

## *Provisional Programme*

### **The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic**

**Friday 13th – Sunday 15th October**

Conference organised by the Institute for Black Atlantic Research (IBAR),  
University of Central Lancashire, and to be held at the UCLan Media Factory, Preston, UK

<b>Friday 13 October</b>	
<b>Evening</b>	<p><b>Welcome social includes book launches:</b> <i>Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939</i> (Pluto Press, 2017) with Prof Margaret Stevens (Essex County College) and <i>World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International</i> by C.L.R. James (Duke University Press, 2017) with editor Christian Høgsbjerg and live music – special performance by <b>David Rovics</b></p>

<b>Saturday 14 October</b>					
<b>9.30-10am</b>	<b>Registration</b>				
<b>10am</b>	<b>Welcome / Housekeeping</b>				
<b>10.15</b>	<b>Keynote address - Prof Winston James</b> (University of California, Irvine) Title TBC				
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## Saturday 14 October

1pm	Lunch	
2pm	Panel 3 – Africa Rising I	Panel 4 – Black America in Soviet Russia
	<p>“Workers of the World Unite”, or, Left Imperialism? The Reception of the October Revolution in South Africa’ <i>David Johnson</i> (Open University)</p> <p>‘Clements Kadalie, Interwar Southern Africa and Black Trade Unionists’ Rejection of “Communism with Its Violent Methods”’ <i>Henry Mitchell</i> (Edinburgh)</p> <p>‘Kenyatta, the Communist Left and the Growth of the Resistance Movement in Kenya’ <i>Ken Olende</i> (WEA)</p>	<p>‘African American Literature in Soviet Russia / USSR, 1917-1930-ies: contacts, translations, literary criticism, editorial policy’ <i>Olga Panova</i> (Lomonosov Moscow State University)</p> <p>‘Wayland Rudd and the Affirmative Action Empire’ <i>Baron Kelly</i> (University of Louisville)</p> <p>‘African American Performers in Russia: Staging Red and Black’ <i>Lisa Merrill</i> (Hofstra) and <i>Theresa Saxon</i> (UCLan)</p>
	Panel 5 – The Red Atlantic	
	<p>‘The Red Atlantic’ <i>Holger Weiss</i> (Åbo Akademi University)</p> <p>‘Left Book Club and Its Associates: International Circulation of Socialist Ideas in an Atlantic Network (1935-1947)’ <i>Matheus da Silva</i> (University of Sao Paulo)</p> <p>‘One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Popular Front Retreat and the 1937 “Parsley Massacre”’ <i>Margaret Stevens</i> (Essex County College)</p>	
3.30pm	Coffee Break	

## Saturday 14 October

4pm	Panel 6 – Black Europe	Panel 7 – Black Activism in the Americas
	<p>“No More Slaves!” Lamine Senghor (1889-1927) and the Fusion of Pan-Africanism and Marxism in Interwar France’ <i>David Murphy</i> (Stirling)</p> <p>“The Stories of Lenin and Trotsky Must Have Their African Counterparts”: The International African Service Bureau, the Russian Revolution, and the Soviet Union of the 1930s and 1940s’ <i>Theo Williams</i> (King’s College London)</p> <p>‘European Marxist or Black Intellectual?: C.L.R. James and the Advancement of Marxism Beyond its Leninist-Russian Expression’ <i>Tennyson Joseph</i> (UWI-Cave Hill)</p>	<p>‘Sandalio Junco and “The Negro Question” in Latin America’ <i>Anne Garland Mahler</i> (University of Virginia)</p> <p>‘Wilfred Domingo under Investigation’ <i>Peter Hulme</i> (Essex)</p> <p>‘Cyril Briggs, the African Blood Brotherhood and Revolution in the <i>Crusader</i>’ <i>Jak Peake</i> (Essex)</p> <p>‘Grace P. Campbell’s “An analysis of the Negro Question in the U.S.A.”’ <i>Lydia Lindsey</i> (North Carolina)</p>
<b>6pm</b>	<b>Keynote Lecture – Dr Cathy Bergin</b> (University of Brighton) / <b>Prof Hakim Adi</b> (University of Chichester) (Title TBC)	
<b>7pm</b>	<b>Buffet dinner</b>	
<b>8pm</b>	Cultural evening with <b>Linton Kwesi Johnson</b>	

<b>Sunday 15 October</b>		
<b>10am</b>	<b>Panel 8 – Black America</b>	<b>Panel 9 – Soviet Russia</b>
	<p>“The Negro Question” – Marxism, Bolshevism and Black Internationalism’ <i>Jonathan Ellis</i></p> <p>‘The National Negro Congress’ <i>Clayton Vaughn-Roberson</i> (Carnegie Mellon University)</p> <p>‘World Revolution and Slave Studies’ <i>Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie</i> (Howard University)</p>	<p>‘Blackness the Color of Red: Negotiating Race at the U.S. Legation in Riga, Latvia, 1924-1934’ <i>Maxim Matusevich</i> (Seton Hall University)</p> <p>‘I’ve Known Revolutions: Langston Hughes on Mexico and Russia’ <i>William Booth</i> (Oxford)</p> <p>‘The New Negro and the New Soviet Man’ <i>Jermaine Demetrius Lloyd</i> (Yale)</p>
<b>11.30</b>	<b>Keynote Lecture – Cathy Bergin / Hakim Adi Title TBC</b>	
<b>12.30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>1.30</b>	<b>Panel 10 – The Caribbean</b>	<b>Panel 11 – Raya Dunayevskaya</b>
	<p>‘The Cosmic, Protean, Androgynous God in <i>Las metamorfosis de Makandal</i>’ <i>Ines Prosdocimi</i> (University of Maryland)</p> <p>‘Firebrands, Trade Unionists, and Marxists: The Russian Revolution and the Emergence of the Left in Guyana, 1917-1956’ <i>Nigel Westmaas</i> (Hamilton College)</p> <p>‘From the Russian Revolution to the Cuban Revolution’ <i>Steve Cushion</i></p>	<p>‘Biography of a Revolutionary Thinker and Activist’ <i>Floyd Codlin</i></p> <p>‘Raya Dunayevskaya’s Philosophical Break with C. L. R. James (and Grace Lee)’ <i>Chris Gilligan</i></p> <p>‘Raya Dunayevskaya’s Concept of Black Masses as Vanguard of the American Revolution’ <i>Nigel Niles</i></p>
<b>1.30</b>	<b>Panel 12 – Africa Rising II</b>	
	<p>‘Decolonization and the Cold War: African Student Elites in the USSR during the Khrushchev Era’ <i>Harold D. Weaver</i> (Harvard)</p> <p>‘People’s Friendship” in the Cold War: African Students at Moscow’s Patrice Lumumba People’s Friendship University <i>Rachel Rubin</i> (University of Massachusetts Boston)</p>	

<b>Sunday 15 October</b>		
<b>3pm</b>	<b>Panel 13 - Hegel / Marx / Lenin</b>	<b>Panel 14 - C.L.R. James / Linton Kwesi Johnson / Amiri Baraka</b>
	<p>‘Marx’s <i>Eighteenth Brumaire</i> and its Appropriation by Caribbean Black Atlantic Intellectuals’ <i>Raphael Hoermann</i> (UCLan)</p> <p>‘Black Hegelian Radicals: Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes’ <i>Bryan Banker</i> (Amerika-Institut Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)</p> <p>‘Distended Marxism: Frantz Fanon, the Comintern, and Dialectical Methodology in Marxist Pan-Africanism’ <i>Cosmo Pappas</i></p>	<p>“‘It Was almost as if Lenin Had Had Trotsky Shot for Taking the Side of the Proletariat against the Bourgeoisie’”: C.L.R. James’s <i>The Black Jacobins</i> and the Universality of Revolution’ <i>Philip Kaisary</i> (Carleton University)</p> <p>‘The Unfinished Revolution: Linton Kwesi Johnson, C.L.R. James, and the new Socialism’ <i>David Austin</i> (John Abbott College)</p> <p>“‘Hard Facts’”: Amiri Baraka and Marxism-Leninism in the 1970s’ <i>David Grundy</i> (Cambridge)</p>
<b>4.30pm</b>	<b>Final Plenary</b>	
	<p><i>Maxim Matusevich</i> (Seton Hall)</p> <p><i>Satnam Virdee</i> (Glasgow)</p> <p><i>Fionnghuala Sweeney</i> (Newcastle)</p> <p><i>Winston James</i> (California – Irvine)</p>	
<b>6pm Close</b>	<b>Tayo Aluko</b> sings Paul Robeson	

# Abstracts

## Panel 1 – Russia 1917

### **‘The Images of the Two Russian Revolutions of 1917’**

*Renata Gravina* (University of Rome)

The centennial of the two revolutions of 1917 impose a reflection over periodical and diplomatic documentations related to the different revolutions. The first or ‘February Revolution’ and the second or the ‘October revolution’ must be distinguished. They are both part of the First World War or European Civil War period. The first revolution seems to align Russia with The Triple *Entente*, landing in a liberal and democratic institutional order. For periodicals and European diplomacy the February Revolution appeared as a repetition of the French Revolution. However, between February and October 1917, Bolshevism appropriated the short-lived democratic ideology position of Kerensky, and employed this cult through the appearance of Lenin icon.

