in the Horn, which is viewed largely as extraneous meddling in essentially internal problems. This begs a number of questions, notably about social and economic relationships in the area. The character and purpose of Soviet assistance to Ethiopia (and of the Mengistu regime) needs deeper consideration. A particularly serious issue for all fighters opposed to the Addis Ababa regime is the temptation, notably thrust their way from Ronald Reagan's America, to tie up with US cold war strategies. The Barre regime in Somalia has taken up the bait, hook, line and sinker, with the lease of the Berbera naval base, massive educational and aid programmes, and so on, in a fashion that closely recalls Sadat's switch-about and has begun to engender serious internal opposition.

The second issue which does not get full enough consideration from

Bereket, who largely pleads the case of each movement on their own, rather differing terms, is the national question in the Horn seen at large. For an outsider, it comes inevitably to mind to ask who would benefit, other than a tiny social stratum, from the creation of a half-dozen or more national entities in the Horn and what their independence would actually be worth. The independence of Eritrea can be defended as that of an unwillingly colonised territory, first of Italy and then Ethiopia, but while valid so far as it goes, this line of reasoning follows an unsatisfactory legalistic argument also. Is not the emergence of cooperative and federal forms in the Horn the only real hope for the area, the only real antithesis to the historic weight of imperial Ethiopia? Yet both books, despite analytical limitations, convince the reader that there seem to be more possibilities in this direction in the EPLF and other insurgent movements than in the politics of General Mengistu. They suggest as well that the travails of the people in the Horn will continue for years to come before the achievement of any such solution.

Harvard University

BILL FREUND

*Teaching in the Multi-cultural School*

Edited by JAMES LYNCH (London, Ward Lock, 1982). 283pp. £7.25

*The School in the Multicultural Society*

Edited by ALAN JAMES and ROBERT JEFFCOATE (London, Harper & Row: Open University set book, 1982). 307pp.

It is almost a year to the day, as I write this, that the youths of Brixton took their rage on to the streets and spoke with the violence of firebombs about their oppression. Since then, the state, its agencies and assorted therapeutic functionaries have worked feverishly to prevent an 'anniversary'. Though these two books may well have been conceived before the uprisings, their concern with the schooling of the young shows a similar preoccupation. The editors, of course, go to great lengths to show that they have no ideological or political axe to grind – and to this end they stitch together various unconnected papers addressing the question of race/racism from wildly different levels of conceptual understanding and theoretical engagement. In the result, what we are left with is a mess of remedies for the maladies that affect inner-city schools.

Both books take as their central concern the pedagogical problems associated with teaching black kids. But even within this limited terrain the contributions in general fail to provide any fresh insights. Lynch's compilation, in fact, has nothing to say which has not already been



said, resurrected and re-resurrected by race relations sociology – only to be slain each time by the virulence of British racism. Nowhere in this book is there any recognition of the way pedagogical relations speak and function through power relations in school to maintain and reproduce the symbolic and economic dominance of the ruling groups of the dominant culture. Nowhere, in other words, does this book deal with the schooling that reproduces race/class inequalities. So that the reader is left with a view of teaching and schooling as autonomous processes, existing outside society's power relationships, value free – which quite simply is a lie.

What most concerns the authors of these pieces, it would appear, is not the pedagogy of oppression, but the pedagogy of mediation and bargaining where separate, alienated, cultural/ethnic hybrids are presented as cases deserving of recognition in the curriculum of the dominant culture.

James and Jeffcoate's book, on the other hand, provides some interesting papers, most notably, that by Stuart Hall – the edited transcript of a talk on teaching race given to a branch of the Association of the Teachers of Social Science in 1980. Hall offers no packaged solutions, strategic messages or theoretical anadins for teaching race in inner-city classrooms. Instead, he situates the teaching of race in the classroom historically and shows how race has come to occupy a central and strategic conceptual space in knowledge formations for the understanding of modern complex societies.

In considering the relations between race and class, for example, race is viewed as a complex totality which, though connected to class, retains its own specific modality (sustained and articulated by different sets of determinations) with its own history and conditions of existence. Analysed in this way, race is seen in relation to the concrete problems of a given moment. This provides fresh clues to the way certain distorted knowledge forms of the dominated have varied and persisted over time. Pertinent to this understanding is the close relationship drawn by Hall between the ideology of racism and sexism.

Hall raises fundamental questions about the pedagogy of race and class domination – questions that other papers in this collection have not tackled in any stimulating or rigorous way. Dhondy's paper, for example, though providing a political reading of the school as a site for the imposition of various kinds of mechanical skills and discipline, falls short of engaging the subtler questions of how the school is able to accommodate and reproduce certain 'resistive cultural grammars' such as Johnson's 'Dread, Beat and Blood' into a pedagogy of subordination for the 'alien fringe'. Perhaps more important, there is nothing in Dhondy's paper that instructs the reader in the ways in which resistance in and outside of schools can be politically educated to escape prepared spaces of reaction.

