

Silences on the suppression of workers self-emancipation: historical problems with CLR James's interpretation of V.I. Lenin



Matthew Quest, writing for *Insurgent Notes*, details CLR James' treatment of Lenin across decades of James' work. While CLR James broke with Trotskyism and Trotsky as well as the Leninist party form, he never properly broke with Lenin or his works.

CLR James (1901–1989), native of Trinidad, was perhaps the most libertarian revolutionary socialist intellectual of both the Pan African and international labor movements. Best known as the author of the classic history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, he also became famous for mentoring anti-colonial intellectuals and post-colonial statesmen such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Trinidad's Eric Williams. Far less understood was James's creative advocacy of direct democracy and workers self-management as found in his analysis of the Age of the CIO, Classical Athens, and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Yet undermining our understanding of the contours and absence of popular self-management as a framework for James's visions of the African World and Third World is the lack of a proper assessment of how he understood V.I. Lenin and the Russian Revolution. This selection from a forthcoming larger work will attempt to examine this dilemma by uncovering silences and dilemmas for how James understood Lenin.

CLR James believed one of his major intellectual legacies was the clarification of the wisdom of V.I. Lenin. However, James's readings fail in making Lenin's role in history and politics transparent. James's Leninism attempts to reconcile the validity of workers self-management and the aspirations of a political party to seize state power. This is in conflict with James's own genuine and original political legacy: clarifying the direct democratic gathering forces which will create the new society.¹
James's Lenin: Never Deceitful or Dictatorial?

James's Lenin appears to be against stifling the revolutionary self-organization of ordinary people and against a bureaucratic mentality. Lenin, insists James, was never deceitful nor dictatorial. James was never Lenin's public or historical critic. For James, Lenin was an enemy of and his policies do not anticipate Stalinism. Lenin always placed workers' self-activity or the popular will, which James reminded Lenin always observed very closely, above his party. James admired Lenin's ability to discard outmoded concepts and break through rhetoric to get at problems of maintaining what James believed was a revolutionary regime in state power.² These are propositions associated with an uncritical reception of James's Leninism.

We will dispute how much clarity James brings to understanding Lenin and the terms for Lenin's close observation of labor's self-emancipation. For our purposes, we might divide how James viewed Lenin into four broad frameworks: Lenin's anti-imperialism and vision of self-determination for colonies, Lenin's purported "shift" from the centrality of the vanguard party to embracing the Soviets, Lenin's stance during the "trade union debate," and Lenin's last prescriptions for a peripheral society under state capitalism as opposed to socialism. We must be alert to how James's Lenin first saw Russia politically as a relatively advanced capitalist country suited for modern politics, and only later sees Russia as emblematic of an underdeveloped peripheral peasant country. While James did not believe in the doctrine of "socialism in one country," which has a retreating internationalism, James and Lenin often view the prospects of direct democracy and popular self-management as they relate to the liberation of one nation at a time. James's meditations on Lenin's last writings on peasants, cooperatives and literacy campaigns were not the basis of rigorous criticism of postcolonial states in the Third World that they first appeared. Finally, we will uncover some silences in James's public career and contours of what he knew about the Russian leader.

"Turn Imperialist War Into Civil War"

First, James admired Lenin's position during World War I as a member of the Zimmerwald Left.³ While leading this coalition of revolutionary socialist thinkers, Lenin denounced the emergence of conservative social democratic thinkers, who liquidated their "anti-war" stance when their own nation states declared war. Many of Lenin's adversaries offered support to their own ruling classes, even if under the premise of parliamentary or electoral criticism as a loyal opposition. Lenin's viewpoint was captured best with his slogan, "Turn imperialist war into civil war."⁴ To the extent James was inspired by this aspect of Lenin's anti-colonialism and analysis of empire it is a consistent radical influence for him.

Lenin, as an insurgent activist, was for replacing bourgeois patriotism and national unity, even in times of war, with political efforts toward the defeat of classes above society in one's own nation. He insisted on a revolutionary socialist perspective, which is not mere aesthetic meditation and does not assume historical defeat. Lenin's "anti-war" policy was to support social revolution against empire, not merely abroad, but within his own nation-state. James's Lenin had anti-imperialist perspectives that importantly are not merely diagnostic analysis of dependency of peripheral nations in the capitalist world system as they have been invented subsequently by many scholars. Lenin, James insisted, did not make a fetish of the unequal exchange of commodities under mercantilism, or in world trade between imperial and peripheral nations, or see one imperialist or bloc of nation-states as more democratic than the other. While Lenin's *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* had some of these themes and could be read as anticipating others, the anti-colonial Lenin did not agitate on the basis that revolution was the more efficient management of capitalism. He neither, while it was certainly an aspect of colonial oppression, centered that imperialists did not allow middle classes from certain countries equal opportunity to enter the rules of hierarchy.

In peripheral nation-states in the world system, under certain conditions, the nationalist middle classes were imagined by Lenin and James as tactical allies, if not to be trusted fully in anti-colonial revolt against military, economic, and cultural domination by a foreign power. James's Lenin wields an outlook of "critical support" of nationalist middle-class politicians, rarely in Russia, but, before the defeat of imperial relations, for the rest of the world. This alliance can partially foster democratic struggles from below among toilers—if necessary, radicals can carry out this tactic at the middle-classes' expense. James's Lenin does not mean for revolutionary socialists to subordinate themselves politically to the nationalist middle classes.⁵

A Libertarian Lenin?: James Invents A Lenin that Rejected Vanguard

Second, James invented a Lenin who repudiated his earlier vanguardism, by leaving behind *What Is To Be Done?* (1903) and writing *State and Revolution* (1917). James imagined Lenin as someone who adjusted his perspectives and strategies to the self-activity of ordinary people whom he observed very closely. Thus, James's Lenin, before attaining state power, is constructed, as shifting his approach from emphasizing the building of a vanguard party toward "All Power to the Soviets." But Lenin's flexibility in his observations of working class self-activity could be misunderstood.

James came to view Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1903), a call for the building of a party of a professional cadre who will tutor the working masses toward socialism, as obsolete in nations distinguished by modern industrial workers. James feels his viewpoint is confirmed because he views Lenin as breaking with this conception, as evidenced by not merely Lenin's *State and Revolution* but also the *April Theses*, *The Dual Power*, and *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*.⁶ In these essays, James's Lenin appeared to be a defender of proletarian democracy which he sometimes called "primitive democracy." Lenin advocated a government of workers councils, where "every cook can govern" or be an administrator in every department of society "in rotation" so long as they are "literate." James's Lenin was an advocate of "instant recall" of unaccountable delegates to constituent or representative assemblies by working people. Inspired by Marx's writings on the Paris Commune, Lenin seemed to advocate the abolition of the state, specifically the professional army and police, and promoted their replacement by popular militias or the armed people. Yet, even in these writings, Lenin desired a government which "cannot properly be called a state" which he insists is "not a utopian vision" and is in fact a Jacobin style regime. A close reading of Lenin, even in his writings with a libertarian socialist tone, reveal a desire to "train" workers to be administrators, not to allow them to place forward programs and perspectives of their own.

