



Caribbean Correspondence

Misrepresentation of Self-Management in the Caribbean

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Look, I'm exactly six months older today and there are many things I want to do.

Montgomery Stone

Caribbean Correspondence

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★ Introduction

This is a 1975 analysis from the Caribbean anarchist journal *Caribbean Correspondence*, which was based in Jamaica, Antigua and the USA. It was kindly supplied to us by Mitch Miller of the Workers' Solidarity Alliance of the USA, an anarcho-syndicalist group which has a long history of support for the struggles of oppressed black people, whether in the USA itself, the Caribbean or Africa.

The document is important both because of its excellent analysis, and because it is an important testimony to the anarchist and syndicalist tradition in the Caribbean.

The most notable anarchist movement in that region was, without a doubt, that of Cuba. The Cuban anarchists pioneered the labour movement, organised across racial lines in both the workplace and in working class communities, and opposed racial segregation. In addition, the Cuban anarchists played an important role in the independence struggle against Spain in the 1890's, and against the subsequent influence of American imperialism. The strength of the Cuban movement was demonstrated by the fact that when the People's Socialist Party (PSP) (the Communist Party, in effect), was founded in 1925 with only 10 members, the anarcho-syndicalist Cuban Workers' National Confederation (CNO) had 200,000 members; that is not to even mention the Cuban IWW section, and the Federation of Anarchist Groups of Cuba (FGAC).

What is rather less well known is the more slender history of anarchism and syndicalism in the English-speaking Caribbean. This was a minority movement, not a mass one. Whereas the movement in Spanish-speaking Cuba and Puerto Rico dated back to the late 1800's, the movement in Antigua and Jamaica appears to have only emerged with the New Left in the 1960's and 1970's. This was in the immediate aftermath of both decolonization, and of the so-called "Cuban Revolution" under Fidel Castro. Castro's regime is often misunderstood to be socialist: it is, in fact, state-capitalist and was based from the start on the naked repression of the working class movement, not least its anarchist wing. Yet Castro's example had a major influence on many who were frustrated by the post-independence situation: Michael Manley of Jamaica, and later Maurice Bishop of Grenada were prime examples of figures who were inspired by the Cuban model and who used the language of "self-management" and "communism" to promote a state-capitalist project.

The ZACF reprints this historical article because it covers much ground that remains very topical today: illusions in Cuba, and in nationalism, and in cross-class racial movements remain prevalent. What is needed is an autonomously organised

revolution and of popular happiness. The organisational technique of Leninism is only effective in the context of an alienated revolution. And the hierarchical setting, which Gorz points out in the capitalist enterprise, is immediately found functioning politically and not technically in the Party with its structure, its top directors, its assistant directors, the secretaries, the union bosses, and the official ideologues. In a word, the "professional revolutionaries" whose profession is precisely to remove the revolution from the proletariat, to transform politics into something external and transcendent, requiring their science and their skill. – *Forgetting Lenin: TELOS #18*

5. CLR James (1901-1989) was one of the Caribbean's foremost journalists, theorists and social analysts. Hailing from Trinidad and Tobago, his political orientation was originally Trotskyist, but he later embraced pan-Africanism, though he had an influence on autonomist Marxism.

6. Consumer Human is satisfied by an ever-increasing volume of commodities; his labor is nothing more than a means in his life – his means of acquiring (by its sale) commodities, of appropriating property, of consuming. Work is seen as an activity which has no intrinsic value, hence its substance is unimportant, its form important only in relation to other goals. It is good to shorten it, to routinise it, to mechanise it, to increase its return – that's all that matters. For Creator Human, his work activity is his fulfilment, hence it cannot be ordered in such a way as to preclude meaning, enrichment and pleasure. – *Administration Theory: TELOS # 12*

★ **Notes:**

1. Address given by Manley at the UWI, St. Augustine, 12-14-1974. A former trade unionist, Manley (1924-1997) rose to power in Jamaica in 1972 on a programme of “people’s power”. His People’s National Party viewed Fidel Castro’s corporatist “communism” as its model, but became increasingly embroiled in political violence from 1976 onwards. In that year, a state of emergency was declared and 500 opposition supporters were detained. In his second period in office, Manley adopted a watered down, moderate stance because his favourite dictatorship, the USSR, had collapsed.

