

Socialism in the English-Speaking Caribbean

Seminar Series

March 16th, 23rd, 30th

**Programme
and
Abstracts**

Organised by
The Socialist History Society,
The Institute of Commonwealth Studies
and
The Society for Caribbean Studies

Socialism in the English-Speaking Caribbean seminar series

The *Socialist History Society*, *The Institute of Commonwealth Studies* and *The Society for Caribbean Studies* will be holding a series of online research seminars.

16th March - register here:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0rd--vqTgoGdbtgRcXT2iQMtBrSmDvk_Wu](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?zmt=1603030000&zoom-join=1603030000)

Ozzi Warwick	History of Socialism in the English-speaking Caribbean
Valentine Smith	The New Left and the Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago
Ben Gowland	Black Power and Socialism in the West Indies

23rd March - register here:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlucOyopzwwqHtYXc9zcGRNv2IKnpSzFjRuc](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?zmt=1603030000&zoom-join=1603030000)

Michael Niblett & Chris Campbell	Caribbean Socialism, Revolutionary Literature, and the Education of Feeling
Loraine Thomas	Politics and Caribbean Literature – The Case of St Vincent and the Grenadines in the Era of Independence.
Tennyson Joseph	The Caribbean Left since the Collapse of the Grenada Revolution

30th March - register here:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0oc--srDwoGdPcbCS9vISPeSE49e9Lnm2R](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?zmt=1603030000&zoom-join=1603030000)

Matthew Myers	'Jamaica – Britain – One Struggle!': Transnational socialisms and black workers' newspapers between the Caribbean and Britain (Flame, 1975-1979)
Marsha Hinds	Woman and Caribbean Socialism
Anne'el Bain	Under The Eagle's Eye: Cooperation As A Survival Mechanism Among Leftist Cuba, Grenada And Nicaragua, 1979-1990

The participants have been invited to submit written papers in advance of the seminars. These will be available to everyone who registers.

Attendance is free, but advance registration is necessary.

Abstracts

16th March

Ozzi Warwick

History of Socialism in the English-speaking Caribbean

There can be no doubt that socialism in the English-speaking Caribbean has a long and rich history. Its antecedents can be traced to the late 19th century with the establishment of the Trinidad Working Men's Association in 1897. Coming out of the socialist and revolutionary tradition, the English-speaking Caribbean produced persons like, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, Walter Rodney, Maurice Bishop and many others. In Trinidad and Tobago, in the 1920s, politics was driven by socialist ideas and socialist candidates.

In the mid 1930's, powerful mass movements emerged in most countries of the English-speaking region organized and led by workers. Additionally, there were Socialist activists who were very involved in both the mass movements and national politics.

In Trinidad, the 1930's brought forward Elma Francois of the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association and Jim Barrette of the National Unemployed Movement. In Jamaica, the four H's - Richard Hart, Ken and Frank Hill and Arthur Henry, were active in the People's National Movement.

In the late 1940's, Trinidad and Tobago had the radical Workers' Freedom Movement led by John La Rose and Lennox Pierre together with trade union leaders – John Rojas, President General of the OWTU; Quintin O'Connor leader of the Federated Workers' Union and Oli Mohammed of the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers' Trade Union. The trade union leaders all came together to form the West Indian Independence Party (WIIP). British Guiana also had the radical Cheddi Jagan as both leader of the original Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) and the Sugar Workers' Union.

In 1952, the left leaning side of the movement in Trinidad and Tobago, the West Indian Independence Party (WIIP) offered an interesting alternative to the existing parties. Meanwhile, in Guyana, Cheddi Jagan even led the PPP to electoral victory in 1953. Unfortunately, however, the U.S. and British intelligence ended the PPP rule with military intervention.

We even had the New Jewel Movement led by Maurice Bishop seize power in 1979, making it the first and only English speaking socialist revolution in Grenada. The Grenadian Revolution (1979-1983) challenged the imperial agenda like it had never been challenged and thirty years later, once again with the use of military force, Maurice Bishop and other leaders of the Revolution were assassinated to put an end to the Grenadian Revolution. A revolution which, during its four years of existence, made serious attempts to dismantle the old institutions of power and establish new, more participatory processes.