Still James's Lenin argued that the idea that it is necessary to direct the state by officials from above is basically false and undemocratic. The introduction of an appointed officialdom should not be tolerated. Rather, government must be based only on those popular councils, committees, and assemblies created by the local people themselves.⁷ Lenin did not want Russia organized around parliamentary democracy. Rather, a republic with Soviets "from top to bottom."⁸ This was a bit confusing because a republic is explicitly a government of minority rule led by philosophers who believe the masses do not have the wisdom to directly govern. Lenin, after the Soviets appeared and before seizing state power, argued labor did have the wisdom to directly govern and believed a revolutionary state cannot forbid demonstrations or any expression of mass power on the part of toilers, or any socialist group or radical party. However, Lenin's vision in state power is of Soviets, if still present, as an appendage.⁹

Lenin saw clearly that the best road to state power was a united front, not opposition to radical democratic forces he in fact disagreed with. Lenin as agitator does not craft a coalition which prioritizes progressive or reformist allies in state power but accentuated all ideas which sought to tear it down and showed a desire for its replacement by direct democracy. He desired to "stir up" adherents to direct democracy and workers' self-management, "float along the wave" set up by their direct actions, and be carried by its "crest" to state power through a dual power where the self-governing institutions created by everyday people themselves would stand side by side with the existing order's institutions and, by their example, condemn them to illegitimacy.¹⁰ Lenin saw direct democratic ideas as methods of agitation but not as principles to which he was bound permanently.¹¹

A Rare Admission and Never In Public: James Knew Lenin Suppressed The Soviets

James, in his invention of his "libertarian Lenin," affirmed every cook "an administrator" (though elsewhere he underlined "every cook can govern," which though James did not say "ought or must," perhaps has more radical implications). He saw Lenin as a great popularizer of soviet democracy. Yet he recognized that on one level Lenin usurped the power of the soviets with his party in theory and

practice, even as James conceived of Lenin as coming to reject the vanguard party and thus often called into question this premise on his own authority. In 1947–1948, when James was working out a new conception of revolutionary political theory, a conception that was not primarily a critical assessment of Lenin in history, he knew that Lenin's initial vision after seizing state power did not make his state socialist. James, as he theorized, subtly rebuked Lenin for an imprecise phrase “workers' control of production.” For CLR James in 1947–1948, workers' self-management, in both politics and economics, must precede the seizure and smashing of state power and was the socialist society itself, “it cannot come after.”¹² James embellished Lenin with a spirit of workers self-emancipation by saying what he meant was the “uncoiling” of labor's “creativity imbedded” in the sense of humans by alienating the technological processes of economic production itself. This pointed to a direct democratic intention that simply does not pan out.

Lenin, not merely Trotsky whom James critiqued for such a view, saw nationalization of property as a revolutionary weapon or “gain” of a workers' state. It was not meant to be an economic formula for general welfare. Rather, first it was used against owners of businesses who did not want to recognize the workers' councils, whose self-organization independent of the Bolsheviks strived to take over their workplaces in the Russian Revolution. It was subsequently used to liquidate the power of the workers councils who would not be loyal to the Bolshevik state.

Third, James rarely admitted, and never for public discussion, Lenin's suppression of popular councils of toilers with direct self-managing ambitions. At the same time, James occasionally and privately affirmed Lenin's role in “the trade union debate” of 1920,¹³ as pragmatic and insightful where Lenin makes a mockery of those who advocate an extreme democracy or a syndicalist vision of workers self-management.¹⁴ James explained in a private study group: “it seems the Bolsheviks suppressed workers councils because to have supported [them] would have blown everything sky high.”¹⁵ In 1967, James viewed Lenin as saying a central committee cannot compel workers who take over their workplaces to do anything without jeopardizing their hold on state power. James compliments Lenin for using proletarian courts to get workers to police themselves for not working efficiently under the Bolshevik State, under which there were wage freezes, suppression of radical literature and strike action was criminalized.¹⁶

Practical People Know Self-Governing Workers Are Fairytales

The Lenin of 1918–1922 was no longer the Lenin of 1917. He no longer spoke of direct democracy or workers' self-management of the economy by rotation of the literate worker. Lenin no longer has any use for the syndicalist vision he himself had placed forward.¹⁷ Lenin began to argue “does every worker know how to rule the country? Practical people know that these are fairy tales.” While admitting people of working class backgrounds to administrative departments, Lenin saw a severe shortage of people from the trade unions qualified to be managers. By this emphasis, he meant managers of a capitalist economy. Feeling harassed by the persistent discussion of trade union management of the national economy, Lenin now said it was “syndicalist twaddle” and an “absurdity.” This is Lenin's reaction to the clause in his party platform that he wrote himself.¹⁸ Scholars of James's life and work have yet to record either debate, confusion, or outrage by those sympathetic with James's full archive for perhaps suggesting that direct democracy or workers self-management were not possible at certain historical moments or in certain sectors of the world.

James's Lenin argued to follow through on allowing the trade unions to manage the national economy would negate the party by an overwhelming majority of people who do not share the party's politics. Lenin now believes the trade unions should function as part of “an inspection” of the state but not manage the economy. Lenin argues if the trade unions alone nominated the people to both manage the economy and govern, it may sound very democratic, but this would destroy the dictatorship of the proletariat by which he meant the Bolshevik hold on state power.¹⁹

James's Lenin believed the trade unions should be non-political, even as he wished them to defend workers interests against excessive bureaucracy. Still they must be guided by discipline and unity

under the state. Factories must be run by trained businessmen. Trade unions (like workers) should never interfere in the administration of the enterprise and to do so was recognized as injurious and outlawed.²⁰

Both Lenin and Stalin's Russia Maintained Capitalist Laws of Value Production

Lenin in 1921 reintroduces the wage scale and collective bargaining. Trade unions were charged with regulating wages. Strikes were legally forbidden. These policies cannot be attributed to Stalin alone as James seemed to do at times. These policies reveal that James's analysis of how the law of value functioned under Stalinism elides the distinction that this is how Lenin desired to manage Russia as well.²¹ Lenin insisted "disputes between the Soviet Administrators" and the workers must not be seen from a "class" point of view but in accordance with the general interests of the nation. Remarkably, Lenin's policies on labor-management relations mirror or are worse than those of the welfare state and trade union bureaucracy that CLR James and Martin Glaberman argued against during the Age of the CIO.

When James's Lenin shifted from advocating War Communism to the New Economic Policy for Russia, he was perceived as sensitive to workers' and peasants' concerns, and appeared self-critical of his own mistaken perspectives on government policies above society. Yet James asserted Lenin was a consistent advocate of state capitalism both early and later in his career. James's later Lenin repeatedly underscored "there can be no socialism in Russia." This is the context of James's veneration of Lenin's last writings which advocate literacy campaigns, peasant co-operatives, and a workers and peasant inspection of the state. James's Lenin is saying in fact every cook cannot govern where he now assessed Russia as a fatally limited underdeveloped nation, even as James viewed Lenin as having a renewed sensitivity toward the peasantry. He never discussed in public how Lenin actually treated the peasantry other than to say Lenin wrote of and was sympathetic to the tyranny of landlord-sharecropper relations.²²

Fantastic: Lenin and the Problem with Workers Associations for the Third World

James projected this invention of Lenin as a model for democratizing Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana in the essay "Lenin and the Problem." It has been overlooked how much Nkrumah's later years in state power resemble CLR James's Leninist prescriptions. This was despite James's rupturing with him. Further, James saw Julius Nyerere's vision of Ujamaa Socialism for Tanzania favorably, for what he perceived as Nyerere's similar approach to Lenin.²³