2. In 1970, Burnham, another president-for-life Castroite, declared Guyana to be a “co-operative republic”. Like all other such pseudo-socialist experiments, this meant in reality that the popular classes were required to co-operate in their exploitation by the republic and its capitalist allies. And yet then, as today, the Marxist-Leninist left remains deluded that Castroite capitalists Hugo Chavez (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Peru) and Lula da Silva (Brazil) can rescue their statist dreams from the trash-heap of history. Burnham’s increasingly authoritarian regime is held responsible for the 1980 assassination of radical Guyanese historian Walter Rodney.

3. Walter was a former unionist who became second prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda (1971-1976) as head of the Progressive Labour Party prior to the country’s independence from Britain in 1981. Gairy was a former US Navy sailor and strike-leader whose United Grenada Labour Party took Grenada to independence from Britain in 1974. His paramilitary “Mongoose Gangs” were responsible for street violence against the equally “labourite” New Jewel Movement that eventually ousted him in 1979. Bradshaw was a former unionist who became the dictatorial first premier of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla in 1967. He apparently styled his regime on that of Haiti’s notorious “Papa Doc” Duvalier.

4. Lenin mentions the need of “highly advanced technology”. Technology is presented as an impersonal and impervious force in the same way as matter and finally history, understood as the history of matter, is presented within a dogmatic Marxism. Thus, all power to the technicians who know the secrets of technology, and know how to command it while obeying it, and who therefore command others without having to obey them. The politician himself is nothing but the engineer of

self-management movement by the oppressed classes, not another set of leaders. On reflection, Montgomery Stone, the author, suggests that there is a real alternative: revolutionary self-management, embodied by anarchism. His cutting article exposes the bankruptcy of Statist solutions, and of nationalism, and shows that real self-management is a fundamentally revolutionary project that cannot be reconciled with the two great structures of class rule: capitalism and the State.

This is something that the great Caribbean revolutionary, CLR James (1901-1989), never fully grasped. While James was increasingly critical of the Soviet Union, concluding it was simply a new State-capitalist regime, he nonetheless continued to adore Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and believed self-management was compatible with a Marxist regime. Likewise, he turned a blind eye to the crimes of post-independence regimes across Africa, lavishing uncritical praise on the radical nationalism of figures like Kwame Nkrumah, who crushed labour and democracy in the pursuit of an independent national capitalism and powerful African State.

Note: a few very slight changes have been made to the original text to ensure clarity and eliminate grammatical crudities; additional foot-notes have been added for explanatory purposes; and sub-headings have been added to break up the text into thematic sections.



Misrepresentation of Self-Management in the Caribbean

Self-management is what the revolution is all about. The struggle being waged by the masses of people to gain direct control over all areas of social life, the absence of which is responsible for their poverty, oppression and alienation. Relating directly to the place of work, self-management does not mean that management consults the workers on what it, management, intends to do. What it means is that the workers themselves should collectively manage their work in all its aspects and put an end to any management other than they themselves. However, the concept of self-management, to be meaningful, could never relate to only the place of work or any other separate part of social existence. Because of the interdependence of all areas of our social life, and because humanity demands liberty in all areas of social life, then for self-management to be meaningful and real it must embrace life in its totality.

Within the Caribbean today, the concept of self-management is being terribly distorted and prostituted, both by the ruling bureaucracies and the host of Marxist-Leninist bureaucracies which are seeking to replace them. One could sit back with a sort of naïve satisfaction and say that it is a testament to the high level of revolutionary consciousness of the Caribbean masses that the tyrants should be forced to include promises of self-management, as dishonest as they are, within their arsenal of false promises.

The fact is, that while on the one hand it is the day-to-day struggles of the poor and oppressed in the Caribbean that forces them to talk about self-management, their talk of self-management is nevertheless a direct reaction to that struggle and is meant to spread confusion and ultimately defeat the oppressed masses in their struggle for true liberation.