From Kingston in 1968 with the "so-called Rodney Riots" to Trinidad and Tobago in 1970 with the Black Power Revolution and again in 1974/75 and 76 with the oil and sugar strikes; the National Union of Freedom Fighters who led an armed struggle in Trinidad and Tobago in 1974; the protests to St. George's in 1973 and '74 - the anti-Gairy struggles; Georgetown in 1979/80 with general strikes; the 1979 protests in Dominica which ousted the Patrick John government, and led to, instead of the progressives and left taking power, the governance of the conservative Eugenia Charles led Freedom Party in the 1980 elections; and protests in Antigua in 1968 – the Mass Movements of the English speaking Caribbean were on the streets demanding fundamental change. These new socialist voices that emerged were demanding an end to neo-colonialism.

Ozzi Warwick

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Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (owtu.org)

Valentine Smith

The New Left and the Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago

This paper turns to one of the most significant antecedent to, and influence on, the Black Power movement in Trinidad and Tobago. It focuses, in particular, on two groups: the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), the leading Black Power organization on the island during the mass demonstrations of February to April 1970, the period of mass struggle had been brought to an end by the imprisonment of the Black Power leadership. Trinidad and Tobago's traditional institutions are inegalitarian with an unequal socioeconomic class structure that are based on family, religion, education, politics/law and their relations of production. What took place did not bother the European countries' rationalization strategy. The Whites and French Creoles who are invariably rich and in control of the banks and businesses super- and infra-structures, dominated the life and wealth of the society. They were not just racists; they contained and subsumed mostly Afro-Trinbagonian working class communities. The Sedition Act which came into being as part of the mechanism to prevent any future economic disruption in the society.

Walter Rodney in his *Groundings with My Brothers*, as well as ideas developed by the New World and Tapia groups, and elements of conventional Marxism. Beginning with the premise that 'political institutions function as an arm of the Economic System', the pamphlet proposed that Caribbean political institutions were shaped by the region's insertion into a global economic system of 'White Power', comprising an alliance between foreign economic interests (who controlled Caribbean economic resources) and their local White allies, whose survival depended on the maintenance of the status quo.

In this context, the 'rules of politics' were 'designed to protect White economic interests', with the institutions of the state – government, police, army, the legal system, education and the media all pressed into the service of the economic system. Constitutional changes – from the expansion of the franchise to the independence settlement did not disturb the fundamentals of White Power. Rather, '[the] Constitution Britain imposed in 1962 confirmed the twin forces of the White Power structure it in no way tampered with the System and contained sufficient checks on the Government to prevent them tampering with local white interests'. Its beneficiaries – those who in Fanonian terms had stepped into the shoes of the departing colonisers inherited, and were complicit in perpetuating, a 'structure of White-oriented institutions which [were] an integral part of a total system of economic, cultural, and political oppression of Black people'. The political space eventually accorded to the black middle class was thus 'empty of all power' Fanon went beyond hegemony and containment to label colonialism an act of complete violence, an act that can only be confronted with revolutionary and spontaneous p. 56).5violence, the violence of emancipation and liberation, not just counter class domination, as Gramsci suggested.

The "negation of the African soul" by the colonists is not just a material or social act. It is, Fanon maintains, an act of depersonalization that can only be reversed through cleansing revolutionary violence. Here, Fanon turns "consciousness" from an abstract term into an all-embracing force. Fanon does not stop long at the consciousness of color, or the issue of black versus white, during his North African phase. *White Masks* outline a situation describing the way the dispossessed view the "other". Fanon was more interested in the overall colonialist process than in the conventional methods of apartheid.