Maureen Stone's polemic against multicultural education takes flight on an eclectic broom which whips up clouds of unenlightening allusions to Gramsci, Bourdieu and lesson-known academic heavies. All this simply detracts from her main intent which is to whisper in the ear of policy that reformers have been getting it wrong: what is needed is not the 'spice-ification' of the school curriculum by multi-ethnic cultural herbs, but a good helping of the type of traditional skills being served up in various supplementary Saturday schools. No doubt, the author herself was raised on such a diet, preventing her from seeing that it is not merely the mastering of the skills and academic traditions of the dominant culture which leads to the emancipation of the dominated, but rather, their ability to grasp their specific class/race histories in the present moment of struggle.

Apart from these papers, the real weakness of both books lies in their reliance on recycling stultifying theories such as cultural pluralism. Strained of all penetrative power, this perspective is incapable of theoretically engaging the complexities of the relations between race and class in society or school. The ideology of liberal pluralism speaks only to pragmatic politics. Its poverty lies in its inability to speak to solutions in terms other than an abstract egalitarianism of distributive justice within the imperatives of a fixed system of race/class/sex priorities. Thus, pedlars of such notions as multiculturalism can only negotiate modes of collective co-existence when the particularity of the ruling group of the dominant culture is under threat.

At a time when the 'resistance particularity' of the dominated is looking for strategies to escape preconstituted spaces of reaction, all that these books can offer is more cleared sites of containment.

London

LEN S. FOLKES

### *The National Front in English politics*

By STAN TAYLOR (London, Macmillan, 1982). 212pp. £20.00

The National Front has aroused far more interest among sociologists and academics than any other fascist party in Britain, not just because it was the largest but because it has tried to intervene on a major scale in the electoral process. This latest book, written by Stan Taylor, a political scientist at Warwick University, is an attempt to look at the basis of support for the NF among the electorate, and to analyse why it failed to sustain a growing vote throughout the country in the late 1970s. In doing so, Taylor also assesses the anti-racist, anti-fascist movement which developed (in 1977-9) in response to the threat posed by the NF.



Taylor begins this readable, but prohibitively expensive book by tracing the NF's development out of the fascist tradition in Britain. Unlike most academic 'NF watchers', Taylor accepts that its ideology was basically that of German nazism. The strategy adopted by the NF – to conceal its national socialist ideology and present itself as a racist but democratic party – was chosen as a result of its experience (and frustrations) in trying to build a nazi movement throughout the 1960s. Thus, the history lesson at the beginning of this book further underlines the way in which the rise and fall of the NF is part of that same process. Three years since the dramatic decline of the NF, a new nazi organisation has been formed out of the fragments that were left.

Most of the book is devoted to an analysis of the real levels of support behind the fluctuating voting figures in the 1970s. Taylor looks at the external factors: the immigration scares, whipped up when the East African Asians were expelled, and the voting traditions in East London, where 'deviant' parties generally fare better than in other parts of the country. The arguments cannot be summarised adequately here, but deserve careful reading. As a study of the racist vote in Britain at that time, these chapters raise some interesting points and provide a record that will certainly be useful. Taylor's conclusion is that during the 1970s, the NF was an outlet for anti-immigration racist voters, at a time when they felt betrayed by the established parties. Its decline, after its disastrous election performance in the 1979 general election, however, was due largely not to a change of heart on the part of racist voters, but to Thatcher's notorious statements about the British fears of 'culture swamping' and the Tories' election pledge to end black immigration.

Elsewhere, Taylor maintains that the NF's intervention in electoral politics and its subsequent decline was paralleled by a short-lived anti-racist movement. The NF gave people a focus, particularly in the form of the Anti-Nazi League, to fight fascism. But in his account of the anti-racist movement, Taylor raises questions far beyond the scope of this book. How, for instance, are we to sustain a broad-based campaign against racism in its own right?

Had he used far more original material to illustrate how the founders of the NF planned from the very beginning to coax the British voters into accepting nazi ideology and shown far more decisively how violence was an integral part of their politics, Taylor would have been able to predict more accurately the direction in which the Far Right would move after 1979. The failure of the NF's post-electoral campaign against the Vietnamese refugees, which it clearly thought would bring it back some of its lost popularity, says less about British racism and more about the mood of right-wing reaction and anti-communism that had swept the country.

The best recommendation that could be made for a book that looks

back at the rise and fall of a fascist and racist organisation is to say that it teaches us how to go on fighting. This book will be invaluable as a record, but little help as a guide.