It therefore becomes of critical importance that every effort be made to unmask these wolves in sheep's clothing, and to maintain a clear vision of the struggle for self-management, for a society in which the masses of people exercise direct con-

★ The Self-Managed Revolution from Below

Workers at particular workplaces must collectively manage the production process through their workers' councils, factory committees, or what have you. And since individual workplaces could never decide what to produce in isolation from each other, plus the necessity for community input in such decisions, there will have to be widespread co-ordination of activities between the workers' councils and community councils of the various areas of production and other social activities.

These councils are the organisational forms which will allow people to seize direct control of the production process, the means of production, and all areas of their social life. The process of co-ordination, carried out by mandated delegates who are subject to immediate recall, will be demystified from the state mystification in which it exists under the system of capitalist production, to the simple administration of things.

The defence of the new form of socialist organisation will have to be taken up by the armed masses themselves, co-ordinating the defence of the revolution in the same manner in which they co-ordinate production. Any attempt to leave the question of defence in the hands of specialist military leaders and their hierarchical form of military organisation, can only result in the defeat of the revolution. There can be no power in the new society but the power of the workers' councils.

To repeat, it is only at the point of production that the poor and oppressed masses can seize power. The masses could never seize state power, because the state is a hierarchical form of social organisation and could only be seized in the name of the masses by somebody else. Whereas a state machinery is needed by the minority oppressors to carry out the oppression of the mass population, the masses do not need a state machinery to suppress the minority oppressors.

The armed population co-ordinating the defence of the revolution is not only enough and most efficient. It is also the only form of military organisation that will not end up defeating the purpose of the revolution.

The history of past struggles has already proven the utter uselessness and the parasitic nature of the bureaucrats of whatever ideological brand. Their sermons of how society would be in chaos without their mediation are now bad jokes. They mistake the clear demands made by the masses for control over their lives, as requests to self-manage their own oppression. However, the final critique of them will be the act of removing them.



control over the means of production, the production process, the products of their labor, and in every area of their social life.

Caribbean society is boiling and seems to be bursting at the seams. In territory after territory, we see employed workers waging a struggle on two fronts, as they openly challenge so-called management prerogatives at the same time that they are waging a relentless struggle against their unions.

With the endless number of strikes that seem to have become a permanent feature of Caribbean life, wild-cats (i.e. rank-and-file illegal strikes) are more the rule than the exception. Increasingly, workers are realizing that so-called industrial agreements, the deals worked out between union and management, not only place a limit on their decision-making, but also place restrictions on their methods of struggle. Thus, today in the Caribbean, it would not be incorrect to say that union bureaucrats are usually the last people to hear about a strike.

★ The Elites, the Marxists and the Union Bureaucrats: An Unholy Trinity

The editorial of the Trinidad *Sunday Express* of December 15, 1974, should give us a feel for the present state of affairs. It said, "The utter disregard of the Industrial Relations Act (IRA) has resulted in strikes becoming an almost daily happening with workers prepared to withdraw their labor under the slightest pretext".

It went on, "It is up to the unions to exercise control over their members if they are to justify their positions as bargaining representatives. It is not sufficient for the unions to take the line that the workers had been advised by them and that there is nothing more they can do. If a union is unable to exercise such control, then its leadership ought to be changed..."

"The act of striking, which is illegal anyway, for what is certainly a matter falling outside the industrial agreement, can only be regarded as irresponsible action, and it is hoped that those responsible for advising the workers will indicate to them the folly of their actions."

It then turned to the workers saying, "It is time that the workers of the country realize that action like this, grasping at all sorts of extras, is reaching to the point of absurdity, and a government might well be forced to take such action that might cost them their precious freedom."

And should any of us harbor any doubts about how seriously the union bureaucrats take their jobs of controlling the workers, let us look at what Basdeo Panday, President General of the All-Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factories Workers Union, told his workers after they had taken just such an action.

In its issue of 12/14/1974 the Trinidad *Guardian* reported, "The union leader

explained to the workers that their actions were an embarrassment to the union and a hindrance in the current negotiations for a new three-year industrial agreement”.

This is the scene throughout the Caribbean and it is complemented by frequent seizure of lands by peasants in their on-going struggle against land-owners and the state.