Valentine Smith PhD

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Black Power and Socialism in the West Indies

Ben Gowland

This paper examines the range of ways socialist theory, praxis and rhetoric was articulated by various Black Power movements across the West Indies in the late 1960s and early 1970s – the ‘high watermark’ of Black Power activity in the region. Just as previous generations of Caribbean radicals had been inspired by the October Revolution of 1917 and the anti-imperialist and anti-racist politics of the Soviet Union (Featherstone and Hogsbjerg 2021) so too did Black Power radicals draw inspiration from international socialism and turn socialist politics to their own ends. By the late 1960s and early 1970s however, the points of reference were less Moscow and Eastern Europe but instead Cuba (Rodney 1969), the national-liberation movements of the Third World (Rodney 1990) and indeed the legacies left by earlier Caribbean socialists (James 1967, 1971).

Central to Black Power articulations of socialism in the West Indies was an analysis of the mutually constitutive nature of race and class in the region; with the political-economy of (neo)colonial capitalism seen to work through and reinforce the colonial racism that has long characterised the region’s history. In this way, I suggest we can read ‘West Indian Black Power socialism’ as expressive of a Black Marxism (Robinson 1984) and a ‘dread’ historical-materialism (Bogues 2003; Austin 2020). This theoretical grounding saw the West Indian Black Power movement produce sharp and insightful critiques of the changing nature of capitalist-imperialism in a decolonising world that was perhaps anticipatory of later theorists of neoliberal capitalism (Narayan 2019). More practically this staunch anti-imperialism saw great interest in the socialisms of the ‘Third World’ and the formation of solidarities with socialist and Black Power groups amongst the world’s ‘peripheral’ peoples. In local terms, this Black Power socialist analysis saw the incorporation of Rastafari cosmology, Garveyism and histories of slave rebellion into this truly global political-economic critique outlined.

Secondarily, the paper will sketch out the diverse historical socialist trajectories that moved through the West Indian Black Power movement and which would, to greater and lesser degrees, shape the history of the decolonising Anglophone Caribbean. In Jamaica the Left elements of the Black Power movement would move into Michael Manley’s Democratic Socialist project, the Marxist-Leninist Worker’s Party of Jamaica and independent trade union organisation (Bogues 2014, Lewis 2014). In Trinidad the Black Power Revolution of 1970 created space for autonomous Marxist groups (Quest 2017) and a focoist guerrilla cell (Meeks 2000). Perhaps most famously, Grenada’s socialist revolution of 1979 can be traced back to the Black Power movement of earlier in the decade. In these ways the Black Power ‘moment’, although relatively brief, had a lasting and marked impact on the articulation of socialist politics in the region long after its appeal and popularity had faded.

Dr. Ben Gowland,

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23rd March

Caribbean Socialism, Revolutionary Literature, and the Education of Feeling

Chris Campbell & Michael Niblett

Speaking in an interview in the 1960s, the Trinidadian novelist and short-story writer Alfred Mendes reflected on the two major factors that had motivated an explosion of literary activity in the Caribbean in the 1930s and 1940s: “The first was, of course, the First World War where a large number of us had been abroad [. . .], and the second event was the Russian Revolution. Those, I think, were the two events in our lives at that time which drove us into writing about our islands.” The years following World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution were tumultuous ones in the Caribbean. An emerging blend of labour radicalism, racial solidarity, and anti-colonial sentiment galvanized workers across the region. With economic and social conditions deteriorating as a result of the Great Depression, a series of labour rebellions displaying an unprecedented level of working-class organization swept the archipelago. Commenting on the situation in Trinidad during the general strike of 1937, C. L. R. James exclaimed: “trade unions are being formed all over the island, and the advanced workers are clamouring for revolutionary literature of all sorts, by Marx and Engels and other writers on Communism.” It was in this context that writers like Mendes and James sought to develop new forms of literary and cultural expression capable of representing the life and struggles of the Caribbean’s labouring classes.