The incompleteness and fleetingness of the revolution as a whole has bifurcated the debate on the meaning of democracy and communism in Russia between a socialist and revolutionary orientation which glorified the redemptive character of the revolution for the European proletariat and a liberal positioning headed by the figure of Benedetto Croce (i.e.), which denied the Russian originality and considered the revolution as a chaos lacking any ideological fulcrum and potentially dangerous for the maintenance of the European order.

Many periodicals and Diplomats reacted to the February Revolution with support for the patriotic impulse. From the beginning of that of October, instead, they reacted with a sort of crusade against Bolshevism, to save European civilization from the revolutionary infection.

The reason why the expansion of the October Revolution is to be considered as global is that it represents a step within a general confrontation between the Russian idea and the European self-awareness. European and Russian emigrants debated over the Russian idea and the idea of Europe, inspired also from the Bolshevik revolution. In fact, the peculiar aspect of the revolution as a universal impact must be studied in terms of historical semiotics according to Yuri Lotman line, as cultural and national characteristics resulting from the comparison-clash among Russia, Europe and the rest of the World.

An interdisciplinary methodology cannot ignore the analysis of 1917 events according to the history of concepts by Reinhart Koselleck. Both political and ideological shifts from Western liberal democracy to Soviet communism well combine within this analysis. Such a shift was detected by very few, among them Antonio Gramsci. Preconceptions about Russia, incompetence and an exhibit intention of censorship contributed to that. The analysis of the impact of the two revolutions (especially in his Bolsheviks outcomes) over all the major movements of the twentieth century is still to be completed.

### **‘From Muslim Central Asia to Black America and back: on Lenin and Langston Hughes’**

*Matthieu Renault* (Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis)

Lenin’s essays on national self-determination and anticolonial struggles are well known. Much less are his earlier remarks on the process of *internal colonization* of the Russian Empire’s “free” borderlands. “Oppressed nations” are conspicuously absent in those writings, which are complemented with a cross analysis of the shared destiny of Russian serfs and American slaves. This urges us to look afresh at the later identification between the experience of Asian and African people subjected to the yoke of European imperialism and

that of African Americans considering themselves as colonized from within. Finally, Langston Hughes's narrative of his travel to Soviet Central Asia in the early thirties offers a valuable perspective for re-examining the emancipation of the Empire's "colored people" after 1917, and its limits.

### **'Race' and the Russian Revolution: Revisiting the 'Jewish Question', a Century on**

*Brendan McGeever* (Birkbeck)

One of the more underexplored aspects of Claude McKay's 1919 statement on the anti-racist potential of the Russian Revolution is its multidirectionality. In the first instance, it was an address to the readers of *Negro World*: should the revolution spread, proclaimed McKay, it could break the grip of racism on the 'white masses' and make America safe for the 'Negro'. What sometimes goes forgotten, however, is that McKay's hopes derived from a reading of the Bolshevik response to their very own 'race question': the so-called 'Jewish question'. A key link between the Black Atlantic and October 1917, for McKay, then, was the Jewish experience of the revolution.

This paper proposes to continue McKay's multidirectionality by bringing the debate on 'race' and the Russian Revolution back through the so-called 'Jewish question'. When the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917 they immediately came face-to-face with mass antisemitic violence. The pogroms of the Civil War posed fundamental questions of the Bolshevik project, in particular the Bolshevik theorisation of racism and the 'national question'. What especially shocked the Bolshevik leadership was the participation of workers and Red Army soldiers in this anti-Jewish violence. Based on archival research in Russia and Ukraine, this paper will examine antisemitism and the Russian Revolution through the prism of 'race', racialisation and anti-racist praxis. In doing so, it argues that debates on working class racism, self-organisation, the relationship between 'race' and class were also addressed within the revolution itself, through the Bolshevik confrontation with antisemitism.

## **Panel 2 – Claude McKay**

### **'Industrial Unionism, Intersectionality and the Russian Revolution: Claude McKay and Sylvia Pankhurst'**

*Fabian Tompsett*

These two key figures of revolutionary struggles which erupted after the First World War were both influenced by the Revolutionary Industrial Unionism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW): Sylvia Pankhurst encountered the IWW during her two trips to the USA (1910-12). Her experiences during the Lawrence "Bread and Roses" strike in particular were to shape the way she approached organising working class women in London's East End. Claude McKay was briefly involved with IWW in the USA before his stay of one and a half years in London (1919-1921). During this period he joined Sylvia Pankhurst in the Workers Socialist Federation, which had been involved in not merely supporting but attempting to emulate the Russian Revolution. Initially this was through Pankhurst's willingness to back McKay in confronting E. D. Morel over his racist support for German hysteria over the deployment of African troops in the occupied Rhineland, an issue which involved both racist and sexist stereotyping. McKay was to become a regular staff member of the paper particularly over the summer of 1920, which saw the WSF transform itself into the "British Section of the Third International" and the subsequently reported on the Communist Unity Convention for the WSF. This paper will explore the intersection of sex, race and class through this encounter of this feminist activist and this African-Caribbean intellectual in the

context of the class struggle as perceived by the IWW and the UK reception of the Russian Revolution.

### **‘The Communist Politics and Primitivist Sensibilities of Claude McKay, 1919-1929’**

*Owen Walsh (Leeds)*

The Harlem Renaissance came closest to the ideas and ideals given new life by the Russian Revolution in the work of Claude McKay. While literary studies often identify McKay as a primitivist auteur, such a framing is rarely in conversation with his commitment to international communism. McKay’s politics were grounded in an agrarian and primitivist sensibility, as is evident both in his political journalism and in his literary work. The salient piece of political journalism in this respect is the 1921 article ‘How Black Sees Green and Red’, which examines the relationship between anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist struggle. *Banjo*, a novel published eight years later, suggests a changed attitude to race, class, and nation – but one which nevertheless remains rooted in a primitivist sensibility. McKay’s deployment of “the hobo”, his primitivism, and the creeping racial essentialism in *Banjo* will be analysed to trace the author’s subtle but significant political evolution. In the late 1920s, McKay moved toward a politics focused on race, identity, and culture, to the explicit though uneven exclusion of working class struggle and anti-colonial nationalism. The changing shape of McKay’s political vision will be seen in the context of shifts in his relationship with international communism. The paper will offer new perspectives on how McKay negotiated the politics of class, race, and nation through the 1920s, at a time when the chronology and meaning of the black cultural front are being contested.

### **‘Journeying Russia: Claude McKay and his Russian Connection’**

*Lisa Tomlinson (UWI-Mona)*

Undeniably, Claude McKay’s work spans the Caribbean and the United States. In his attempt to contribute to the re-articulation of a “New Negro” voice, McKay’s work has primarily been surveyed within two geographical spaces, thus at times highlighting the unique Caribbean sensibility he wittingly imported to the development of the Harlem Renaissance. While, McKay relied heavily on his African Caribbean background in the crafting of his creative work, he was cognizant of other radical literary movements that drew on literature as their catalyst for expressing national and cultural identities. As such, one literary movement that McKay had an affinity to was Russia. McKay’s embrace of communism is often discussed within his Black internationalist politics. However, his Russian literary influence is seldom spoken about. The focus of my paper is to analyse McKay’s ties to Russian literary writers and the important role they played in his creative growth as well as how McKay opens up a dialogue between Russia and the Black Atlantic. My paper also attempts to bring in a comparative analysis of the cross- culturally and cross-racial bond between the two distinct yet similar literary traditions.