However, we have only been looking at those people lucky enough to be employed. The Caribbean youth, who make up the greater proportion of the high percentage of unemployment in the region, have not been sitting idly by. From Jamaica to Antigua to Dominica to Trinidad to Guyana and in between those, it is the same thing. The ruling classes and the state machinery have virtually declared war on young people.

And in their day-to-day struggle against the state, young people, once attracted by the revolutionary rhetoric of the various bureaucratically centralised groups in the area, are more and more rejecting such groups because of bitter experiences and are by themselves trying to throw up more democratic organisational forms. They are moving away from the vanguard organisations, which stifle their initiative and seek to set up a “leadership” over them.

It is against this background that we have the middle-class state bureaucrats on the one hand and the various Marxist-Leninist parties and movements on the other, all talking about workers’ control and self-management. And as if not to be outdone, the union bureaucrats too have begun to call for workers’ control and self-management. All three of these forces are as different from each other as the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

What keeps them apart is their power struggle, which results from their common desire to be in control of the state machinery. What makes them one is their equally common desire to continue the oppression and exploitation of the masses of the people, under the hierarchical organisation of work for their commodity economy, with themselves as professional specialists in charge of the factories and state institutions.

★ The Error of Nationalisation

Around the world, capitalism is in the midst of a crisis. From Sweden to America to Cuba to England to Yugoslavia, they are all talking about “worker participation”. Worker alienation seems to be getting more acute, and whether it is the worker in Moscow who stays home and drinks vodka or the worker in Detroit who goes to work and sabotages machinery, workers around the world are fighting back. As a result of this, production is not increasing the way the capitalists would like it to and in some cases even dropping. Their intellectual agents have told them that the workers’ sense of alienation could be reduced by allowing them to “participate!” in management and ownership.

★ So What is Self-Management?

The movement to self-management is one that sees the question of alienation as fundamental – and therefore one that seeks to deal with the question of exploitation and authority at the same time. It is not that we don’t see the question of more food, clothes and housing as being of the utmost importance. It is just that we have no intention of becoming only better-fed slaves.

Still, this is not to say that exploitation does not continue under the Marxist-Leninist state. Under the socialist state (or final state of monopoly capitalism), surplus value goes to the state bureaucracy instead of private capitalists. It should be clear then that self-management is not an arrangement worked out by any state (Marxist-Leninist or not) for worker participation.

Seizure of control over the production process and the products of labor are key elements in any attempt to end alienation. They will also be key elements in any attempt to establish self-management. We do not intend to concern ourselves with the legalities of who owns the means of production; whether it is the people, the state, or private capitalists. What concerns us is that we establish effective control over them. Let that determine the property relations.

All those who preach the virtues of hierarchical authority will accuse us of being opposed to organisation. Ironically, in our struggle to establish a society of self-management, where decisions are made by those whom they affect, it is precisely our organisation (or lack of it) which will determine our success (or failure).

They confuse bureaucracy and its hierarchical authority for organisation. It becomes more absurd than ironic when one realizes that direct democracy, especially in today’s world, requires an amount and quality of organisation that is as yet to appear in any society. On the other hand, their organisational form, with the vast masses being directed by the few, is an absolute minimum of organisation, and anything less would be no organisation at all.

Far from being a program for worker participation within capitalist (or state capitalist) society, the struggle for self-management is a revolutionary project for the total transformation of society. The number of instances in which workers have thrown out management and proceeded to reorganise production on their own are acts that go way beyond the most liberal programs of the authoritarians.

Yet such acts are just the beginning. The occupation of a particular place of work by its workers, together with a continuation of production under their collective management, cannot continue in isolation for too long before it is recuperated in one form or another. Therefore it is a continuing revolutionary process in which other work places and communities come to the defence of this occupation by initiating their own occupation.

It is only a generalized movement of self-management, a final appropriation of the appropriators, that can get the poor and oppressed out of the vicious circle of strikes and strikes and more strikes. It is only at the point of production that the poor and oppressed masses can seize power.

good old socialist centralised planning. Also, he was of the opinion that this workers' control thing was a good means through which workers could keep an eye on the bureaucrats whom he intended to appoint to man the scientific system of one-man management! ⁴

But did not Michael Manley say something about nationalisation being a bridge to public accountability? (And worker participation too?) Anyway, the Marxist-Leninist concept of self-management was never any different from what we presently have in Jamaica, Great Britain, Guyana, or Yugoslavia.