This paper examines the relationship between the new forms of working-class organization that emerged in the early twentieth-century Caribbean, the development of socialist ideas in the region, and literary and cultural production. Literary and other cultural works were not merely adjuncts to or reflections on this history, but actively involved in shaping its unfolding, not least by contributing to what George Lamming called the “education of feeling” that must “be at the heart of any struggle for liberation.” The intersection between socialism, the interwar upheavals, and the arts is perhaps most famously embodied in C. L. R. James. Focusing initially on Trinidad, this paper will turn its attention to various other, lesser-known writers whose work contributed to and drew inspiration from the radical energies of the era, including Olga Yaatoff, Kathleen Archibald, and Jean de Bossière. It will also trace the continued entanglement of regional literary production in the development of Caribbean socialism in the immediate post-war era, again focusing on less widely studied writers and activists – including, for example, Phyllis Shand Allfrey. The latter’s writing registers the trade union and socialist energies of the interwar years in Dominica, while also documenting the disappointments of her own experiences of the later, failed Federation experiment. Throughout, the paper will pay particular attention to the specific ways in which the critiques of colonial-patriarchal ideology to be found in the writing of Archibald, Yaatoff, and Allfrey can expand our understanding of the revolutionary nature of Caribbean socialisms.

Chris Campbell

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Michael Niblett

Associate Professor in Modern World Literature, University of Warwick

Politics and Caribbean Literature – The Case of St Vincent and the Grenadines in the Era of Independence

Lorraine Thomas

The names contained within the Anglophone Caribbean literary canon would suggest that writers hailing from the first Caribbean nations to establish themselves as independent from Britain tend to dominate the literary narrative. However, given the geographical diversity and cultural complexity of the Caribbean region, the study of literature from lesser-known islands has the capacity to enrich and add nuance to the broader cultural discussion around Caribbean literature – both its aesthetic and thematic concerns. This paper will draw attention to the literature of St Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) during the era of independence 1940-1980. It will demonstrate how the island's literature not only reflected what was happening in political contexts, but was also able to stoke, and in many cases, lead the conversation around nationalist progression.

SVG has a well-documented history outlining decades of political activism (Fraser, 2002; 2010; 2011) nevertheless, this paper focuses on the period shortly after the 1935 Labour Disturbances. From 1940 onwards, research shows greater numbers of Vincentians from across all social classes becoming more politically conscious (Fraser, 2013; 2016; Gonsalves, 2014; 2019). As a result, and corresponding with the process of active politicisation, the time was marked by an upsurge in the number of trade unions in operation throughout the islands that 'ushered in the commencement of the social democratic revolution in SVG' (Gonsalves, 2019 p.25). In due course, labour unions such as the 'Federated Industrial Agricultural Workers' Union, the Workers' and Peasants Union and the National Union of Progressive Workers' (p.43) morphed into vibrant political parties like the People's Political Party and the St Vincent Labour Party (p.23), whose members worked doggedly to raise national consciousness. Eventually their efforts resulted in people being able to enjoy more political freedoms: universal adult suffrage was granted in 1951 before, in 1969, the islands were granted associate statehood status. It was not until some ten years later that in 1979, finally, SVG achieved independence from Great Britain (much later than some of its regional counterparts). As this paper argues, works of the creative imagination produced during these five decades increasingly reflect this fervent nationalist sentiment as islanders endeavoured to carve out a unique national and cultural identity within the Caribbean region.

Kate Quinn (2014) discusses the impact of Black Power in the Caribbean region more widely, however, her research does not address the development of the movement in SVG. This paper outlines an original history of Vincentian little magazines and draws attention to the affect that both the Black Power Movement and radical Marxist Black Politics had on the writers who contributed to these journals. At the same time, I emphasise the significance of youth voices to the political debates in the lead up to Vincentian independence so as to argue that there is a marked difference between the literature and movements of the 1970s as compared to the prior decade. Statistically, SVG had more young people of voting age living on the islands than any other Anglophone Caribbean territory at the corresponding moment in its independence movement. I reveal how a new generation of Caribbean men adopted a more pro-black narrative to articulate their desire for national independence during an era that saw Britain as a much less powerful entity.

Lorraine Thomas

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The Caribbean Left since the Collapse of the Grenada Revolution

Tennyson Joseph

Since the period of the collapse of the Grenada revolution, the Soviet Union and the concomitant rise of neo-liberal ideology, the notion of the crisis of the left has been accepted as a given “commonsense” truism, but one which is seldom unpacked and explained. While the dramatic fall of actually-existing socialist projects from the mid-1980s to 1990s, represented a genuine existential crisis of possibility for twentieth-century Leninist models, it is debatable whether a deeper analysis would confirm a total crisis of the left extending into the third decade of the twenty-first century.