## **Panel 3 – Africa Rising I**

### **“Workers of the World Unite”, or, Left Imperialism? The Reception of the October Revolution in South Africa’**

*David Johnson (Open University)*

The writings of South African socialists in the decade after the October Revolution combine the vocabularies of northern hemisphere socialism and Southern African anti-settler/colonial

resistance. On the one hand, these writings express an impulse of solidarity and equality, a dream of workers in the capitalist nations and in the colonies uniting in a common struggle against capitalism and imperialism. On the other hand, they assume a hierarchy and a *telos* dividing Moscow socialists from African workers. For example, the delegate from Africa at the 1921 Moscow Comintern congress, David Ivon Jones, argued, ‘the native working mass’ are green, but are ‘ripe for communism’; they are asleep, but ‘only need awakening’. With the addition of ‘the knowledge how to free themselves’ – provided by Soviet and European socialists – African workers will commence their journey to liberation under socialism. The question posed is: how were these contradictory discourses of socialist solidarity and colonial/racial hierarchy negotiated, side-stepped, or temporarily resolved by South African radicals? Building on seventy years of scholarship on Communism in South Africa (notably Roux, Simons and Simons, Johns, Hirson, Legassick, Drew, Filatova, Davidson, Neame and Roth), this paper directs the question to the writings of *inter alia* Josiah Gumede (1867-1946), T. W. Thibedi (1888-1960), Jimmy la Guma (1894-1961), Edwin Mofutsanyana (1899-1995), Jonny Gomas (1901-1979), Josephine Mpama (1903-1979), J. B. Marks (1903-1972), Eddie Roux (1903-66), Albert Nzula (1905-1934), and Moses Kotane (1905-1978).

### **‘Clements Kadalie, Interwar Southern Africa and Black Trade Unionists’ Rejection of “Communism with Its Violent Methods”**

*Henry Mitchell* (Edinburgh)

In the 1920s all of the largest black trade unions across the Atlantic were decidedly sceptical about communism. They gravitated, instead, towards the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) - the ‘yellow’ Amsterdam International. Clements Kadalie led the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU), the first major black trade union that set out to become ‘One Big Union’ of workers ‘South of the Zambezi’, and affiliated with the IFTU in 1926. He also wrote numerous articles for the official organ of the US-based Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), *The Messenger*. Both Kadalie and A Philip Randolph, the head of the BSCP, were derided by communists as sell-out ‘bourgeois reformists’ who distracted from revolutionary organising. Governments, however, saw them as the most dangerous black men in each of their respective countries in the late 1920s.

Why, then, did the 1917 Russian Revolution, Comintern and the Red International of Labour Unions have a limited impact on interwar black trade unionism? A number of key officials in the ICU became communists, but were sidelined in leadership struggles that mirrored the yellow-red split in the international labour movement. Whilst Kadalie captured the imagination of black Southern Africa with arguments for black unity, a black Christianity, economic freedom and a Socialist Commonwealth - mobilising hundreds of thousands of workers - South African communists were expelled from the ICU and subsequently garnered only a few hundred followers. In part this reflected the place of the ICU, rooted within British Africa: Kadalie had “to speak of conditions in Britain, because if I refer to conditions in Germany, France or Russia I will be called a Bolshevik” and was compelled to follow Fenner Brockway and the ILP’s alternative arguments for transforming the empire into a ‘Federation of Socialist Commonwealths’. Additionally, black trade unionists felt they already ready knew the central tenets of ‘communalism’ - without Europeans having to tell them. But it also reflected the fact that violent revolution was seen by most black workers as impractical and highly dangerous. In the aftermath of numerous mass shootings by the South African government, non-violent mass organisation and general strikes - not vanguard revolutionary Communism - seemed the only practical way forward. As Kadalie wrote to a leading South African communist in 1928: “I found out the worth of your party in Europe...I believe in socialism and not in communism with its violent methods.”

### **‘Kenyatta, the Communist Left and the Growth of the Resistance Movement in Kenya’**

*Ken Olende (WEA)*

The paper will discuss to what extent the Kenyan independence movement was inspired by the Russian Revolution or influenced by Communist ideas and bodies such as the Red International of Labour Unions. Did changes in the policy of the USSR affect the development of independence and Pan-Africanist groups?

The spread of anti-colonial struggles like Harry Thuku’s East African Association launched in 1921 coincided with a worldwide mood that came out of the carnage of the First World War and the hope offered by the Russian Revolution.

But later experience shows how hard the communication of ideas could be. Jomo Kenyatta who would be imprisoned by the British during the independence struggle in the 1950s and later become independent Kenya’s first leader, worked with the Communist Party while he lived in Britain in the 1930s and wrote in its publications. Yet the ideas he implemented on his return to Kenya were nationalist rather than socialist.

However, several other leading figures in the resistance took a much more leftist stance. So, much of the leadership of the post war resistance movement emerged from a radical trade union background—including Mau Mau leaders Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai. They were influenced by and worked with the openly communist trade unionist Makhan Singh.

Yet when leading guerrilla leader Dedan Kimathi took the name “General Russia” it was more in general solidarity with powers that inspired resistance against the British than a wider engagement with Marxist ideas.

### **Panel 4 – Black America in Soviet Russia**

#### **‘African American Literature in Soviet Russia / USSR, 1917-1930-ies: Contacts, Translations, Literary Criticism, Editorial Policy’**

*Olga Panova (Lomonosov Moscow State University)*

The aim of the paper is to give an idea of the policy and guidelines for translation and publishing of Black American literature in Soviet Russia in 1917-1930-ies, as well as of the basis for establishing / maintaining contacts with African American writers. Ideology always being at the core of the Soviet literary policy, there exists, however, a drastic difference between the revolutionary 1917-1919, the 1920-ies (New Economic Policy) and Stalin’s 1930-ies. The key issues that allow to see the logic of the change are: the choice of the authors and their works for translation and publishing, the bias of literary criticism, the dynamics of Black writers’ literary reputation in the USSR, the activity of Soviet translators, publishers, periodicals “specializing” in African American literature, Soviet and international literary institutions (IURW, writers’ associations and organizations of the 1920-ies, the Soviet Writers’ Union). Special attention is paid to Black visitors (including major figures like Claude MacKay and Langston Hughes) and Black residents of the USSR, their essays, articles and travel-books about Soviet Russia, and the reception of these works in the Soviet Union, as well as to the correspondence between Black writers and Soviet institutions. The study is based mainly on the materials of the Soviet press (including newspapers, literary magazines and journals) of the period in question, as well as archived documents from the funds of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (RGALI), Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), State Archive of the Russian Federation (GA RF).

#### **‘Wayland Rudd and the Affirmative Action Empire’**

*Baron Kelly* (University of Louisville)

Wayland Rudd, was among the twenty-one blacks that went to the Soviet Union for the *Black and White* film project, arriving in Leningrad in late June 1932. Like Paul Robeson, he too was deeply offended by the racism in the United States. Rudd looked to the Soviet Union, as did many black actors and artists, as a site where equality was guaranteed for all. Following the collapse of that project, and his frustration over racism in the entertainment industry in the United States, Rudd elected to say in Russia where he lived and performed until his death in 1952. Rudd became a trophy of Soviet racial enlightenment. His status as a black actor who provided black America with images of Soviet racial equality shielded him from much of the antifoignier bias and suspicion that marked Soviet society during the Stalinist era. Also, by denouncing his theatre director, Vsevolod Meyerhold, as an anti-Soviet formalist, he had hopes that he would find more sympathetic roles and that he might develop his skills as a playwright and director, an avenue closed off to African American actors in the United States. I will discuss how Rudd encountered competitiveness in the Soviet theatre world, and ironically was racialized and objectified in the country where he was used as the poster boy to illustrate the absence of racial prejudice. His career in the 1930s exemplifies the remarkable access given to foreign artists in the Soviet Union and the mixed results of one man's attempt to exploit these resources.

#### **‘African American Performers in Russia: Staging Red and Black’**

*Lisa Merrill*, Hofstra and *Theresa Saxon*, UCLan

For our contribution to this event, we explore the careers of black American actors Ira Aldridge and Paul Robeson, both of whom, while subject to oppression and racism in the US, were received positively as performers in Russia. Aldridge's first visit to Imperial Russia coincided with official discussions around emancipation of serfs, and the connection between the systems of slavery and serfdom were noted in press reports of his performances – he was denied permission to perform in St. Petersburg whose authorities were fearful of the unrest that the actor, a seeming champion of the repressed, might inspire.

More than 75 years later, Paul and Eslanda Robeson's embrace of Russia, as a place of liberation was so extensive that they chose to send their son to school there, rather than in the United States where even in the 1950s blacks were subject to continued overt discrimination. Though Robeson was more overtly political than Aldridge, and though the contexts of their visits were very different, they were harnessed by the Russian press as catalysts for political positions that they were seen to represent personally and with their artistry.