] James's account, in just that context, has some severe blemishes. James's "Lenin and the Problem" affirmed Lenin's discarding of direct democracy, insisting it is "fantastic" (by which Lenin and now James meant absurd) to conceive of building socialism "by means of all types of workers' associations," rather than finding more "simple," "intelligible" and "easy ways" for the peasantry to participate under state power. James never explained persuasively why indirect "self-reliance" was proper, instead of self-directed liberating activity for toilers of peripheral nations, other than to fall back on their material and cultural underdevelopment. Yet James's Lenin maintained that those who cannot directly govern are in fact "the real masses of the population."²⁴

James conceived that it was possible for Lenin to fight bureaucracy from a position of state power where workers and peasants, importantly selected for their political loyalty to the Bolsheviks, will function as a type of ombudsman with no direct policymaking power. Rather, this inspection will check the one-party state's vanity and corruption by elevating its power to below the party's central committee. The peasant cooperatives are imagined as a transitional model under the New Economic Policy, a mixed economic plan, where people viewed as illiterate, by Lenin, were to be given "incentives" (small farmers will be allowed to produce under capitalist relations) so long as they show qualitatively their growing embrace of "socialism" as monitored by the Bolshevik state. The trade unions, not politically independent of this regime, will be consulted on economic production alone. Workers will not have any power directly over governance. To allow them to act independently to

defend themselves in their unions would be to allow them to challenge the state and act in a supposed privileged fashion toward the peasantry. By this logic independent labor was suppressed in both Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and Julius Nyerere's Tanzania.²⁵

How Early Did James Know That Lenin Betrayed All His Professed Principles?

How did toilers miraculously become so dumb in Lenin's Russia where a social revolution against the Czar through mass popular activity had just been made? This is also important comparatively for understanding how James evaluated anti-colonial revolutions at the post-colonial moment. We can begin to understand James's silences about Lenin's politics by centering the critique of Lenin in Boris Souvarine's *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, that James translated from French very early in his political career.

Boris Souvarine explained how Lenin abandoned, one by one, all of his October Theses: Soviet democracy; peasant control of land; abolition of professional police, army, and bureaucracy; equality of wages; the right of self-determination of oppressed nationalities. Souvarine argued that Lenin publicly admitted many economic planning mistakes. However, he never admitted the abandonment of soviet or direct democracy was a mistake or dictatorial measures against his opponents whether workers or peasants, revolutionaries or socialists were mistaken. All rival radical ideas and parties were outlawed (Left Social-Revolutionaries, Anarchists, independent trade unionists, Tolstoyans). While a legal opposition was eventually allowed led by Martov of the Mensheviks, exclusive power was held by Lenin's Bolsheviks. Lenin believed neither in liberty, equality, nor workers' democracy if he found them contrary to "the theory of labor" or "the dictatorship of the proletariat," by which he meant the one-party state. Congresses of Soviets developed into meetings of paid officials compelled to take instructions from above, yet it was said by Lenin to be the result of apathy and lack of culture.²⁶ It is remarkable that CLR James translated a book published in 1939 that underscored crucial political and historical matters that he was muted about for the rest of his career.

James's Contours On the Soviets: Were the Soviets Self-Managing Workers Councils or Mere Evidence of Workers Self-Activity?

Perhaps Oskar Anweiler's *The Soviets* is the best introductory survey of how the Russian workers, peasants, and soldiers councils functioned from 1905–1921. Were Soviets suited for government administration or were they a permanent riot? Were they a mere barometer of the masses' changing moods or were they forms of freedom with a clear program of popular self-management? Anweiler suggested while they could be seen as all these things, we must understand that the Soviets were battlegrounds of various political tendencies. They were a market place of revolutionary ideas, a meeting pot of intellectuals and toilers, and they often in their factory council form began to govern and carry out politics at the point of production. The Soviets were as powerful and directly democratic as the politics which were advocated and administered by them. But they were also undermined in various ways by Lenin's Bolshevik state including the maintenance of multiple layers of indirect workers' representation to compete with and undermine them.²⁷ Thus, we need to be aware of the Lenin who oriented to the Soviets and critically inquire why in order to understand the contours of James's interpretation. They were perceived as tools of insurrection to secure state power but also means of containing workers' autonomy as Lenin's tactics shifted.

James tended to place Lenin and the Soviets in conversation in a peculiar fashion. James's Lenin believed if the Bolsheviks want to carry any program out at all they have to go toward or enter the Soviets. On the one hand, they were organs of popular self-management that no elites or vanguards invented or taught to workers—they appeared to have self-sufficiency as self-governing institutions. Soviets, an enhancement of the political general strike including armed extension of struggle, "tell us things which no experts on the powerlessness of permanently alienated populations dare even to think." James emphasized they do not "wait on any [political] party." From another angle, Soviets are the masses' self-activity which should be engaged by revolutionists who did not create them or

previously thought them unimportant—this can reduce their stature to inconsistent protest activity. James's Lenin could proclaim that the self-organization of the working class carried out a higher type of social organization but this did not emerge from moral wishes but from the crisis of material relations which his party had to tactically adapt. Yet James knows Lenin said some “savage” things about the Soviets.²⁸

James, in a January 2, 1951, letter to William Gorman, acknowledged Gorman uttered a great truth in their private correspondence when he concluded the revolution and counter-revolution were tied together in the Bolshevik leadership in Russia from 1918 to 1925. This was substantially Lenin's regime's responsibility, not Stalin's, and it would appear Gorman's sympathy for the Bolsheviks is overstated. Nevertheless, James continued to believe Lenin embodied the highest stage radical political thought had reached and it was the task of contemporary revolutionaries to clarify and extend the historical lessons of that tragedy.²⁹ Yet, for James, the tragedy was not Lenin's way of seeing but that the toilers, both proletariat and peasantry, could not do what was required. Apparently their creativity and self-governing potential had its limits and they could not directly re-organize society because Russia was not modern enough and rejected working on other than capitalist terms.³⁰

Anarchism and Syndicalism: Bourgeois Movements to Be Vanquished?

Lenin saw no self-emancipating workers because those who are inspired by a different anti-capitalist or more libertarian socialist perspective he suppresses. Where Mensheviks, SRs, or Left SRs gained a majority in the Soviets, he would either disband them or expel the offending forces and deliver the Soviets to Communist Party members or functionaries who then steered the Soviets to conformity with government policy. This amounted to a coup by the Bolsheviks against the system of sovereign popular committees their party had advocated.³¹ Lenin, months later after suggesting every cook could govern and advocating abolition of the professional coercive apparatus of the state, proclaimed anarchism and syndicalism are “bourgeois” movements to be “vanquished.” From April 11–18, 1918, Lenin's Bolshevik State broke the anarchist movement by a military “pogrom.” He closed its newspapers, smashed its offices, arrested and assassinated its prominent members. Over forty anarchists were killed or wounded. 500 were taken prisoner.³²

In 1918, Lenin said the party of the Left Social-Revolutionists was the only party which expresses the will of the peasants. He acknowledged this so long as they remained in a loyal opposition to his policies. This changed with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk where the Left SRs attempted to assassinate the German ambassador in revolt against Lenin's retreat on self-determination for oppressed nationalities. Lenin's state now said the Left SRs were accomplices of the White Guards, landlords and capitalists and attempted to suppress them. The Left-SRs responded by going underground, as they did through much of their existence against the Czar, and conducted armed struggle against the Bolshevik state.³³ Notably the SRs who did not go underground retreated to the Volga, a stronghold of theirs for years. They advocated the restoration of the Constituent Assembly that the Bolsheviks had abolished, as “a soviet” of a united and independent Russia, projecting a type of provisional government against the Bolsheviks. Their political program rejected workplace committees and instead advocated municipal assemblies, the restoration of private property and suspension of socialist experiments declaring it was impossible to abolish capitalist forms of industry at the present time—a stance Lenin would soon embrace.

