CLR James's 80th Birthday Lectures

Edited by Margaret Busby and Darcus Howe
C L R James was 80 years old on January 4th 1981. To celebrate this event he was invited by the Race Today Collective to deliver three public lectures in London. (He was residing in Trinidad at the time). The lectures were held in the main auditorium of the Kingsway College in Central London on the 6th, 9th and 12th January 1981. The first was titled Socialism or Barbarism; the second, Britain and America: Two English speaking Democracies; and the third, Immigrants to Britain: Formerly Colonial Peoples. All three lectures were chaired by Darcus Howe, Editor of Race Today.

The idea for the lecture series emerged after discussions between CLR James and the Race Today Collective about struggles as they were developing in Britain and world-wide. James has had a long and fraternal relationship with the Collective. The choice of topics was his own.

The lectures were well attended; in fact all three were sold out. In order that the reader might share what turned out to be a profound political experience we have included in the publication an edited account of the question and answer sessions.
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Introduction

Just a few words by way of introduction. My name is Darcus Howe and I will be chairing this meeting and the other two advertised for the 9th and the 12th. I am the editor of the bi-monthly journal Race Today and a member of the Race Today Collective who are the organisers of this meeting. The meetings will fall in two parts: CLR James will speak for an hour or thereabouts and then for the second hour we will take points of clarification and discussion based on what he has said. For us, the organisers, these lectures, three of them have some political purpose. It seems to us that if one is active in the struggles of workers and if one is a worker oneself and struggling today in Britain, one has to muster all one's defences against what seems to us to be a creeping barbarism practised by those who govern us in this society. It is not difficult, comrades, to know that the way the British government is seeking to keep order in Ireland is by means of tanks, guns and torture chambers. It is clear to us that the way the British government, successive governments seek to keep order among blacks is by way of the Special Patrol Group (SPG), and collaboration of the courts. So we have to be concerned with the creeping barbarism, not only concerned but mustering all our forces to attack it and defeat it. At the same time we have to be concerned with the struggles that we are engaged in. A logical extension of those would be a new society of socialised workers — socialism. So through
practice and through organisation and contesting official society, the question of "Socialism or Barbarism?" is not abstract. It is on the order of the day here in Britain. In that sense the title of the first lecture has some political purpose.

Secondly, it seems to us that if one is even observant — far be it for me to assume that everybody is active — one would understand that the two English-speaking democracies have extended their tentacles, imperialistic tentacles, in every corner of the globe. And in every corner of the globe their presence is being contested by the hostile organisation of workers and peasants, sometimes armed, as in El Salvador, and sometimes organised in other ways as is the case with the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union in Trinidad. It seems to us the organisers therefore that we ought to understand perhaps the development of these English-speaking democracies, what in them we must keep and what in them we must destroy. That is the political purpose for us of the second in this series of lectures.

And thirdly, I do not believe, comrades and friends, that there is anybody in the room who can deny the fact, the historical fact, that black workers in this country, who are formerly colonial peoples, are in the forefront of contesting trade union bureaucracy, the exploitation of workers at Grunwick, the increasing policing of the black community by Scotland Yard and that erratic Chief Constable in Manchester. And it is key for us, we believe, to be able to say at some point in the struggle — and we believe this point is crucial — where we have come from, what we have done in the past and the role we are likely to play in the future; because we did not come alive in Britain, nor did we come alive when a few left-wing activists discovered us. So those are the political purposes that I have defined.

Now just a few brief words as to why our choice of CLR James, whom we asked to respond to our historical requirements. In identifying him we have discriminated against others, and we make no apology for it. We believe that CLR James has kept his eye on the ball all of his public life. That is requirement number one, and that is the point I would like to explore briefly. In all his public life he has looked at what workers and peasants have been doing as the basic alternative to the kind of barbarism with which we are
threatened. Some of you who are acquainted with his work will know that in the 1920s before he left Trinidad he wrote some fiction, and I want to refer you to three pieces: *La Divina Pastora*, *Triumph* and *Minty Alley*. In all of those three pieces he is preoccupied with the washerwomen, the prostitutes — Inita Perez, who works from eight to five in *La Divina Pastora*, drying, cutting and picking. He has concerned himself with the life of ordinary working people in Trinidad who live in barrack-yards; so at once he has an instinct for what ordinary people do and think and how they cope with their problems. It seems to me that if you were born in Trinidad in 1901 there were other places you could look to; you could look to the life around the governor's court and write some fiction about it, you could look to the life around the lower middle classes and write fiction about it. But at once CLR rejects both — and he is part of one — and looks to ordinary working people. And at the end of the day he travels with his baggage; inside of that is *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*, which gives a political edge to that instinct, a radical document which says that Captain Cipriani was leading the barefoot men — a radical document, not a marxist document. James comes to Britain and he lives in Little Moscow and he is educated by those workers and by reading about what Stalinism is. So that instinct is strong enough for him to reject Stalinism and move to Trotskyism; and that instinct has developed, because the political edge of Trotskyism is much sharper than the radical edge of *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*. And he recalls what slaves did in the Caribbean — not what was done to us but what we did to them as a consequence of what they did to us in his historical documentation of the Haitian revolution. Then he goes to America, and that instinct drives him to break with Trotskyism, that instinct drives him to discover that the barbarous state of Russia was not a degenerate workers' state but state capitalist; and that instinct drives him to look into the philosophy of Marxism to come up with the political position that the self-activity of workers is what is required in this day and age. And, comrades, that prepares us to understand what is taking place in Poland today. So when we discriminate for CLR James as opposed to others, it is because of that instinct, developed through marxist thought, that he has contributed because he keeps his eye on the ball.
Finally, comrades, I was speaking to Nello as we were going to the countdown for his birthday and he says: “I would like to live to the year 2000.” I said, “Fine, that is all right.” What I am sure of, if I divine the response to him over the years, particularly since he came here last year, particularly on this trip, if I divine that response properly I would be able to say to you, Nello, from this meeting that we will offer you all the support and encouragement you need to live to the year 2000.[Applause.] Comrades, we hope we will be able to invite him again here as the senior dignitary to the celebration of the inauguration of the workers’ state and the socialist republic of the United Kingdom. Thank you very much... CLR James.