It is this shared and specific heritage of political activism associated with Aldridge and Robeson as black American performers in Russian theatre that forms the basis of this paper. Moreover, Ira Aldridge and Paul Robeson are pivotal figures for discussions of attitudes globally that continue to inform contemporary critical approaches to race and representation. This paper will explore the history of their engagement in and appropriation for the work of political activism in both Imperial and post-revolutionary Russia.

### **Panel 5 – The Red Atlantic**

#### **‘The Red Atlantic’**

*Holger Weiss* (Åbo Akademi University)

The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, and the complexities and conflicting positions and agendas in making of a 'Red Atlantic', i.e. the collision of those of the ISH and those of the ITUCNW. Full abstract to come.

**'Left Book Club and Its Associates: International Circulation of Socialist Ideas in an Atlantic Network (1935-1947)'**

*Matheus da Silva* (University of Sao Paulo)

Focusing on the histories of *The New Era Fellowship* (founded in South Africa in 1937), *The Current Affairs Group* (founded in Southern Rhodesia in 1938) and the *Left Club in Jamaica* (founded in Jamaica in 1938), we intend to map a triangular network of circulation of socialist ideas created between the Caribbean, Africa and Europe, from the transnational activities of the London's Left Book Club, during its operation period between 1935 and 1947, when it founded more than 15 groups around the globe, which distributed the material produced by the Club. In addition to functioning as centers for diffusion of Marxist, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial ideas, largely forming local nationalisms, those circles acted as centers of congregation and education. *The Current Affairs Group*, for example, was founded under influence of Victor Gollancz to support the Republican cause on the Spanish Civil War. Along with the South African Communist newspaper *Guardian*, *The Current Affairs Group* was responsible for disseminating socialist ideas among the black apartheid-segregated population. We argue that transnational networks sewn by LBC, which connected those groups, favored the creation of a global circuit which helped non-European intellectuals to act as carriers of anti-colonial, anti-imperial, anti-racist and nationalist ideas. Themes that were already discussed within regional networks in southern Africa, as well as in the Caribbean region, independent of relations with Europe, through LBC could circulate its material, as well as collaborating in the amplification of local discussions to other national contexts, particularly in the Atlantic region under British influence.

**'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Popular Front Retreat and the 1937 "Parsley Massacre"'**

*Margaret Stevens* (Essex County College)

A truth little known and even less understood is that some of the most significant victories and also setbacks in the past century made by Black people in the struggle against racial oppression developed within the context of the global Communist movement. Black working people in the Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean islands as well as Communist hubs of operation in New York City and Mexico were central to this radical process—at once local, hemispheric and indeed global in its force and magnitude. We are indebted to scholars of twentieth-century Black radicalism and Communist history who have widely documented how Western metropolises such as Paris, London and New York City were international centers of operation for Communist praxis that addressed questions of anti-colonialism and the fight against racism. As a student of this history, however, I found that insufficient attention was being paid to the ways in which the Communist movement related to people based out of epicenters in Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, British Guiana and even Mexico. Therefore, I intend to present a paper that places the 1935 "Popular Front Against Fascism" in the specific context of US-Cuban-Haitian collaborative Communist-led activity and the subsequent 1937 genocide of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic. In the wake of the 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution,

I aim to outline the strengths and weakness of one moment in Communist anti-fascist strategy in light of our own current historical period as leftists assess proto-fascist populism in the United States and anti-immigrant hegemony across Europe.

## **Panel 6 - Black Europe**

### **“No More Slaves!” Lamine Senghor (1889-1927) and the Fusion of Pan-Africanism and Marxism in Interwar France’**

*David Murphy (Stirling)*

To speak of a ‘Black France’ in the interwar period still typically involves accounts of jazz, Josephine Baker and the *vogue nègre* of the 1920s or the birth of Negritude in the 1930s. Over the past three decades, however, groundbreaking research has uncovered the writings and activism of a hitherto largely forgotten group of black militants from the 1920s who sought to fuse Pan-Africanist and Marxist thought. This paper will examine one of the most important but still curiously neglected figures of this period, Lamine Senghor, a decorated Senegalese veteran of the First World War. Senghor emerged in the mid-1920s and, for a few short years (he died of TB in November 1927), he was perhaps the best-known and most influential black anti-colonial activist of his time. In his writings and activism, Senghor combined a communist-inspired critique of empire with an attempt to forge a shared sense of black identity across disparate groups both within France and more globally. My paper will chart the trajectory of Senghor’s brief career as an activist, tracing the ways in which issues of race and class were consistently intertwined. It will focus in particular on his success at the inaugural meeting of the League against Imperialism (LAI) in Brussels in February 1927: Senghor’s speech—in which he used slavery as a key trope linking black and working-class experience—was widely greeted as one of the highlights of the Congress, translated almost immediately into English and published in the United States.

### **“The Stories of Lenin and Trotsky Must Have Their African Counterparts”: The International African Service Bureau, the Russian Revolution, and the Soviet Union of the 1930s and 1940s’**

*Theo Williams (King’s College London)*

The title of this paper derives from Ras Makonnen, a leading member of the London-based International African Service Bureau (IASB), recalling his reaction to the 1935-36 Italo-Abyssinian War. There is a tension here; Makonnen acknowledges Bolshevik inspiration, but also concludes that Africa must emancipate itself rather than look to Europe. This reflected a broader disillusionment with European socialism experienced by many black radicals in the 1930s. This paper will explore the ways in which the Bolshevik Revolution was engaged with as a model for pan-African revolution by members of the IASB, including Makonnen, C.L.R. James, and George Padmore. James in *The Black Jacobins* (1938) compared and contrasted his protagonist, Toussaint L’Ouverture, with Lenin in a cautionary tale of revolutionary leadership. Padmore, in his oft-overlooked *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire* (1946) suggested a postcolonial British Commonwealth based on Lenin’s theses on the national and colonial questions. The Leninism of James and Padmore can be contrasted with Makonnen’s more eclectic political philosophy; in the unabridged version of the aforementioned quotation, Makonnen also listed Sun Yat-sen as a possible inspiration. Members of the IASB also held contrasting views about the Soviet Union of the 1930s and

1940s. While all were critical of the Comintern's Popular Front and its implications for anti-colonial work, James's Trotskyist critiques of the Soviet Union's domestic politics were not shared by Padmore. Importantly, in these critiques the Soviet Union's foreign policy was often framed as an aberration from Leninism, as pan-Africanists claimed to uphold the Bolshevik legacy.

### **'European Marxist or Black Intellectual?: C.L.R. James and the Advancement of Marxism Beyond its Leninist-Russian Expression'**

*Tennyson Joseph (UWI-Cave Hill)*

Caribbean intellectual C. L. R. James has made a distinct contribution to global Marxist thought through his insightful analysis of the organisational imperatives for revolutionary change beyond the Vanguard Party model offered by V.I. Lenin. Indeed, in the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of spontaneous mass movements independent of centrally organised vanguardist leaders has concretely actualised James' reflections. Yet, despite the contemporary validity of his perspectives, James has been largely assessed as being more relevant to the radical politics of the advanced capitalist regions of Europe, than to the small Caribbean states in the black Atlantic. Whilst James is acknowledged as a foremost pan-Africanist, his "pan-Africanism" is often treated as being separate from his Marxism. With the exception of the reviews of his "Revolutionary Answer to the Negro problem in the USA", very few writers see his theoretical reflections on Marxist organisation as being linked to the possibilities of pan-African liberation. This paper seeks to highlight the analytical link between C. L. R. James' pan-Africanism and his Marxism. It seeks to resolve tensions between race and class, and Marxism and pan-Africanism, in an effort to dissolve the lingering questions about the applicability of Marxism to the black revolutionary politics in the Twenty-first century.

## **Panel 7 – Black Activism in the Americas**

### **'Sandalio Junco and "The Negro Question" in Latin America'**

*Anne Garland Mahler (University of Virginia)*

This study examines the work of an understudied Afro-Latin American intellectual who made a significant contribution to theorizing the role of black labor within international communist organizing. Many studies of the relationship between communism and black Americans in the 1920s-1930s focus on Claude McKay and Otto Huiswoud's presentation of the "Thesis on the Negro Question," the Scottsboro Boys case, and the Black Belt Thesis in the U.S. South. However, the role of this particular debate in shaping Latin American political thought has gone largely unrecognized.