The anarchist Nestor Makhno was a major leader of the national liberation movement in the Ukraine. A few days before surrendering the Ukraine to Germany, where the Bolsheviks made a treaty with the imperialists, Lenin and Trotsky had the leadership cadre of Makhno's army shot. They also sabotaged Makhno's army's supply line, just as Stalin's Russia did the Aragon Front in the Spanish Civil War.³⁴

Lenin on Soviet Power: A Nature of Jellyfish?

On April 23, 1918, Lenin addressed the Moscow Soviet, and said “the Soviet Power” had a nature of “jellyfish not of iron” and that, in many instances, was not efficient or determined against the counter-revolution. Lenin saw the workers and peasants and every radical idea or party he didn't control in the

Soviets, which of course are popular councils which desired a more direct democracy, as “disorganized and petty-bourgeois forces.” Lenin began a wave of terror against the independent power of the workers' councils. Two weeks after, Lenin argued for the most part the Civil War with pro-imperialist counter-revolutionists had come to an end. Thus one cannot confuse his wave of terror against forces to his Left with them having been collaborators in the Civil War with pro-imperialist forces.³⁵

By June of 1918, the withdrawal of political support by the majority of the social groups that had supported the Bolsheviks in October—workers, soldiers, and peasants—was plunging the regime into crisis. The problems, including rising unemployment, inflation, famine, popular unrest (both peaceful and insurgent); and the possibility that the opposition parties might replace the Bolshevik-Left SR coalition in winning majorities in the Soviets compelled Lenin to wonder whether his government would survive until the next day.³⁶ On June 28th, the Council of People's Commissars passed a nationalization decree. Implemented gradually until completion at the beginning of the next year, under the premise of rooting out disorganization of production and supply, the Bolshevik state outlawed the remaining Soviets they did not control in mining, metals, textiles, steam driven mills, utilities, railways, and other sectors.³⁷

On August 30, 1918, Fanny Kaplan, a former anarchist turned SR, tried to assassinate Lenin, firing several bullets into him at point blank range outside a Moscow factory. His health never recovered. An official “Red Terror” was proclaimed in response where all legal limits on the Cheka, the state secret police, were removed and roundups of opponents followed, with unknown thousands being executed or placed in concentration camps for real and suspected offenses. Victor Serge, a well known “socialist humanist” and ex-Communist, was convinced that the formation of the Cheka chapters in different parts of Russia and the inquisition they carried out, instead of popular tribunals, was “the gravest error” of 1918.³⁸

On Sept 20th of 1918, Lenin launched a campaign against workers and entire factories who viewed the Bolshevik State as they did the capitalist employer and thus desired to give their bosses as little work as possible.³⁹ Jonathan Aves has called this the volyna (go slow) movement.⁴⁰ James analyzed such a stance in the United States as labor striving to directly govern but made no critique of Lenin for campaigning against workers local grievances and strategy of work to rule.

By 1919 there were major strikes in Petrograd and Moscow. Workers demanded that the peasants be allowed to sell grain on the free market, the removal of military coercion blocking food being brought to the cities, and restoration of civil liberties to all anti-capitalist forces. Somehow, James commended Lenin for observing workers' self-activity closely and supposedly correcting mistakes but never highlighted toilers' actual thoughts and actions which take the revolutionary lead in Russia after Lenin achieved state power. Radical socialist and direct democratic workers and soldiers were being accused by Lenin of being accomplices of imperialism. James was not even sympathetic to the Workers Opposition, led by Alexandra Kollontai and A.G. Shliapnikov, which was a disciplined minority faction within the Bolsheviks that called for allowance of more direct democracy and workers control. Instead, James affirms Lenin for offering financial bonuses to workers to build socialism on capitalist terms.⁴¹

“Enemies of the People”: Lenin's Attack on Self-Governing Farmers

Often lost in “kulak” discourse, Lenin attacked the peasantry for not producing grain and food under conditions of scarcity of commodities, inflation, and coercion to those who wished to sell their produce on the market. The system of producing grain had broken down partially because of the loss of the Ukraine and partially because trade was abolished between town and country. Farmers were called “enemies of the people” by Lenin and attacked by “committees of poor peasants” that included state organized hoodlums from the cities. Lenin said: “that we brought civil war to the village is something that we hold up as a merit.” James felt Lenin was aware and sensitive to the tyranny of landlords against sharecroppers in Russia's rural outposts. However, whole villages that did not produce enough grain were subject to mass whippings (a method employed previously by the Czars but also

over one hundred years before by Toussaint L'Ouverture's post-colonial state in the Haitian Revolution when ex-slaves rebelled against their own economic arrangements). In the summer of 1920, prominent toilers in the co-operative movement became the focus of the most intense persecution. They were arrested, thrown into prisons on trumped up charges of economic sabotage and collaboration with capitalism.⁴² All of these are important historical preludes to understanding Lenin's last writings on peasants and cooperatives but also how he to evaluate his own state capitalist initiatives.

Lenin hoped to terrorize the peasants into full state regimentation before shifting to the more moderate New Economic Policy (NEP). NEP, which gave “incentives” but in fact merely allowed peasants finally to produce under market relations, divided peasant resistance movements, like A.S. Antonov's Green Movement in the Tambov region, and in effect saved Lenin's regime from itself.⁴³ James shared with Lenin uncritical contempt for most Mensheviks, in spite of the fact that the latter initially advised the more moderate path of state capitalism that Lenin finally chose.⁴⁴ James also felt, as did Lenin, that, within the peasantry, not just their landlords, existed an inherent and dangerous capitalist impulse. James's Lenin was critical of the romantic impulse of past Russian radicals who saw an inherent collectivist impulse in rural life. We must be aware that human nature is prone to both competitiveness and possessive individualism but also mutual aid and a self-directed creativity in the quality of their autonomously managed work. That these dueling spirits have not been resolved for all time (and likely will never be) need not be an obstacle to a self-managing cooperative society.

Something “Tragic” To Witness But “Foolish” To Defend: James Sides with the Bolshevik State Against the Kronstadt Uprising of 1921

For CLR James, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 represented a breakthrough toward a type of third revolution against both the one party state and the welfare state. But James, in his treatment of the Kronstadt Uprising of 1921, the sailors who supported revolution against V.I. Lenin's Bolshevik regime after a long trail of abuses of Russian workers—especially broad layers of labor in Petrograd and those identified with anarchist and libertarian socialist activism — does not support the self-mobilization of working people as a historian or political theorist. The Kronstadt rebellion, like the events in Hungary thirty five years later, lasted for a very short time, and was a flash of light which illuminated the conflicting tendencies within actual existing socialism. James often elevates the political statements of statesmen, from V.I. Lenin to Julius Nyerere, all out of proportion to their real worth given their actual political practice. Often he presents these as remarkable—the finest—political statements overtaking and overturning anything Rousseau, Aristotle, Plato, or Locke could ever comprehend. James's readers and audiences tend to fall for this hyperbole even as they also accept that mass movements for liberation often seize historical moments but very often cannot find adequate leadership to plan and theorize and create opportunities. While taking in strains of racial and anti-colonial vindication it is often missed that all of these figures are advocates of various forms of a republic—a regime led by a minority professional ruling elite—not a popular government where working people place forward perspectives of their own and carry them out.