London

VRON WARE

*A Savage Culture: racism – a black British view*

By REMI KAPO (London, Quartet Books, 1981). 146pp, £2.50.

Inside *A Savage Culture* is a novelist struggling to get out. Remi Kapo begins his view of British racism by telling us that 'if sincerity is a foundation, it is definitely impossible to write about *any* injustice with a muffled pen; for outrage demands the hot ink of belief, for clarity'. Unfortunately, clarity is not a hallmark of this book. He has chosen to present his view of racism in a literary style – something akin to the 'stream of consciousness' writing favoured by some earlier British novelists – and herein lies the rub. Stream of consciousness writing was meant to place the reader inside the character's head, to witness at close quarters the spontaneous nature of thought. The reader's task was not to get drowned in the flow. Kapo's version of this style works well when he is trying to convey his inner feelings, but when he gushes from blacks fighting in the wars, to 'Sus', to the immigration of blacks in the 1950s; from racism at Ford's, to the Immigration Acts, to education; from policing in Brixton, to the media reporting of the struggles in Zimbabwe, it becomes so much existential reportage with scarcely a connection.

But when we have got beneath the flowery prose of Kapo's book to a closer examination of his view of racism, we are unrewarded. To begin with, although he makes reference to feminism, he can devote only one paragraph to the specific ways in which contemporary racism exploits and oppresses black women. His failure to recognise the gender specific operations of racism means that while he mentions the un-savoury practice of 'virginity testing', he does not examine the ideologies of Asian women's femininity or of Asian family life which are used to justify such testing. These and similar ideologies about Afro-Caribbean women also underpin the practices through which they are channelled into particular types of work and which attempt to 'discipline' them at work. Similar ideologies are also to be found at the base of the racist practices of, for example, the NHS and the social services, and are a key element in the elaboration of pathological explanations regarding the behaviour and 'problems' of young black people, such as identity crisis, cultural conflict, etc.

Even the issues that Kapo does deal with tend to be presented in a superficial and inadequate way. He talks about policing and



immigration controls, but doesn't attempt to link these different practices except by telling us what we already know, i.e., that they are racist. 'Police power' he reduces to individual psychologies: 'it is inherent in the act of joining a police force that an individual, consciously or subconsciously, seeks a larger slice of the local power cake'; and police harassment is reduced to a reaction to the racist hysteria of white people. The hysteria, apparently, provides ready-made victims for power-seeking police officers. Surely there is more to it than this!

Oddly enough, despite the fact that Kapo uses the term 'black' to exclude Asian people (what would he say about Southall Black Sisters of Bradford's United Black Youth League?), he remains silent about the different racist 'theories' which have been constructed around the presence of the different communities. To use his own examples again, this makes it possible for police and government representatives to argue – quite plausibly – that 'fishing raids' and SPG 'swamps' have no connection with each other, except that both 'illegal entry' and 'mugging' are 'crimes'. But in fact the common rationale for police practices is hidden beneath racist ideologies of 'criminality' which refer specifically to particular communities. This differentiation takes place at all levels of the social formation and carries the potential to disrupt and disorganise black struggles. Had Kapo inquired into the specifics of racism, he might have recognised that racism today is no mere relic of a past imperial mentality. It has been constructed anew in the post-war period and repatriation, far from being a 'giant miscalculation', is a preferred solution to Britain's 'race problem' in these times of deepening crisis. The groundwork for it has already been laid.

It is worth saying a few words about Kapo's view of the connections between race and class. Although he never fully spells it out, he seems to favour the white working class/black underclass formulation popular these days amongst 'radical' sociologists. Like them, he views the white working class as having been bought off by economic rewards and anaesthetised by 'myths of racial superiority'. This formulation obscures their own role in the elaboration of racist ideologies at the same time as it blocks discussion of the class character of black struggles. These apparently only become class struggles when white people join in. But this rigid view of Kapo's actually causes problems for his analysis. At one point he argues that white people's racism is so far gone that it has become more or less 'instinctive', rendering them unable to 'change their own myths about' black people. Yet he also wants to acknowledge the fact that white youth in Toxteth fought with the blacks against the police. At this point his optimism shines through. White youth, apparently by virtue of being *young*, are in a better position to see that the past 'which can hold a Nation back ... is a dead living [eh?] entity to be perceived from totally honest objectivity'. Perhaps it is this which will stiffen their moral fibre and give them 'the

courage, integrity and the ability required to conceive new conceptions for the actual make-up and realness of a multi-racial and multi-cultural British body politic'.

Such heavy moralism takes the place of analysis in this book, and while it may complement Kapo's literary style, it does little for our understanding of racism. More than anything else, it shows that you can't knit a jumper with a needle and thread.