At the First Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires in June 1929, "the Negro Question" became a topic of heated disagreement and was especially employed in discussions of self-determination for indigenous communities. The well-known Peruvian *indigenista* philosopher, José Carlos Mariátegui, composed a position paper on "The Problem of Race in Latin America" to be read at the conference by his chosen representative, Dr. Hugo Pesce (the Peruvian physician who later introduced Che Guevara to Marxism). While Mariátegui's contributions to "the Indigenous Question" in this speech are widely recognized, there was another participant at this conference, Afro-Cuban Sandalio Junco, who disagreed strongly with many of the participants' dismissal of the presence of racial discrimination among the working classes and who clashed in general with the Comintern's class-over-race position. The analysis of his comments at the conference, as well as his speech "The Problem

of the Negro and the Proletarian Movement,” will be the focus of this paper, calling attention to Sandalio Junco, assassinated in 1942, as a central figure of black radical thought whose work continues to resonate in debates around race and class that shape social organizing today.

### **‘Wilfred Domingo under Investigation’**

*Peter Hulme (Essex)*

In June 1919, agents of the Lusk Committee raided the Rand School of Social Science in New York and seized material suspected of encouraging sedition. The committee published its report under the title *Revolutionary Radicalism: Its history, purpose and tactics. With an exposition and discussion of the steps being taken and required to curb it*. One of the principal figures fingered was the Jamaican, Wilfred Domingo.

Domingo is an interesting figure with respect to the themes of this conference. Born in 1889, he worked as an apprentice tailor, meeting Marcus Garvey in the National Club in Kingston. Preceding Garvey to New York, in 1910, Domingo helped get him established and worked as an editor on Garvey’s newspaper, *Negro World*, although Domingo’s socialism eventually ensured a split. In the following years, Domingo consistently wrote for and participated in various groups and journals without getting entirely tied to a single position. He was more successful than many, if not all, his contemporaries in balancing the red with the black. After the difficult years of the Depression, and with the hardening of political positions within the socialist block, Domingo committed himself to the nationalist cause, becoming one of the founders of the Jamaica Progressive League in New York in 1936 and one of the shapers of the People’s National Party back in Jamaica in 1938. This paper attempts to situate Domingo with respect to the movements and issues with which he was engaged in New York in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution.

### **‘Cyril Briggs, the African Blood Brotherhood and Revolution in the *Crusader*’**

*Jak Peake (Essex)*

In the wake of the Russian Revolution, Cyril Briggs founded the journal *Crusader* in 1918 and, a year later, the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), an organization closely linked with the Communist Party of America (CPUSA)—often seen as a black ‘wing’ of the party. Galvanized by the Russian Revolution, as Briggs’s editorials demonstrated, Briggs devoted himself to both international communism and international black liberation.

Briggs attempted to sustain a balance between his ‘black’ and ‘red’ activism. While he sought to influence Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association and hoped to federate all black organizations, he and fellow ABB member Otto Huiswoud pushed the CPUSA to consider the plight of the African diaspora. His views concerning black liberation became increasingly militant, peaking around the 1921 Tulsa race riot, earning him the especial attention of the Bureau of Investigation which classified the ABB “entirely radical”. In 1939 the CPUSA expelled Briggs for his support of black nationalism, though he would rejoin the party some nine years later.

This paper focuses on Briggs’s writing and activism in the years following the Russian Revolution and examines how the Revolution’s aims—the establishment of a socialist state within Russia, but also abroad—could be seen as a guiding force in Briggs’s writing and the *Crusader*’s output. It also aims to demonstrate how the Russian Revolution inflected the magazine’s ‘revolutionary’ writing on topics ranging from the Mexican Revolution to fictional ‘world’ or Caribbean revolutions.

### **‘Grace P. Campbell’s “An Analysis of the Negro Question in the U.S.A”’**

*Lydia Lindsey* (North Carolina)

In 1928, Grace P. Campbell as a member of the America Negro Labor Congress (ANLC), wrote “An analysis of the Negro Question in the U.S.A.” for the Negro Committee of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) in response to Communist Sixth World Congress” the Black Belt Thesis. Campbell was a “race woman” who stood with one foot in the Progressive Era and the other in the bosom of the black militant Left. She is a vital link between the reformist movement of the nineteenth-century and the emergence of the radical black Left within the “new Negro movement” in the twentieth-century. Campbell was active in racial uplift charity work and the only female founder of the African Black Brotherhood (ABB) and in 1922, she became a member of the Workers’ Party. Campbell’s presence can be traced throughout the Left New Negro Movement of the twentieth-century, but her voice on the Left is often muted because she did not leave a plethora of writings; so, this particular précis allows us to hear her voice. It is a rare find. The significance of Campbell’s “An analysis of the Negro Question in the U.S.A” is fivefold: (1) it provides an assessment of the social, political, and economic struggle of African Americans for equality and dignity based on the most recent contemporaneous literature that mirrors aspects of her life and her family’s trajectory within the Negro Question, (2) it places a great significance on the intent and shortcomings of the Emancipation Proclamation and Reconstruction that were embedded in the Negro Question; (3) it offers a response to the Communist International (CI) proclamation of the Black Belt Theory; (4) it was written a few months before she left the Communist Party in the midst of a factional struggle spearheaded by black male comrades; and, (5) it is an early account of a black female’s position on the Negro Question, most early accounts were written by men. In her analysis, she concluded that “On the whole, the negro of America is among the most oppressed groups in the world.”

## **Panel 8 – Black America**

### **“The Negro Question” – Marxism, Bolshevism and Black Internationalism’**

Jonathan Ellis

“The Negro Question” has been and is still central to those who consider themselves revolutionary socialists. Various socialists have dealt with the question in a variety of ways. The Bolshevik Party, and its lead intellectual and political leader Vladimir Lenin, sought to unite the working class across national and racial lines in a unified movement against capitalism. Many early socialists in America either ignored the specific oppression of Black people under capitalism or allowed explicit white supremacy to exist within their circles. Early Black socialists who were alienated from white socialist circles in America were attracted to the Bolsheviks because of their insistence on racism being a central fight to the goal of international socialism. Black American and Caribbean socialists Claude McKay, Cyril Briggs, and Harry Haywood influenced American and Russian socialists ideas on the “Negro Question.”

Despite a rough start, the Communist Party USA was able to attract working class African Americans to its organization because of its radical stance on the “Negro” question. Their theory allowed them to seriously try and organize Black workers not only against their bosses but against racist terror in the Jim Crow south as well. This paper will explore how the “Negro question” allowed the Communist Party to become serious fighters for Black Liberation in the American south throughout the 1930s.

### **‘The National Negro Congress’**

*Clayton Vaughn-Roberson* (Carnegie Mellon University)

This paper examines the local and transnational dimensions of the National Negro Congress (NNC) in Philadelphia during the period of the Popular Front. Under the leadership of Benjamin DeWayne Amis, a member of the Communist Party, the NNC's Philadelphia branch drew strong connections between the socioeconomic conditions of black Americans under Jim Crow and the experiences of Africans and European Jews under colonialism and fascism. Racial activists articulated these connections through newspapers, conferences, speeches, and grassroots activism. This paper focuses on two questions: how did the NNC pioneer a global identity for American blacks and create solidarities with European Jews and colonized people worldwide, and how did these solidarities in turn influence its local activism in Philadelphia. Amis' life and writing reveals the role of African Americans in the Popular Front as well as the overlapping diasporic anti-fascist struggles among Africans, black Americans, and European Jews. By examining the personal papers of Amis as well as the NNC records, this paper will shed light on the dynamic geo-political and socio-economic conditions that shaped the interwar civil rights movement. Positioned at the juncture between the local and transnational, African American anti-fascism raises challenging questions about how American historians conceptualize significant intersectionalities such as race and class, and Pan-Africanism and communism.

**'World Revolution and Slave Studies'**

*Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie* (Howard University)

This talk addresses the following question: what impact did the 1917 Russian Revolution have on existing historical scholarship concerning slavery and emancipation and what were its consequences? Until then, most scholars argued that New World slaves were largely docile and content, emancipation was primarily a pious act initiated by benevolent white leaders, and people of African descent made no contribution toward world history. Between the mid-1930s and mid-1940s, these established arguments were robustly refuted by a remarkable scholarship including W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935), C. L. R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938), John C. Carroll's *Slave Insurrections in the United States, 1800-1860* (1939), Melville J. Herskovits' *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), R. A. & A. H. Baur's "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *Journal of Negro History* (1942), Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943), and Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Rather than being docile and quiescent, slaves fought, resisted, and sometimes overcame slave systems. Abolition was less a gift from above and more the outcome of economic contradictions as well as slave resistance in the Caribbean as well as the United States. Rather than people without history, slaves and freed-people played a vital role in the making of the modern world. I argue that this critical scholarship drew from communist ideas of world revolution propagated after 1917 that found fruitful soil in two decades of economic depression, state fascism, anti-colonial political mobilization, and World War. Moreover, this activist and revolutionary historical scholarship impacted existing struggles for a better world in Africa, the Caribbean, and beyond. This intellectual and political scaffolding proved remarkably resilient through the late twentieth century eventually succumbing to post-modernist historiography, the transatlantic turn, and nationalisms.