James often inquired about the spontaneous and instinctive qualities of working people and repeatedly extended the implications of their elemental drive toward self-government. But never has James placed before his audiences direct democratic political statements by self-emancipating workers. Kronstadt was his opportunity. The Sailors had a political statement that was so vivid it put fear in the heart of Lenin's regime—it actually advocated “a Third Revolution.” Let us examine some of their demands. We must remember, like the Hungarian workers of 1956, they were not making mere calls for reform. For, as part of the military, they were the law in practice and on their own authority threatened to be the armed backing of the dual power of independent labor retaking of the factory councils in Russia.

The Kronstadt Sailors called for immediate new elections to the Soviets (the “popular” councils) which they boldly stated under a police state no longer expressed the wishes of workers and peasants. While they were not the first to proclaim it, they were in the best position for self-defense while saying it. The sailors called for all sectors of the military to associate with this and other resolutions. They called for the secret ballot and insisted the vote should be after a period of free political propaganda of all Left parties, all of whom, besides the Bolsheviks, were suppressed. Freedom of the press and speech was explicitly called for anarchists—which most accounts of the Russian Revolution favoring the Bolsheviks, whether Trotsky or Stalin, have been written out of these historical events.

A Congress of “non-party workers and soldiers” was called for at Kronstadt consistent with a general call for freedom of assembly. The Sailors called for a stop to the Bolshevik monopoly of the press and finances to spread political ideas. They rejected the idea that all military guard detachments could receive political education from only one source and called for a proliferation of independent cultural associations and a taking into account of what rank and file workers were actually thinking. A Commission was called for to look into those detained in “concentration camps” as distinct from a demand that all political prisoners from Left Parties were to be released immediately.

The Sailors exposed the premise of the Russian Revolution, under Lenin's regime, as a consolidation of the revolt against value production itself sponsored by the state—as James's *State Capitalism & World Revolution* viewed it—and called for an equality of wages, save for those workers who toiled in unsanitary or dangerous conditions. Ida Mett, a scholar of Kronstadt, reminded us that this also placed out in the open the lie by Trotsky that the Sailors wanted privileges while the masses went hungry—a stock false premise that would be used against independent labor by Third World regimes who admired the Bolshevik state time and again. The Sailors underlined that the peasants' self-government over their own land was to be restored, with sovereignty over their own soil and cattle, as well as small handicraft artisans, provided they didn't employ wage labor. The Sailors rejected the idea that the state could fight bureaucracy and the lie that they wished toilers to inspect the ethics of the state—mobile workers' control groups would be maintained autonomously to police the state.⁴⁵ Oskar Anweiler reminds us that the Kronstadt Sailors did not criticize Lenin and blamed primarily Trotsky and Zinoviev for the bloody conflict. But they turned the concept “All Power to the People” against the Bolshevik State and rejected a counter-revolution of both left and right. Anweiler, while a critic of the Bolsheviks, sees both an irrational faith and a vitality in the council concept as embodied in the Sailors' declaration.⁴⁶ Paul Avrich, perhaps the most definitive scholar of the Kronstadt Sailors, argued that Lenin, in contrast to the repeated claims by CLR James of Lenin's affinity for workers' self-activity, repeatedly distrusted the spontaneous actions of independent labor. Lenin feared that “organs of local democracy” could end up advocating and sustaining any type of politics. While that was true, Avrich explains fairly the Sailors did not defend a historical retreat to more conservative politics as they were falsely accused by the state. In fact, the Sailors were not advocates of “equal rights and liberties for all” but only for the numerous political tendencies among the Left. Their sense of freedom was not for landlords, capitalists and the middle classes—only for workers and peasants. They were for direct democracy and had no use for representative government—something James embraced in the Hungarian workers but not for the Kronstadt Sailors.⁴⁷

All James could see in Kronstadt was a tragic dilemma for a revolutionary statesman. He thought Lenin was bound to crush this rebellion. Then the Bolsheviks could admit some past mistakes, institute economic reforms which would let the state retreat into a more free capitalist market, and continue to suppress direct democratic expressions of labor. This became James's model for the conflict between Toussaint and Moise in the Haitian Revolution and his justification for the suppression of independent labor among the ex-slaves at the post-colonial, post-abolition moment. This degrading of the direct democratic potential is what is really behind James's Leninist prescriptions and advice for underdeveloped formerly colonized countries.⁴⁸

James could be subtle and concerned with ethical dilemmas in his public career. Yet, particularly in his writing of *World Revolution, 1917–1936* and *The Black Jacobins*, it may take several readings to understand better what is at stake. However, if one reads the marginalia in his personal copy of R.V. Daniels's *The Conscience of the Revolution*, one of the first scholarly studies of the Russian Revolution in the second half of the twentieth century to highlight the conflict between the Bolshevik state and workers' self-management, it is clear that James was hostile to any notion that Lenin's state should not be defended against accusations of dictatorship—even when it suppressed self-managing workers.

Daniels explained that when Lenin and the Bolsheviks tried to retreat from the extremes of War Communism, the economic plan which desired to abolish the market by military means, “the party leadership found doctrinaire criticism from the Ultra-Left intolerable.” James wrote in the margins of his book “fool!” expressing impulsively that Daniels, to his mind, did not understand the art of social revolution.⁴⁹ But we can watch further as James reads Daniels.

Undoubtedly the Kronstadt revolt could have been forestalled by timely reforms, but such a course would have been too embarrassing and might well have been a serious blow to the authority of the government. Petrograd was in the throes of a wildcat strike wave, upon which Menshevik and SR undergrounders were allegedly trying to capitalize, and the Soviet authorities had all they could do to keep the situation in hand there. For the Communist leaders it was more natural at the time of crisis to tighten up. Given the state of popular discontent, an admission by the government that the Kronstaders had a case that could be discussed might have brought the Soviet regime crashing down everywhere. It was essential above all for the Communist Party to suppress the idea of Kronstadt as a movement which defended the principles of the October Revolution against the Communists—the idea of the 'third revolution.'⁵⁰

James writes in the margins “quite thus always.” He seems to confirm what we find in his commentary on Kronstadt in his *The Black Jacobins* many years before—there is agreement with Daniels that the Kronstadt Sailors were “ultra left”—a pejorative term—and they would have had no basis for projecting their proposals if Lenin had pushed reforms through sooner. Within the Bolshevik Party, it was permissible for Lenin and the leadership to acknowledge “mistakes” but these were mistakes of administration not of intention. One could not permit any attacks on the authority of the Bolshevik government—for it embodied the revolution, not the workers' actual thoughts and action after state power was seized. The Kronstadt rebels represented not a mutiny of Sailors alone. It embodied one of many popular committees of labor which were in motion everywhere against the regime—especially across the water in the wildcat strikes of Petrograd. So not only did the meaning of Kronstadt have to be suppressed by the Bolsheviks but in a certain respect it had to be denied by CLR James in his public political thought. James thus is annoyed with Daniels and writes “fool” again in the margins, where he discusses in public “from the standpoint of the party leadership, such explosive criticism had to be disarmed permanently.”⁵¹ James is satisfied with the strategic issues being documented but not the implied evaluation, for Daniels appeared to criticize the Bolsheviks too much for James though Daniels's historical perspective was clearly that he still wanted them to succeed in retaining state power.