In order to avoid the lazy, unscientific and ultimately politically-debilitating conclusion of an un-specified “crisis of the left”, this paper offers seeks to unpack the notion of a “crisis” and offers a framework against which the actual state of the Left in the Caribbean can be empirically assessed and discussed. The paper presents three general criteria - theory, practice, and global structural constraints - from which to source a crisis of the left. To avoid the “un-dialectical” error of assuming fixed contexts, the paper utilizes a historical comparative approach, assessing the possibilities for the left first from the mid-1980s-1990s and secondly from mid-2000s to the present. The paper concludes that the present possibilities for the left are far greater than any moment since the mid-1980s, but given the weight of historical reversals, the Caribbean left may be experiencing a crisis of “will”.

Tennyson S. D. Joseph PhD

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30th March

'Jamaica – Britain – One Struggle!': Transnational socialisms and black workers' newspapers between the Caribbean and Britain (Flame, 1975-1979)

Matthew Myers

This paper is the first to analyse the phenomenon of socialist newspapers simultaneously distributed amongst black workers in Britain and the Jamaica during the mid-1970s. Transnational connections between socialists in the two countries during the 1970s have been less studied than the relationship of early Caribbean socialists with their counterparts in Britain, the U.S., and elsewhere. Using previously unused archival materials, this paper analyses the little-known 'black workers' paper', Flame, published between 1975 and 1979, as part of wider culture of transnational socialist activism during the mid-1970s. Under the editorship of two Caribbean socialists, Kim Gordon and Barrymore Anthony Bogues (later a Professor at Brown University), editors (with C.L.R James) of the collection *Black nationalism and socialism* (1979), Flame started as an extra-parliamentary left publication distributed in Britain and Jamaica, and hosted regular articles from its reporters during crucial moments of Michael Manley's People's National Party government.

The headline of the April 1976 issue encapsulated one of the paper's abiding concerns: 'Jamaica – Britain – One Struggle!' The paper's editorial policy sought to connect struggles of black workers in Britain and the Caribbean to ongoing anti-colonial movements in Africa and elsewhere. However, as the newspaper grew, it broke with its British far-left links and became an 'independent revolutionary socialist' and movement-orientated organisation, centred on its publication, and aimed primarily to win black workers in Britain to its positions. Flame's trajectory reflected wider political trends in the black movement in Britain as activists sought greater autonomy within and outside existing political and trade union organisations (the mast-head of the paper changed from "International Socialist Paper of Black workers in Struggle" in its September-October 1975 inaugural issue to "Black workers paper for self-defence" by its last issue in October 1979). Flame attempted to compete with social democratic, progressive, and commercial competitor papers aimed at Caribbean workers like *West Indian World*.

Revisiting the working class internationalism of Flame offers new perspectives on contemporary discussions of black internationalism, decolonisation, and racial capitalism. It indicates that concrete links between socialists in Britain and Jamaica during the 1970s sustained an undervalued version of black working class internationalism. It also underscores how political radicalisation in the anglophone Caribbean was critical to launching transnational initiatives like Flame. This research also shows that transfers of ideas, dissemination of news and analysis, and translation of concepts across spatial and cultural boundaries were prerequisites for imagining a black internationalist and socialist alternative to global capitalist crisis and protracted post-colonial transition. This paper also analyses why such networks of activists were ultimately unsuccessful in fulfilling their original goals of revolutionary transformation. Political and socio-economic changes in both Jamaica and Britain, combined with debilitating organisational and political tensions, made the existing model of 'black workers' paper' unsustainable by the end of the 1970s. The editors and initiators of Flame would in turn leave Britain for academic careers in Jamaica and elsewhere.