**Panel 9 – Soviet Russia**

**'Blackness the Color of Red: Negotiating Race at the U.S. Legation in Riga, Latvia, 1924-1934'**

*Maxim Matusevich* (Seton Hall University)

This paper draws on the archival records of the United States Consulate in Riga, Latvia, during the interwar period to reconstruct the rites of passage by African American citizens of the United States traveling to a from the Soviet Union. In the absence of established diplomatic relations between the US and the USSR (until 1933), the US diplomatic legation in Riga served as a popular entry point for American tourists and contract workers attracted by the mystique and job opportunities of the first socialist state. During the interwar period, the USSR was visited by hundreds if not thousands of American travelers - an assortment of leftists, adventurers, businessmen, intellectuals, and job seekers. Among this motley crew of sojourners we find a number of African Americans, whose motives for travel to Soviet Russia frequently differed from those driving their white compatriots. Ever since the bard of the Harlem Renaissance Claude McKay arrived in Petrograd as an honorary guest of a Comintern Congress in 1922, many black Americans, especially the educated urban elite, developed a fascination with the multiethnic and ostensibly colorblind Soviet experiment of fashioning a new social order. Among those who decided to gain a first-hand experience of a society which eschewed racism as a matter of policy and state ideology were not just such luminaries as McKay, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson, or such ideologues as Harry Haywood and William Patterson but also dozens of lesser known (or completely unknown) personalities – factory workers and middle class professionals, journalists and writers, actors and athletes. In fact, most of them remained rather oblivious to the Communist ideology per se, but all appeared to have been intrigued by its promise of a colorblind utopia. The consular records of the American legation in Riga contain a wealth of data related to some of these travels. In the course of formal interviews with consular officials, American citizens, including the minority of black visitors, revealed remarkable details of their Soviet odysseys. For obvious reasons, African Americans proved to be particularly attuned to the “race question” in the Soviet Union. Importantly, they tended to interpret race relations in the “land of the Bolsheviks” by referencing the conditions obtained back home. And the comparison was usually not in the United States’ favor. The tone of many of these consular interviews is indicative of a degree of mutual suspicion and, in some cases, even outright hostility palpably present between the black interviewees and the white legation officers. The archival records bring to life a unique story of “race tourism” by African Americans to the first socialist state and thus provide a rare insight into the early Soviet society and its accepted attitudes toward racial difference; and such accounts are usually juxtaposed with an eviscerating critique of North American and Western racism during the interwar period.

### **‘I’ve Known Revolutions: Langston Hughes on Mexico and Russia’**

*William Booth* (Oxford)

The poet and author Langston Hughes (1902-67) spent parts of his youth in Mexico where his father lived. Two extended trips towards the end of Mexico’s revolutionary decade (1910-20) afforded Hughes a close view of the process, though compared to other subjects his writings on politics at this stage were fairly minimal. Meanwhile, he was showing signs of interest and engagement with the Bolshevik Revolution. The paper will examine Hughes’ contemporary observations of the Mexican Revolution alongside his earliest comments on that of Russia. Using travel journals, autobiography, letters, short stories and anthropological sketches, the paper suggests that Hughes’ early writings foreshadow his later explorations of cosmopolitanism, communism, anti-imperialism and black identity but also contain tensions and contradictions. This paper forms part of a wider project undertaken jointly by the author and Nick Grant (UEA) entitled ‘Langston Hughes in Mexico’.

### **‘The New Negro and the New Soviet Man’**

*Jermaine Demetrius Lloyd* (Yale)

The story of African Americans in the Soviet Union began with ideas of a New Negro and a New Soviet Man. I use an interdisciplinary methodology, archival findings, existing scholarship, literature, and film to show how black Americans and Soviets incorporated these tropes to craft radical identities through socio-political and philosophical routes.

This paper examines how the Russian intelligentsia was born within the contexts of the Decembrist Revolt, the end of serfdom, and the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, part of which became the Bolsheviks. Likewise, the idea of the New Negro in black political thought was shaped by emancipation, the old Negro/New Negro debate, Garveyism, perennial lynching and disfranchisement, and fighting overseas.

World War I midwifed both the New Negro and the New Soviet Man. In that period, the Bolsheviks seized control of the crumbling Russian empire, while black Americans returned from Europe infused with international racial solidarity. The soldiers stepped into a Harlem Renaissance stewing with pan-Africanism and communism. Galvanized, the more radical New Negroes ventured to the Soviet Union.

In the USSR, the New Soviet Man emerged as an esteemed figure. Debates over race, gender, class, national ethnicity, culture, art, and *byt* (life style) informed this image. Simultaneously, the New Negro became a model of black masculinity, and African American residents in the USSR adopted aspects of both identities. They eschewed servility, celebrated blackness, and related their cultural production to politics.

### **Panel 10 – The Caribbean**

#### **‘The Cosmic, Protean, Androgynous God in *Las metamorfosis de Makandal*’**

*Ines Prosdocimi* (University of Maryland)

Hispaniola’s story is often told through the fatal-conflict narrative which reduces Haitian-Dominican relations to an unending cockfight. This narrative paints the D.R. and Haiti as two nations (1) fated to be foreign archenemies; (2) destined to be in total conflict; and (3) whose fight for Hispaniola is fatal and for the preservation of their respective cultures. My paper affirms that an exploration of the maroon in literature can be a means to challenging the fatal-conflict narrative and acknowledging the too-often-repressed historical, political, and cultural connections between Haiti and the D.R. My method of tracing the maroon in literature is influenced by Cedric Robinson’s examination and tracking of the Black Radical Tradition (i.e. the evolving resistance of African people to oppression). Robinson highlights the limits of Marxist theory; not only did Marxism’s theory of historical materialism emerge from the middle class, rather than the proletariat, but its nationalism (specifically German nationalism) at times undermined its goal to achieve multinational working-class solidarity, hindering its applicability in the non-Western world. He argues that Marxism, as a Western construction, does not view Africans and the Black Diaspora as agents of change and resistance, or understand their struggles for freedom. Marx assigned slavery to “primitive accumulation,” an earlier stage of economic development. Yet, he did not “realize” that enslaved individuals possessed and preserved African cultures, cosmology, languages, belief sets, and a tradition of resistance. By confuting Western tradition, examining its silences and revisions, the suppressed Black Radical Tradition emerges; it can be found in works by African American writers who engaged and challenged Marxism, and in the presence of maroon communities throughout the Americas.

The Black Radical Tradition challenges the fatal-conflict narrative and disturbs the Dominican state because it acknowledges a shared history of resistance, cross pollination, and moments of collaboration between Haiti and the D.R. Additionally, it changes the way the island has been conceived by the Dominican letrado (i.e. writers from the post-independence period). My paper extends and contributes to existing scholarship by uncovering instances of cooperation and/or collaboration that suggest alternative views of the island and complicate contemporary political and social realities in the D.R. I focus on Manuel Rueda's *Las metamorfosis de Makandal* (1998), where François Makandal is a protean figure that undoes the fatal-conflict model, and an agent of change that anchors the island in the Black Radical Tradition. I argue that *pluralismo*, evident in Rueda's text, is an avenue (in addition to Marxism and surrealism) that enables a writer to engage and/or practice the Black Radical Tradition. In Rueda's text the maroon becomes a shared figure of resistance between Hispaniola's two nations. Rueda implores us to see the maroon as a central figure in the story of the island and for the poet, as well as a figure of aesthetic possibilities and boundless exploration, challenging the hegemonic conception of freedom. Importantly, Rueda creates a cosmic Makandal, unhindered by racial or gender constructs, by space or time, embodying all those elements within and surrounding the island.

### **'Firebrands, Trade Unionists, and Marxists: The Russian Revolution and the Emergence of the Left in Guyana, 1917-1956'**

*Nigel Westmaas* (Hamilton College)

British Guiana (Guyana), like elsewhere in the Black Atlantic felt the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The rise of the Left in Guyana in the period was initially marked by the work of trade unionists like Hubert Critchlow and others. On his return to Guyana from a visit to Soviet Russia in 1931 Critchlow is reported to be the first individual to introduce the term "comrade" to the colony and uphold the Red symbols in May Day marches. Individual firebrands, some of whom hailed from the local chapter of the African Blood Brotherhood, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and other organisations were active as an emergent black nationalism. By the late 1940s, the nascent nationalist, Marxist influenced movement had developed in Guyana.