Daniels believed the “Ultra-Left had held the ideal while the party leadership, through the progressive canonization of bureaucratic expedients into the law of the revolution had departed from the spirit of 1917.” Daniels is correct to point out that Alexandra Kollontai's faction among the party, known as the Workers' Opposition, whom James never identified with anyway, actually represented “a failure to deviate along with Lenin when he abandoned the anarcho-syndicalist aspects of the Bolshevik program.” CLR. in his marginalia, continues to believe Daniels's assessment is “fool[ish]” and asked “why?”⁵² It should be clear that James's valorization of the Soviets as the creative self-management of labor in 1905 and 1917 should not be mistaken as an “anarchist” thread of his political principles. It is not a principle he is willing to sustain when they confronted Lenin's state power or a state power he deems progressive for an underdeveloped country.

We see CLR's perspective on "socialism from below" was really a way of seeing the self-activity of labor as a measure of what statesmen must do to retain state power—a project he sees as a huge priority—over and above the self-organization and self-emancipation of labor at "the post-colonial moment" for Russia after the Czar. CLR terms the following assessment by Daniels as "wicked":

The proletariat of itself was held to be incapable of rising above the level of mere trade union-consciousness. To dispute this was an unpardonable theoretical regression from Marxism, which no genuine proletarian could commit. Granting his premises, Lenin had an airtight case. Any manifestation of independent revolutionary thought among the workers which would seem to refute Lenin's characterization of them naturally had to challenge the authority of the party which purported to do the proletariat's thinking for it

53

There was nothing evil or malicious about Daniels' interpretation. But his view does conflict with James's claim that Lenin left behind the perspectives of *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin did not see vanguard ideas as obsolete. James would insist that Lenin never saw his party or state as politically thinking for, or providing government for, the workers. But James never even used one of his more modest formulations at Lenin's expense. He never assessed Lenin as being "pushed from behind" by the Russian workers once he had achieved state power. Their self-directed political activities suggested corrections in state policy but their actions, and their actual political thought, never clearly expressed the programmatic desire for popular self-management in James's mind's eye. He wished to maintain the illusion that toilers could not find adequate leadership side by side with their historical tendency to rebel in ways of their own invention. Yet this for James never implied that Lenin's statecraft was illegitimate. Thus CLR insisted Daniels was "all wrong" when Daniels asserted the pattern of 1921 relied on the old organizational tradition of Bolshevism to "conceal, rationalize, and explain away the failure of the regime to live up to its original social ideals."⁵⁴ James falsely saw Lenin's last writings as a form of decentralization within the context of accepting Lenin's admission that socialism in Russia was impossible. Lenin, in fact, was defending and legitimating his own plan for industrialization by invitation to multi-national capitalists, while he threatened all socialist thinkers to his left, many for workers' self-management, with repression.

James believed, at his finest, that the greatest obstacle humanity placed in its own path was the notion that social revolution through self-emancipation was not possible. But Maurice Brinton in his introduction to Ida Mett's *The Kronstadt Uprising* sets up a supposition relevant to a critical study of James:

When Stalinists or Trotskyists speak of Kronstadt as "an essential action against the class enemy," when more "sophisticated" revolutionaries refer to it as "a tragic necessity," one is entitled to pause for a moment. One is entitled to ask how seriously they accept Marx's dictum that "the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself." Do they take this seriously or do they pay mere lip service to the words? Do they identify socialism with the autonomy (organizational and ideological) of the working class? Or do they see themselves, with their wisdom as to the "historical interests" of others, and with their judgments as to what should be "permitted," as the leadership around which the future elite will crystallize and develop? One is entitled not only to ask...but also to suggest the answer!

One can't help but see James as "the sophisticated revolutionary" who refers to Kronstadt as "a tragic necessity" after a close reading of his *World Revolution* and *The Black Jacobins*. For James, the quarrel over the events of Kronstadt in 1921 represented more than a historical instance of direct democracy or workers' self-management challenging state power. It was an event which could be used, and was by defenders of the capitalist world system, to call into question not merely Stalinism, but "the whole Marxist-Leninist heritage."⁵⁵

James's Dictatorship of the Proletariat: A Nuanced or Vulgar Materialist Concept in James's Intellectual Legacies?

Why did James go so far in his development of direct democracy and workers self-management as the socialist future but often capitulated subtly to oppressive notions associated with Lenin? A better understanding of the concept of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” suggests a further avenue of inquiry. James appears to embrace this concept before and after he saw state capitalism as an obstacle to the self-emancipation of modern industrial workers as expressed in his writings during the Age of the CIO and on Hungary.

State capitalism evolved in his political thought to have a double value—especially where he saw it as progressive for former colonial and plantation societies. Where state capitalism was viewed as progressive by James it was merely an application of the theory of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” to the Third World. But this theory had little to do with labor's self-emancipation in any nation.

James explained that global capitalism inevitably developed into huge monopolies, and these gradually control the economic and financial life of the larger capitalist nations. There is an increasing tendency to separate the ownership of finance capital from industrial initiatives, or seek economic production in the lowest wage sectors in the world economy by the capitalists. It follows for James's Leninist political economy that the supremacy of finance capital suggests perhaps a tendency to hesitate to re-invest or lack of desire to invest surplus capital to raise the standard of living of the masses, for this would mean a decrease in profits. It should be clear that this is not an anti-capitalist discourse but a nationalist discourse about capitalist development for an underdeveloped nation (wherever it may be found).⁵⁶

James, again arguing about Lenin's Soviet Union, explained that, in 1937, capitalism and socialism were not economic entities that were already fixed. A decaying capitalism could overthrow an aspiring socialist state, or an aspiring socialist state might organize working people to strike blows against capitalism.⁵⁷ These were not class struggles, as in self-directed initiatives of workers, but economic clashes among nation-states and aspiring rulers within the world economic structure.

When Lenin desired for a more advanced capitalist country to come to the aid of Russia (or a socialist revolution in another country) or Russia would surely fail—he meant the same thing. Internationalist workers would not so much aid Russia as he was hoping for another nation-state like his own. So when James's Lenin argued it was impossible to pass from capitalism to socialism without breaking “national frameworks” he did not mean a rupture with nationalism or the nation-state but the creation of blocs among nation-states which might share capital but operated on the terms of capital and subordinate wage labor with a progressive varnish. This was essentially what Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, and CLR James mean about Caribbean and African federation.⁵⁸

James's concern to describe the importance of “an advanced society” was remarkably, in terms of Leninist political economy, similar to his prescriptions for a colonial or peripheral nation. A modern industrial nation could have both urban and agricultural workers, but have a greater number of urban ones which live close to and intertwined with the middle classes. Having a majority of industrialized workers, or a peripheral nation's push to get to that quota, is not a prelude to a direct democracy in James's Leninist formulations (whether nationalist or internationalist). Instead they anticipate the proletariat's representatives remolding society by smashing the bourgeois state and creating a new type of bourgeois state of their own often called progressive or socialist. James's assertion that Lenin “saw the form of the new state” in the Soviets, while consistent with a strict textual reading of Lenin's *State and Revolution* and other writings, is either a rupture with James's and Lenin's actual political economy or telling a neglected truth. The Soviets were merely a battering ram to secure a nationalist-capitalist state which would reinvest capital, where possible and if present, in subordinate workers' development.