For these Caribbean revolutionaries then, self-management is nothing but a secondary part of their program and a fraud to boot. How can we reconcile the dictatorship of their Vanguard and these popular assemblies which they love to make so much noise about? Where will the power rest – with their Vanguard or with the assemblies?

Will they be just another set of (Party-controlled) rubber-stamp parliaments, or genuine forms of organisation for workers' power? The fact is that if you push these self-styled revolutionaries far enough, they will admit to you that their version of self-management only becomes meaningful after the "transition period". The only trouble with that is that there is no end in sight to this transition period. The transition period, like the "temporary" dictatorship, is permanent.

These so-called revolutionary organisations are carrying out a program of mass deception. On the one hand they run down the Marxist-Leninist ideology which can only lead to a state bureaucracy ruling over a society based upon capitalist production relations. On the other hand they babble about self-management and workers' control. They are stuck in the same confusion that CLR James ⁵ has been stuck in for so long, pretending that state socialism and self-management are not irreconcilably opposed to each other. They run around calling themselves the New Left, the new this and the new that, trying to hide the fact that theirs is the same old authoritarianism.

Can we solve the problem of the exploitation of man by man without simultaneously addressing ourselves to the authority of man over man?

The fundamental question of the revolution is not one of making more commodities available to people. However that seems to be the limit to which our Marxist-Leninist friends are willing to go. They are always quick to point out the statistics of how many children are in school after their seizure of power, how many bottles of milk are produced, and the tripling of the production of shoes.

But whenever one raises the question of hierarchical authority, there is always "the counter-revolution and the backwardness of the masses" to justify it. Added to that is the Marxist dogma which says that human society only becomes capable of freedom at a certain level (?) of commodity production. So we in the technologically underdeveloped areas of the world are faced with the added burden of having to wait until "our proletarian dictatorship" has taken us to that magic level of commodity production before we can put in our claim for freedom. ⁶

We in the Caribbean are very much a part of the world capitalist system. Thus let us sit back and listen to what the Hon. Michael Manley [Jamaica's pro-Castroist prime minister 1972-1980, and 1989-1992] has to say on the subject:

"May I now turn to a vital area: worker participation. One might be tempted to feel that one has discharged the obligation to change and restructure the society when an industry is nationalised. This is a trap into which many an unsuspecting socialist has fallen.

"Here, however, we are in danger of confusing institutional shadow for the substance of change in the experience of human beings. The nationalisation of the industry does not in itself bring any change in the experience of the worker. The motivation for workers' exploitation may be reduced when we substitute the state for the private shareholder. But the worker may find out that he is, as before, a blind cipher in a machine that is controlled and managed by powers that are remote and insensitive.

"Hence we are planning to use the method of nationalisation, where it is appropriate, as more than a bridge to public accountability. We see it as an opportunity to develop full worker participation in all significant aspects of social and economic activity." ¹

I am afraid that the second half of Manley's statement proves that he is totally unaware of the piercing profundity of the first. He has unwittingly put forward the fundamental criticism of the nationalisation theory (the current fad) and the Marxist-Leninist theory of state socialism. Both theories in fact amount to the same thing.

Not for a moment must we imagine that Manley, Forbes Burnham (leader of Guyana 1964-1985) or any of the others have any intention of restructuring society.² The big power breed of the metropolitan capitalists, from their position of dominant control of the network of international capitalism, along with the general chaos in trade and capital investment, add up to make the particular foreign investors insensitive in negotiations with the local state bureaucrats over what percentage of the booty they must get from exploiting the human and material resources in the Caribbean.

At the same time the current assault from the prisons, from the factories, in the streets and through occupations of land, has taxed all the means and weapons of social control, particularly the army, the police and academic education. This is the crux of their government problems of power-relations. The motivation behind their rush to nationalise is the need to earn more income for the state. This becomes necessary because of the increasing cost of operating an ever-growing bureaucracy on the one hand and, on the other, their position as state bureaucrats is the basis of the wealth of a large section of the Caribbean middle-class.