The story of the left's role in the movements for change in the colony is conveniently identified in three periods: before the Russian Revolution; between 1917 and the Second World War, and from the immediate post-war period to 1956. The negative fall-out of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 appeared to close a chapter in the already fragmented leftist movement, after the left of centre government had collapsed under the weight of British colonial repression.

This paper explores the largely unrecorded contribution of the early radical movements their varied ideological outlooks, and potential collective influence on the development, by the 1950s, of a popular national party, the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) with its Marxist and anti-colonial orientation.

### **'From the Russian Revolution to the Cuban Revolution'**

*Steve Cushion*

The Cuban Communist Party was the most significant response to the Russian Revolution in the Caribbean. It also provided an organisational home for a many Afro-Cuban working class militants. So, when the communist party set up the Cuban trade union federation in 1939, three of its principal leaders were of African heritage: Lázaro Peña, Jesús Menéndez and Aracelio Iglesias. Later, in 1956, Juan Taqdechel, the black communist leader of the Santiago stevedores, organised a dock strike in support of a rebel uprising in the city. But the role of

Afro-Cuban workers goes well beyond such exceptional leaders and we find their contribution to revolutionary politics at all levels of the movement. The sugar workers' "soviets" of 1933 are just one example of the legacy of 1917 in Cuba.

Many West Indian immigrants in Cuba also joined the communist party and this militant organisational experience would be a factor in the Labour Rebellions of 1930s. Hugh Buchanan, "the first Jamaican Marxist," had close contacts with the party when he worked in Cuba in the 1920s.

Recent research shows that the working class played a much more decisive role in the outcome of the Cuban Revolution than was previously understood. But if the working class role has been hidden from history, the revolutionary activity of Afro-Cuban workers has been doubly obscured. This paper will trace the history of the Afro-Cuban relationship with communism from the party's foundation through to the rebel triumph - from the Russian Revolution to the Cuban Revolution.

## **Panel 11 – Raya Dunayevskaya**

### **'Biography of a Revolutionary Thinker and Activist'**

*Floyd Codlin*

Raya Dunayevskaya was born in 1910 in the Ukraine, which was then part of the Tsarist Russian Empire. She was Jewish at a time when Jews experienced widespread discrimination and persecution. Her family fled the Ukraine in 1918, displaced by the turmoil of the Civil War that followed the Russian Revolution. They ended up settling in Chicago in 1922, only three years after the urban uprising by African-Americans in 1919. From her early teens through to her final years she was involved in both the Marxist and Black liberation movements. This paper provides a biographical account of her involvement in both of those movements – from the 1920s through to the 1980s. The paper will cover her involvement in revolutionary Marxist politics – from her work with Trotsky in the 1930s and her involvement (with C.L.R James) in the Johnson-Forest Tendency, through her eventual break with Trotskyism and her founding of Marxist-Humanism in the 1950s. It will also cover her parallel involvement in the politics of Black liberation – from her early involvement in the American Negro Labor Congress in the 1920s, through the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, her dialogue with African revolutionaries in the 1960s and her work with Black feminists, in the 1980s. The paper will provide the wider context for the two other papers on the panel.

### **'Raya Dunayevskaya's Philosophical Break with C. L. R. James (and Grace Lee)'**

*Chris Gilligan*

C.L.R. James (J.R. Johnson) and Raya Dunayevskaya (Freddie Forest) formed the Johnson-Forest Tendency (JFT) in the American Trotskyist movement in the 1940s. The JFT (which also included Grace Lee) split from Trotskyism in 1950 and went on to form Committees of Correspondence in 1951. Dunayevskaya subsequently split from James and Lee and formed News and Letters Committees (NLC) in 1955. This paper examines the philosophical basis for the split between Dunayevskaya and her co-collaborators in the JFT. It does so through a detailed examination of letters exchanged between Dunayevskaya, James and Lee between February 1949 and May 1953. The letters were written against the backdrop of the Stalinist domination of worldwide communism, the emergence of anti-colonial freedom movements in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, the JFT battles within the American Trotskyist movement,

the JFT's activity around the US miners' General Strike against automation (1949-1950), and the early years of McCarthyism. The letters centred on Lenin's *Notebooks on Hegel's Science of Logic* and Dunayevskaya's reading of Hegelian dialectics. It was through these discussions that Dunayevskaya came to her understanding of Marxist dialectics as involving a two-way movement from theory to practice and from practice to theory, in which the movement from practice is understood as itself a form of theory. The paper will examine the differences between Dunayevskaya's understanding of Hegel and that of James and Lee, and, in particular, its implications for revolutionary organisation.

### **'Raya Dunayevskaya's Concept of Black Masses as Vanguard of the American Revolution'**

*Nigel Niles*

This paper outlines and explains *American Civilisation on Trial* (ACOT), Raya Dunayevskaya's key text on the Black struggle in the USA. In ACOT (1963) she shows how, when Black movements and workers' movements joined forces, great leaps were made in the struggle for freedom: from the struggle against slavery in the early 1800s through to the freedom movement of the civil rights Era in the 1950s and 1960s.

The paper examines Dunayevskaya's approach to the Black freedom struggle through an explication of three key concepts that are central to ACOT; the Black masses as Force and Reason; multiple forces of revolution, and; the Black masses as vanguard. In taking about the Black masses as both Force and Reason Dunayevskaya challenges both the idea of Black slaves, sharecroppers and later, workers, as cowed and passive, and the idea that they were politically backward. Her concept of multiple forces of revolution broke with the Left idea that national liberation struggles had to subordinate themselves to 'workers' struggles, and specifically, that African-Americans had to wait until 'after the revolution' for their rights and liberty. For Dunayevskaya, both the class struggle and the struggle against racial oppression are different aspects of the struggle for humanity to become fully human, and they inform and encourage each other. Her concept of Black masses as vanguard makes the case for viewing the Black masses as a leading driver of revolutionary struggles in US history.

## **Panel 12 – Africa Rising II**

### **'Decolonization and the Cold War: African Student Elites in the USSR during the Khrushchev Era'**

*Harold D. Weaver* (Harvard)

This presentation focuses on African students in Moscow during early decolonization and the Cold War. Three major questions:

1. What were Africans seeking in the USSR that they could not find in their respective countries?
2. What did they actually discover during their sojourns in the USSR?
3. What was the importance of the Soviet Union to Africans in their respective struggles for decolonization (cultural, economic, and political) and dignity and respect?

For the African students' section, we will draw upon our primary methodology of direct field experiences in Moscow during the Khrushchev era, as well as some follow-up interviews in Tanzania, Paris, and elsewhere. Our research on African students is unique for several reasons: (1) our field-research methodology (participant observation and interviews), (2) our

point of view (Edward Said's "cultural empathy" in contrast to the antipathy of many other scholar, (3) our focus on transnational actors (not international actors), and (4) our findings related to (a) innovative recruitment and selection, (b) their socialization in the USSR, and (c) their curricula related to African needs and priorities as defined by African scholars and political leaders.

### **“People’s Friendship” in the Cold War: African Students at Moscow’s Patrice Lumumba People’s Friendship University’**

*Rachel Rubin* (University of Massachusetts Boston)

This paper explores the role of the Patrice Lumumba People’s Friendship University in Moscow (PLPFU) in shaping both individuals and governments in post-colonial Africa. Founded in 1960, its stated objective was to provide higher education for the developing world. Its opening followed important global shifts—collapse of European empires, the assassination of Lumumba, geopolitical fallout from World War II—but coexisted with (and participated in) others—especially decolonization movements, Arab-Israel conflicts, and Cold War activities in the US and USSR.

PLPFU gathered future leaders from various newly-independent African countries. For many, it was one of the only avenues for post-secondary education available, along with the U.S.’s HBCUs (a fascinating parallel). Jeff Radebe, South Africa’s Minister of Public Enterprises, recently commented, “Hundreds of young South Africans found here the education they were denied in their own homeland.”

Observers in the U.S quickly began to refer to PLPFU as a site of Communist indoctrination and a training-ground for terrorists; its symbolic connection with Lumumba was invoked (in racialized language) as evidence of this. Time magazine scoffed that “Four years after his death, a lot of people talk as though Patrice Lumumba were still the Congo” and moved on to list PLPFU as producing “terrorists” and “agitators” who are “invoking Lumumba’s name” with its “rhythm of jungle drums.” Thus, I explore PLPFU’s operation as a nexus of interaction among the various African countries whose students traveled there, the USSR as host and “instructor,” and the global vision of the U.S. and its allies.