James's explanation of "the real task of the dictatorship of the proletariat," as expressed in *World Revolution*, and in historical defense of Lenin's Bolshevik state, "was to increase production and create such abundance" that the middle classes "would be drawn on the basis of their own experience," which we assume generally is not concerned with social revolution, "to support the proletariat." "A series of economic transformations extending over many years" would ultimately reveal that the new order was obviously better than private ownership of the means of production. But James inadvertently reveals that no new order would be instituted for it was rooted in the assumption that "the whole system would stand or fall by the increased productivity of labor." A welfare state, nationalized property, or a one-party state with monopoly of foreign trade (all in shifting gradations) would make the increased development of state capitalism possible. When James then says "capitalism retards this development" he meant merely the unfettered global free market kind.⁵⁹ James reminded us in *World Revolution*, and for our concern with national liberation struggles we might pay close attention, that both Marx and Lenin agreed that the seizure of state power and the property of the rich was not "socialism." But if what James argued in that text is true, that the quality of a political system "cannot rise higher than the technical level of [economic] production," then Marx teaches that socialism was impossible in both imperial and peripheral nations.

Yet James complicated matters when he says properly what about "the part the workers" play in a social revolution? Workers under capitalism, whether in imperial or peripheral nations, in their self-organized leap over the constraints of the means of production throughout history, suggest the preoccupation with capitalist development of modes of production by socialists is a grave distortion. James underscored however that "ultimately, the standard of education, of fitness for the complicated duties of citizenship, rested on the level of production." When James argued that Lenin, like no other statesman, believed in the creativity of the masses, he makes clear that besides Lenin's self-discarded chants about soviet power replacing state power, he only intended for labor to participate as subordinates in the higher productivity of capitalist development.⁶⁰

James in *World Revolution* embraced at times a vulgar Marxist materialism which underscored that it was "inescapable" that labor's self-emancipation was tied to capitalist development. Not merely the contradictions of capitalist development which compel upheavals, he argued that unfettered free market capitalism was an obstacle to rational or progressive capitalist development.

James's later turn to an explicit direct democracy and workers self-management had to be birthed through the medium of a critique of not merely Stalinism but rationalism, progress, "production for production's sake," and the insults of the welfare state and one-party state whose only conception of "socialism" was that "workers would work" and not directly govern. But direct democracy was in constant tension not just with James's Leninism but with his nationalism (both of which rejected imperialism but not capitalism upon a close reading).

James interprets the dictatorship of the proletariat as an economic dictatorship, not a personal dictatorship, under capitalism. To be clear, this is not synonymous with working people directly governing. The statesmen can be imagined as validly patriotic or nationalist and this can be its only "socialist" content in a hostile world. James argued it can only be evaluated in the context of a given time and circumstances—this only appears to be a nuanced stance. Those circumstances are the rate of the economic transition to socialism, the economic resources the country holds, and a country's relationship with other nation-states. Thus, the determining factor on the progressive nature of state capitalism is not the self-management of labor which would be its negation but the quality of socialist statesmanship who explained the "retreat," and maintained some semblance of freedom of discussion under what is essentially a real dictatorship over workers.⁶¹ James's literary framework which often presented Lenin, Toussaint L'Ouverture, and Kwame Nkrumah in terms of tragedy, papered over what was in fact a vulgar historical materialist framework that erased or justified the smashing of independent labor.

In Conclusion

James, like Trotsky in *Their Morals and Ours*, saw the heritage of Marx and Lenin as not merely synonymous with the art and science of world revolution, but with his own claim to be a great historical actor. He was wrong on both counts. “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat” was a concept developed by Marx and Lenin. There were many others placed forward by these two men, which were authoritarian capitalist concepts that, in the name of workers, betrayed a fear of their self-emancipation. James's greatest contribution to emancipation was as an enchanter of direct democracy and workers' self-management. James shares that legacy with many libertarian socialists, most of whom are commonly rejected by adherents of Marxism and Leninism, no matter how they imagine their own political identity. James was correct to reject the notion that past historical atrocities demonstrated that the desire for social revolution “was wrong from the start.” But preventing expressions of popular self-management from tarnishing the legacies of those, like Lenin, who (in aspiring to be progressive guardians above society in state power) smashed these forms of freedom, was an error so grave that it was fundamental.⁶²

This error has been a great obstacle to clarifying the revolutionary content of James's political thought. Further, the error has obstructed a proper assessment of the presence, contours, function, and absence of direct democracy and workers' self-management in James's view of national liberation in colonized and peripheral nations. Yet we must always be alert that these contours, which often seem absurd or idiosyncratic from the perspective of a consistent advocacy of popular self-management can be explained more consistently through the pathways of James's Leninism.

James's view of Lenin as more sensitive to peasants than Stalin, and his sympathy for Lenin's advocacy of a workers' and peasant's inspection soon after the Bolshevik state's attacks on independent toilers in factories and fields reveal something crucial. James's insistence on underscoring the vanguard party and the one-party state were not central or special doctrine of Lenin's was a grave mistake. His repeated assertion that Lenin as a dictator is “a lie stuck in people's minds” by bourgeois media is false and complicated a reality of world politics he understands elsewhere. One does not make an assessment of social revolution based on what imperialists say about a regime alone. Rather, the criteria should be whether toilers directly govern in that society.⁶³ Lenin, an ascetic never motivated by desiring a privileged life, nevertheless behaved very autocratically in state power. Most crucially for our study, James's Lenin, while he at times popularized libertarian socialist ideas, made clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that direct democracy and workers' self-management could be discarded. For James's Lenin state power was not in fact reconcilable with self-governing labor. Further James's Lenin, in state power, discredited and repressed the self-emancipation of workers and peasants, and the libertarian socialists who consistently defended them.

James's Leninism existed in tension with his politics of direct democracy and workers self-management for modern industrial nations—aspects of which appear in his historical narratives of peripheral nations as well. We are partially indebted to his more libertarian socialist writings as a basis for making this criticism. Nevertheless, James's Leninism and labor's self-emancipation are not intellectual legacies which can be reconciled uncritically, save for scholars and activists who wish to elevate the banner of labor's self-emancipation only to discipline and discard working people when they have their opportunity to enter the rules of hierarchy.