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*Been in the Storm So Long: the aftermath of slavery*

By LEON F. LITWACK (London, The Athlone Press, 1981). 651 pp.  
£14.50

The deteriorating position of the mass of black America two decades after what was called 'The second Reconstruction' makes us look back to the first Reconstruction to identify the factors responsible for the fate of both. Leon Litwack's massive study of the years following emancipation provides the opportunity. And his use of original sources, letters, diaries, newspaper accounts and interviews with ex-slaves carried out in the 1930s by the Federal Writers Project – to highlight 'the countless ways in which freedom was perceived and experienced by the black men and women who had been born into slavery and how they acted on every level to help shape their condition and future as freedmen and freedwomen' – provides the focus.

The pattern of racist violence and repression of the black community during Reconstruction as described by Litwack has all too immediate resonances. For example, the acquittal by both the coroner's court and the local military authorities of the Columbia, South Carolina, Chief of Police after he shot and killed a young freedman while arresting him for a misdemeanour brings to mind, among other cases, the acquittal of four Miami police officers who beat a black man to death. The description of terrorist attacks, uncontrolled by the military or police, is like reading about the wave of KKK attacks in the United States and British Movement and National Front attacks in Britain.

The process of turning the freedmen and freedwomen into a rural proletariat is extensively discussed as are the failed attempts to replace black labour with immigrant and other white labour. 'The more the white South experimented with white labor, the more the employer class came to appreciate the relative advantages of black labor, free or slave.' In the process of creating a stable labour force the employers were assisted by the Federal Government in a number of ways. The non-confiscation of the plantations and the consequent non-provision



of forty acres and a mule locked the freed slaves into a re-established plantation system. The Freedman's Bureau, for ideological, as well as more immediately economic reasons, functioned to discipline the black labour force. Black resistance to contract labour ultimately led to the development of sharecropping which at least avoided gang labour and enabled the black family to control its own labour on a day to day basis – but in the end 'he [the black labourer] found himself plunged ever deeper into dependency and debt, pledging his future crops to sustain himself during the current crop'.

Litwack looks at the political responses of the black communities in the South, particularly in terms of the conventions that were held in every state, and finds them more concerned with political and civil rights than with economic demands. He attributes this to the tacit acceptance by the black leadership of the primarily middle-class ideology of white America, and even more to their feeling that if they were to gain the same rights as whites they would not want to undermine their own position by appearing to ask for special treatment – and confiscation was seen as such. Such a demand, besides, would fail and alienate potential supporters. Clearly, the dominant structure and ideology of capitalism determined the framework within which black leaders operated, and limited the range of demands that were considered 'legitimate'. A similar situation existed in the Civil Rights-second Reconstruction period. Demanding entrance into the existing structure of society on terms of racial equality meant accepting the class structure of that society and putting aside demands for a restructuring of the society itself. The status differences within the black community in both time periods reinforced this pattern, with the most successful blacks shaping the emphasis on equal access to public facilities rather than on economic demands. The political strategy in both periods was largely predicated on the existence of competing interests and priorities between the Federal Government and the national political and economic elites and the white Southern political and economic elites. This approach limited the demands being made to those that would appear legitimate, and was to have limited long-term utility in the face of a congruence of interests between national and regional elites.

The failure of both Reconstructions for the mass of Afro-Americans raises crucial questions about the link between race and class. Demands which ignore the class nature of the system can only benefit a segment of the black population and demands which ignore racism cannot deal with the racist political culture which has distorted the class consciousness of the white working class.

It is the strength of *Been in the Storm So Long* that these issues are raised for the period of the first Reconstruction in the voices of the people of the time, of the black protagonists, and their white oppressors. Litwack shows sensitivity in his handling the material, and

while there is no clear analytic framework situating what was happening in the South in terms of the development of the political economy of the nation as a whole, the material itself is presented in a form which is of use to those concerned with these questions and the book is, therefore, an important contribution to the literature.

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# Books received

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- Ain't I a woman: black women and feminism.* By Bell Hooks. Boston, South End Press, 1981. Paper \$7.00
- Battlefront Namibia: an autobiography.* By John Ya-Otto. London, Heinemann, 1982. Paper £2.95
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- British nationality: the new law.* By Ivor Stanbrook. Orpington, Clement Publishers, 1982. Cloth £9.50
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- Ordinary lives: a hundred years ago.* By Carol Adams. London, Virago Press, 1982. Paper £4.50
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- The political economy of underdevelopment.* By S.B.D. de Silva. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. Cloth £20.00
- Race, migration and schooling.* Edited by John Tierney. London and New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982. Paper
- Reading, 'riting, and reconstruction: the education of freedmen in the south.* By Robert C. Morris. Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1982. Cloth £17.50
- Roots of revolution: an interpretive history of modern Iran.* By Nikki R. Keddie. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1981. Cloth £21.00, Paper £4.15
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