## **Panel 13 - Hegel / Marx / Lenin**

### **‘Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire and Its Appropriation by Caribbean Black Atlantic Intellectuals’**

*Raphael Hoermann* (UCLan)

This paper wants to illustrate how Marx’s essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) has become a key intertext for anti-colonial Marxist Black Atlantic intellectuals from the Caribbean, such as C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. At first glance, it seems astonishing that a text that is deeply Eurocentric and in one passage even racially caricatures the contemporary Haitian Emperor Faustin I. should be appropriated by these staunchly anti-racist activists. However, it seems partly Marx’s trenchant analysis of the social deep-structures that underpin revolutionary and counter-revolutionary change that

allowed an anti-colonial Marxist appropriation. With the addition of race to the equation, they were able to forge analytical approaches that have been able to capture more minutely the dialectics of race and class in a colonial context. Besides Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930), Marx's *Brumaire* forms a key intertext for James' history of the Haitian Revolution *The Black Jacobins* (1938/63). He not only applies it to the analysis of the colonial class-race-nexus but also appropriates Marx's 'Poetics of Revolution' to forge his own poetics of anti-colonial revolution. In his anti-colonial Marxist manifesto *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) Césaire applies Marx's analysis of proto-fascism to European colonialism. As he contends, colonialism equals fascism committed against non-Europeans. Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) transforms Marx's exhortation to develop a novel 'poesy' for the future proletarian revolution into a clarion call to revolt against the psychopathology of racism. To borrow Marx's famous dictum from *The Brumaire*, this racist-pathological "tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," as Fanon forcefully demonstrates.

### **'Black Hegelian Radicals: Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes'**

*Bryan Banker* (Amerika-Institut Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

Cedric Robinson posits in his seminal work, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, that contemporary philosophical and cultural analyses tend to assume European models or standards of history and experience which neglect the significance of African and African diasporic schools of thought, history and culture. Following Robinson's intellectual move, this presentation suggests a similar need to decentralize Hegelianism from its European context in order to highlight African men and women in the Americas, who as agents of change and resistance, actually lived through what Hegel described as the long suffering "labor of the negative." Built upon the foundations laid by Black intellectuals W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James, Black Hegelianism repurposes Hegelian concepts of freedom, slavery, consciousness, and recognition within a Black theoretical and cultural framework, in order to examine all the unique experiences of African diasporic groups in the Americas. Investigating people who endured Hegelian dialectical notions of self-externality and otherness, in order to achieve a "certainty of being for themselves" – borrowing Hegel's own words – assists in a deeper understanding of African diasporic resistance to hegemonic oppression across the globe. This presentation will briefly trace the transnational origins of Black Hegelianism and underscore the position of past Black Hegelian intellectual artists such as Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes in transnational resistance movements across the Atlantic. In doing so, the paper aims to highlight the importance of dialectically-thinking artists who opposed the racial discrimination, injustice, and economic inequality visible on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **'Distended Marxism: Frantz Fanon, the Comintern, and Dialectical Methodology in Marxist Pan-Africanism'**

*Cosmo Pappas*

I will first analyze the dialectical methodology of Fanon. Arguing that Fanon forges a "general theory of decolonization" based on a unity of economic analysis and the phenomenology of race, I will also point out the ways in which Fanon complicates this theory in an attempt to bridge the gap of universal and particular. More specifically, Fanon is able to show that race is the lived modality of class under imperialist capitalism through an analysis of the corporeal and psychological violence of colonialism, and he also works to incorporate gender into his analysis. Fanon is aware in his writing outside of *Wretched of the Earth* that gendered sexual violence is a constituent element of colonialism, yet he meets trouble in

developing a “general theory of decolonization.” He describes colonialism, metaphorically, as a form of sexual exploitation of people living under colonialism, but this does not incorporate the specific attention he directs toward the use of sexual violence as a political weapon by the colonial authorities, particularly by the French colonial administration toward women militants of the FLN. Drawing on a black feminist as well as Marxist analysis, I argue that Fanon described an incomplete dialectic of (anti)colonial violence which, ultimately, left gender liberation as much left behind as a living possibility. I then investigate Fanon’s relationship with Comintern anticolonial policy, comparing Fanon’s analysis with the language of Soviet Marxist analysis of colonialism to understand the relationship between socialist revolution as understood in Comintern policy with gender and racial liberation.

### **Panel 14 - C.L.R. James / Linton Kwesi Johnson / Amiri Baraka**

**“It was almost as if Lenin had had Trotsky shot for taking the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie”: C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins* and the Universality of Revolution’**

*Philip Kaisary* (Carleton University)

In *Black Marxism* (1983), Cedric Robinson argued that in his historical masterpiece, *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James “framed the Haitian Revolution against the Bolshevik model”.<sup>1</sup> This paper will undertake a close reading of James’s comparative analysis of the Russian and Haitian revolutions in *The Black Jacobins* to test this particular argument of Robinson’s. In addition, a critique of Robinson’s claim for the centrality of 1917 to James’s masterpiece will serve as a point of departure for a re-examination of the theory of world revolution that undergirds James’s text – an analytical endeavor that also impinges on recent scholarship on the ‘universalism’ of *The Black Jacobins*.<sup>2</sup> James certainly connected the revolutionary events in Saint Domingue of 1791–1804 to the Russian Revolution (as well as, inevitably of course, the French Revolution) but also, in the appendix essay to the 1963 second edition, to the Cuban Revolution of 1958. There, James argued that, “What took place in French San Domingo in 1792–1804 reappeared in Cuba in 1958.”<sup>3</sup> Insisting that in placing these two world historical revolutions side by side he was not using them merely as convenient bookends of an epoch of Caribbean history, James argued that these two events shared key structural commonalities. This paper will therefore offer a critical exploration of the multiple (and overlapping) historic, theoretic, and analytic frames in which James located the Haitian Revolution.

1 C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Vintage, 1963).

2 See, for example: David Scott, “The Theory of Haiti: The Black Jacobins and the Poetics of Universal History” and Nick Nesbitt, “Fragments of a Universal History: Global Capital, Mass Revolution, and the Idea of Equality in *The Black Jacobins*,” both in *The Black Jacobins Reader* edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

3 Ibid. 391.

**‘The Unfinished Revolution: Linton Kwesi Johnson, C.L.R. James, and the new Socialism’**

*David Austin* (John Abbott College)

Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ) is widely known as a (dub) poet and one of the most important poetic voices of dissent of our time – the “political poet par excellence,” a title he once

bestowed upon the celebrated Guyanese poet Martin Carter. But what is perhaps less widely acknowledged is the philosophical and political underpinnings of his poetry, the sense of dialectical movement and possibility that is tied to the work of the late Marxist theorist C.L.R. James. The poet describes James's *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* as a central book for him in terms of understanding the nature of socialist and working class struggle. The dialogue between James and Johnson is evident in the poems "Di Good Life," which is dedicated to James, and "Reggae fi Radni," an elegy for the Guyanese historian and political activist, Walter Rodney. In these two poems we witness a synthesis of Johnson's political-poetics and James's poetic-politics, the combination of which produces a political aesthetic of human possibilities in the light of the collapse of the Socialist Bloc and the death of Rodney, carried out in a manner that is characteristic of Martin Heidegger's idea that the poem reveals or brings into the open the unconcealed.

### **"Hard Facts": Amiri Baraka and Marxism-Leninism in the 1970s'**

*David Grundy* (Cambridge)

Previous critical discussions of Amiri Baraka have focused almost exclusively on the poetic and political work which predates his 'conversion' to Marxism-Leninism in 1974. Yet Baraka's Marxist period, which lasted the majority of his career, was neither an aberration nor a footnote. Baraka did not simply fade away into obscurity once he became a Marxist; rather, he produced a large body of work that deserves re-assessment, looking to the examples of Bolshevism and Maoism in order to build a viable mass politics and mass art. In this paper, I will examine Baraka's collections *Hard Facts* and *Poetry for the Advanced*, published in 1975 and 1979 respectively. While often dismissed as 'dogmatic' and 'sloganeering', I will argue that these collections combine the polemic-prosaic with a "lyric necessity" that never left Baraka. Baraka here shows himself to be a mature poet, drawing on the tradition of American socialist poetry – in particular, that of Langston Hughes – illuminating debates on the American left in a decade of increasing political fracture, and writing poems of absolute commitment to the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. In engaging with and reviving a neglected tradition of Soviet-influenced Afro-American Communism – one often forgotten in the wake of McCarthyism and the often explicitly anti-Socialist discourses of Black Nationalism – Baraka's work illuminates the fraught legacy of the Soviet revolution in Black America at a time of divisive Cold War politics, in which the search for a workable mass politics and for a means of poetic expression adequate to this task was as vital as it now is today.