Reproduced from <http://insurgentnotes.com/2012/10/silences-on-the-suppression-of-workers...>

- 1. CLR James did not see these two intellectual legacies in conflict. See CLR James, with Paul Buhle, James Early, Noel Ignatin, and Ethelbert Miller, “Interview,” *CLR James: His Life and Work*, Paul Buhle ed., London: Allison & Busby (1986), p. 164.
- 2. Frank Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary: CLR James and the Struggle for A New Society*, Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press (2008), pp. 54–60

- 3. An excellent study of this aspect of Lenin's career is the following: R. Craig Nation, *War On War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and The Origins of Communist Internationalism*, Durham, NC: Duke UP (1989).
- 4. See CLR James, *World Revolution, 1917–1936*, (1937), Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press (1993), pp. 74–75; CLR James, "State and Counter-Revolution," *New International*, vol. 6, no. 7, August 1940, pp. 137–140.
- 5. See C.L. Rudder (CLR James), "Popular Fronts in Past Times," *Fight*, vol. 1, no. 2, December 2, 1936, p. 16; C.L. Rudder (CLR James), "The Leninist Attitude To War," *Fight*, vol. 1, no. 3, January 1937, p. 16. These issues of *Fight* have been bound with others as Staffan Lindhe, ed., *Fight: Fascimile Edition of British Trotskyist Journals of the 1930s*, Goteborg, Sweden: SL. Publications (1999).
- 6. These texts can be found in Robert C. Tucker, *The Lenin Anthology*, New York: W.W. Norton (1975).
- 7. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, vol. 1, Chicago: Cienfuegos Press (1940), p. 23.
- 8. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 9. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 10. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 11. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 12. CLR James, with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee, "On Marx's Essays from the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts" (1947), in *At the Rendezvous of Victory: Selected Writings*, London: Allison & Busby (1984), p. 67.
- 13. The Trade Union debate within the Bolshevik Party included Trotsky, Martov, Bukharin, and Alexandra Kollontai's Workers Opposition. James mistakenly viewed this debate of 1920 as proof of the democratic character of the Bolshevik one-party state, and the freedom of discussion allowed. Despite this claim, what was conceived as a debate about the role of labor in workers control of production, was something else entirely when an important matter was considered. Almost all the trade unions had been co-opted by the state or were outlawed. They earlier were used to overtake some Soviets and suppress others. James's analysis may have benefited from his normative critique of trade union bureaucracy as militantly hostile to independent labor action during the Age of the CIO. We can fruitfully apply James's insights from elsewhere here.
- 14. CLR James, "Lenin and the Trade Union Debate in Russia," part 1 (1967), in *You Don't Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of CLR James*, David Austin ed., Oakland: AK Press (2009), pp. 161–162.
- 15. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- 16. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
- 17. Many Gordon, *Workers Before and After Lenin*, New York: E.P. Dutton (1941), p. 84.
- 18. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 19. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.
- 20. *Ibid.*, pp. 88–93.
- 21. CLR James, with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee, *State Capitalism & World Revolution* (1950), Chicago: Charles H. Kerr (1986), p. 47.
- 22. See CLR James, "Lenin on Agriculture and the Negro Question" (1947) in CLR James on "The Negro Question," Scott McLemee ed., Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi (1996), pp. 130–32.
- 23. CLR James, *A History of Pan African Revolt* (1939, 1969), Chicago: Charles H Kerr (1995), pp. 148–150.
- 24. CLR James, "Lenin and the Problem" (1964), in *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, Westport, CT: Lawrence & Hill (1977), pp. 202–203.
- 25. See forthcoming Matthew Quest, *In the Shadow of State Power: CLR James, Direct Democracy and National Liberation Struggles*, Atlanta: On Our Own Authority!
- 26. Boris Souvarine, *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, translated by CLR James, New York: Alliance (1939), pp. 255–257, 261
- 27. Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921*, New York: Pantheon (1974), pp. 111–112
- 28. CLR James, *Lenin, Trotsky, and the Vanguard Party*, Detroit: Facing Reality (1964), pp. 3–4; CLR James, *Modern Politics*, Detroit: Bewick (1973), pp. 46–47; CLR James, *Marxism and the Intellectuals*, Detroit: Facing Reality (1962), p. 24; CLR James, with

- George Rawick, Martin Glaberman, and William Gorman, *The Gathering Forces*, Unpublished Manuscript. George P. Rawick Papers. Western Manuscript Archives, University of Missouri at St. Louis (1967), p. 4.
- 29. CLR James, Letter to William Gorman, January 2, 1951, Martin Glaberman Collection, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.
 - 30. CLR James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, Westport, CT: Lawrence & Hill (1977), p. 211; CLR James, *World Revolution, 1917–1936*, (1937), Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press (1993), pp. 125–126.
 - 31. Murray Bookchin, *Third Revolution*, vol. 3, New York: Continuum (2004), pp. 267 and 271; Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP (1994), p. 16.
 - 32. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, vol. 1, Chicago: Cienfuegos Press (1940), pp. 37–38; Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917–1921: The State and Counter-Revolution*, foreword by Andrew Zonneveld, Atlanta: On Our Own Authority! (2012), p. 96.
 - 33. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, vol. 1, Chicago: Cienfuegos Press (1940), p. 39.
 - 34. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, vol. 1, Chicago: Cienfuegos Press (1940), pp. 108–109; See also Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement, 1918–1921*, London: Freedom Press (1987); Voline, *The Unknown Revolution*, Montreal: Black Rose Books (1990), pp. 541–711.
 - 35. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, vol. 1, Chicago: Cienfuegos Press (1940), pp. 52–53.
 - 36. Vladimir Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP (1987), p. 199.
 - 37. Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917–1921: The State and Counter-Revolution*, pp. 106–107.
 - 38. Murray Bookchin, *Third Revolution*, pp. 272–273; Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary: 1901–1941*, New York: Oxford UP (1963), pp. 80–81.
 - 39. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, pp. 80–81.
 - 40. Jonathan Aves, *Workers Against Lenin: Labour Protest and the Bolshevik Dictatorship*, London: Tauris (1996). See especially chapter 4
 - 41. CLR James, “Lenin and the Trade Union Debate in Russia,” part 1 and 2 (1967), in *You Don't Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of CLR James*, pp. 179, 192–193.
 - 42. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, pp. 132–133; Murray Bookchin, *Third Revolution*, pp. 286.
 - 43. See Oliver H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press (1976).
 - 44. G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: The Leninist Counter-Revolution*, pp. 71.
 - 45. See Ida Mett, *The Kronstadt Uprising*, London: Solidarity (1967), pp. 37–41; Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt, 1921*, New York: W.W. Norton, (1970), especially chapter 5.
 - 46. Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921*, pp. 250–251.
 - 47. Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt, 1921*, pp. 161–162.
 - 48. CLR James, *The Black Jacobins*, (1938) New York: Vintage (1963), pp. 282–286; CLR James, *World Revolution, 1917–1936*, p. 135.
 - 49. R.V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia*, London: Oxford UP (1970), p. 138. This, and all of the following citations, come from CLR James's personal copy found in the CLR James Collection in the West Indiana Collection of the Alma Jordan Library, University of West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago.
 - 50. R.V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 144.
 - 51. R.V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 146.
 - 52. R.V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 147.
 - 53. R.V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 147.
 - 54. R.V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 147.
 - 55. CLR James, “Discussion II,” London (1964), vol. 2, Unpublished Oral History Transcript. Martin Glaberman Collection. Walter Reuther Archive, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
 - 56. CLR James, *World Revolution*, pp. 118–119.

- 57.Ibid., p. 120
- 58.James, in contrast to Nkrumah and Padmore, would often raise the idea of a constituent assembly, an aspect of direct democracy that he forced on middle class politicians, in the hope they would have to account for criticism of the form federation would take. But with statesmen in the lead such an assembly could be discarded like Lenin discarded the Soviets.
- 59.Ibid, p. 122
- 60.Ibid., p. 123.
- 61.Ibid., p. 133–135
- 62.CLR James, “Discussion II,” London (1964), vol. 3, Unpublished Oral History Transcript. Martin Glaberman Collection. Walter Reuther Archive, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.
- 63.CLR James, Lenin, Trotsky, and the Vanguard Party, p. 3; CLR James, “Lenin and the Trade Union Debate in Russia,” part 1 (1967), in *You Don't Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of CLR James*, pp. 174–175.