★ What of Fidel Castro's Nationalist-Capitalist Friends?

Yet Manley is perfectly correct when he says that nationalisation is confusing institutional shadow for the substance of change in the experience of human beings. Caribbean workers have moved quickly to burst the illusion that the nationalisation of an industry changes their position in relation to it. Note the strike of Guyana bauxite workers right after "their" company was nationalised.

However, what we are up against now are all the talk and fraudulent schemes being put forward as "workers' control". Workers in Guyana have recently been appointed to the management boards of four public concerns. They have now become bureaucrats who were once workers, or to be more precise, worker bureaucrats. It seems as if an old chapter in Caribbean history is being replayed.

Let us look at the tyrants and semi-tyrants of today. George Walker, Eric Gairy, Robert Bradshaw, etc, etc, etc. ³ Were they not the workers of yesterday? How many of us still believe that you could end a system of oppression by integrating one or any number of the oppressed into the oppressive bureaucracy?

No! Even if the entire board of management was made up of workers, nothing would have changed. Now as then, the same system of management would remain intact.

The examples can go on and on. The schemes range from co-operative farms to selling hotel workers shares in some hotels. Worker participation is now official policy. Management consultants and university academics are making it clear to the state and private business that some strategy of worker involvement has become necessary to save the system of capitalist exploitation.

We cannot take Manley seriously when he talks about bringing people into the fullest participation, because that would mean real self-management which would get rid of Manley and all like him, and which he is not prepared to deal with. For them, workers' control is just another reform of the capitalist system made necessary by developments within the mass struggle.

What must be of concern to us is the degree to which the poor and oppressed allow themselves to be taken in by such things as "workers' banks" and buying shares in the company. These schemes serve the double purpose of raising capital for the state and other capitalists at the same time that they harbor in the workers the illusion of involvement. Historically, one of the worst handicaps of the poor and oppressed has been their own illusions.

The free-market capitalists and the Third World champions of nationalisation are not the only ones who find it necessary to integrate fraudulent schemes of "workers' control" into their program.

★ And What of the Marxist-Leninists?

The Marxist-Leninists, known to be the defenders of hierarchy and authoritarianism, have begun to unfurl theories of self-management. We should now be able to understand why the confusion is total.

The theory of socialism expounded by Marx and Engels, which calls for the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state, is in contradiction to the theory and practice of self-management. Marx himself brilliantly pointed out that unless production relations were changed, a change in property relations by itself (i.e. a move to state ownership of the means of production) would only mean a society of one big capitalist, but the same capitalist production relations would continue.

It was Marx's naïve belief in the eventual withering away of the state, plus his belief in the very need for the state, which led to his hierarchical and authoritarian view of "socialist society". The fact is that if we were to have an immediate change in production relations (i.e. a move to direct control by workers over the production process and products of their labor), this would bring the power of the workers into conflict with the power of "their" state.

The fact is that genuine self-management and state power can never exist side by side. It could only mean a situation where the state bureaucracy "allows the workers to make certain decisions," but maintains the final power within its hands.

But history has shown that the so-called peoples' states were never willing to do even that, because it puts wrong ideas into workers' heads and the workers may move to make their state-controlled "self-management" real. This is the controversy which is raging in Yugoslavia today, where self-management in commodity production operates under the centralist control of the communist party and the state.

How is it then that Marxist-Leninist groups like the New Beginning Movement, the Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement, the New Jewel Movement, the Movement for a New Dominica, the Workers' Liberation League, the Revolutionary Marxist Collective, etc, etc; how is it that they present themselves as people who are advocating self-management?

★ The Vanguard Versus Popular Assemblies

To answer the question, we must first find out what they mean when they say self-management. Make no mistake about this: they are Marxist-Leninist, they see themselves as the Vanguard; they intend to seize state power and set up a dictatorship. We can only take consolation in the fact that they promised to make their dictatorship a temporary one. But whatever became of self-management? Well, we have not gotten to that yet.

Lenin saw "workers' control" as a temporary measure which should be instituted to guard against the counter-revolution, upon the defeat of which we should revert to