Dr Matt Myers,

History Faculty, University of Oxford

Woman and Caribbean Socialism

Marsha Hinds

The Women of the Caribbean are owed a debt by the architects of the nationalist movements. Marxism has been a part of the political and intellectual ferment in the Caribbean which provided the framework for the creation of nationalist societies. While Marxism has provided a strong basis from which intellectuals such as Fanon and C.L.R James have constructed roadmaps for the creation of post-slavery Caribbean societies.

The problem is that Marxism never considered the ‘woman’ question at a metatheoretical level and when that reality met the treatment of women in the construction of plantation society, there were significant deleterious effects for the burgeoning Caribbean project.

This paper calls attention for the need for a new revisioning of the place of women in the Caribbean project. It uses womanist theory and the writings of foremothers in the Caribbean women’s struggle including Andiaeye to set first set out the historical and intellectual issues inherited by the women’s movement. Next the paper considers how impediments such as race and class combined with patriarchy to weaken women’s organising in the Caribbean. Finally, the paper asserts that women’s organizing and treating to the issues of embedded misogyny and patriarchy cannot be seem as women’s work alone.

The paper affirms that Marxism and socialism as philosophical spaces still hold lessons of import for the Caribbean but the erasure of women and their issues has been detrimental and needs address. Women have fought and dedicated their lives to drawing attention to these issues for years but from the periphery of the ‘real’ intellectual discussion – this paper aims to centre the issues.

Marsha Hinds

Operation Safe Space
Barbados

Under The Eagle's Eye: Cooperation As A Survival Mechanism Among Leftist Cuba, Grenada And Nicaragua, 1979-1990

Anne'el Ethel Bain

In the year 1959, a leftist state was established in Cuba and in 1979, left leaning governments assumed power in Grenada and Nicaragua likewise. By means of revolutionary uprising, these three states increased the profile of the Caribbean Basin as a theatre of the wider Cold War. The western and unofficial hegemon of the region (the US) viewed these left-leaning regimes as threats to US national security interests and extensions of a communist foothold which required containment.¹ Thus, while the USSR was positioned as the overarching villain in the US democracy crusade, these three states in the late 70s and 80s were treated as Soviet satellites involved in "terrorist" actions in the region.

Much has been written about the Cold War but there are limited publications regarding the cooperation among the selected leftist states. This paper will highlight the agency of Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua as a supportive network between 1979-1990. Brian Meeks explored the three revolutions and the theoretical underpinnings regarding them² and John Walton Cotman examined the relationship between Cuba and Grenada.³ This paper will present a critical evaluation of the supportive exchanges among the three states in response to US hostility.

During the 1979-1983 period, Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua engaged in a host of economic, political, military and socio-cultural exchanges of support. Cuba and Nicaragua, continued in this mode subsequent to the collapse of the Grenadian revolution (1983). The proposed paper aims to provide a rationale for the intense and mutual supportive networking during this period among the three leftist states. Chief among other motivators for the supportive exchanges was state survival.

The major means by which Washington sought to dismantle the governments of Fidel Castro, Maurice Bishop and Daniel Ortega were economic sanctions, propaganda, support for dissidents and their paramilitary ventures, diplomatic pressure, isolation and direct military intervention. The governments in Havana, St. George's and Managua cooperated to survive the antagonisms of Washington.

The proposed paper will discuss the antagonistic attitude and actions of the US toward the three leftist territories, explore the nature of the exchanges which occurred and evaluate the effects and efficacy of these exchanges as survival mechanisms. It is important to note that Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua were agent states with strong political wills and cooperated in both defensive and offensive capacities to maximize revolutionary longevity. Therefore, the paper will argue that leftist Cuba, Grenada and Nicaragua primarily engaged in supportive exchanges to secure the survival of their respective revolutions, which were constantly under the threat of US destabilization.

In addition to articles and books, the proposed paper will rely primarily on declassified CIA documents, archival documents (Archivo MINREX, Cuba), newspaper articles of the Grenadian National Museum and Archives, the National Library of Cuba and the Sterling Memorial Library, YALE. The approach will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature to offer a comprehensive analysis of cooperation among the three states as a survival mechanism.

Anne'el Ethel Bain

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