Darcus Howe
Thank you, Mr Chairman, an admirable introduction, one of the best I have ever heard. Now I want to say first of all that I am grateful to Race Today and to Allison and Busby, who I gather were responsible for my being able to speak to you. I hope that when I have finished you will be equally grateful (you may not be). I want to make another reference, to Wilson Harris, a man I admire immensely and whom I would have welcomed here, but he isn’t well, and he has written me a letter to let me know that — one of the most remarkable persons I know, not only as a writer but as a human being.

Well, it is now 7.30 and you can be certain that at 8.30 I will not be speaking directly to you, I will be answering questions.

You will leave here and somebody will ask you: “you heard James speaking? What did he say?” That is not an easy question. You may have great ability to understand and to explain what I said, but perhaps more important is what I decided to say. There are many things I could have talked about. I could have talked about the San Domingo revolution, I could have talked about Poland, about this and that and the other. I had to think very carefully and although I have to quote Marx and Lenin you could be sure, more or less in the hour I will be speaking, there wouldn’t be more than six minutes of Marx and Engels and Lenin. But I have to
say that, Marxist as I am, over the years, some sixty years it has been (that’s a long time, I assure you; you will get to know that yourself. I hope). I have been translating the things that I have read and learnt and expounded as history into more human relations, and while I will speak once or twice about this and that Marxism, I want to tell you what they mean to me today that they didn’t mean to me twenty years ago.

Socialism and Barbarism: they both exist at the present time and, with all due respect to the chairman, they exist everywhere, particularly in the advanced countries; they are a duality. . . .I want to spend some time first of all on Barbarism as I see it. I am not concerned particularly with the barbarism of Mrs Thatcher or whoever; no, I am speaking of something else. I have learnt that one of the greatest barbarous episodes in the history of the world is the war of 1914 – 1918. We can let that slip away from us; it slipped away from me for a long time but now I know it began there, because 1815 to 1914 was reasonably peaceful. Between 1914 and 1918 they killed 10 million people, 10 million men. Now it is difficult for the ordinary person to visualise a million, so I’ll take a little time to try to get it home to you. You know at Wembley on cup final day there are about 100,000 people. That’s a lot of people; it takes hours to get them in there and more hours to get them out again — one hundred thousand people. Imagine ten Wembleys, a whole lot of people, amounting to one million — ten Wembleys, and you begin to visualise what it is. That is the number of people they killed in World War One. Now you have left civilisation entirely when you kill ten million people. That is my position today, that to me is not just history or World War One, that is the first stage of the descent into barbarism: to kill ten million people...

Now it has meant a great deal to me as time has gone on. I will tell you of two episodes. I came to Britain in 1932 and I went out one evening to a party with a girl — she was about 20 or 30 years old. We were sitting there with lots of people around and a man came up to her, a young fellow, and told her he would be glad to have dinner with her at his flat on Thursday; she could come but he would take her home and his manner was very offensive. What he meant by dinner was obviously not merely food so I, backward West Indian as I am, said, “But the way that man speaks...” She replied

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“That is how all his generation speak. The men whom I would have gone to bed with, the men who would have married me, the men with whom I would have gone to dances, they are all dead. They have been killed in the war, so there is a whole generation of us young women of this age. He knows that, so he speaks to me in that way, and whether I respond or don’t respond, he knows he will find somebody else.” That was the result in human relations of ten million people killed all over the whole of Europe. That brought home to me that this was not figures in a book, or dead men or the flag I left behind me, but something that affected people: that is, a whole human relation. She tells me, “There are a whole lot of us, he knows, and when I say no he leaves me and he goes somewhere else. He knows we are a certain age and that there is nobody to take us out; and there are a whole lot of them who come around us, because they feel that we are defenceless.”

There is something else that I want to refer to about the war of 1914 to 1918. It ruined a whole country, it ruined France; the French hadn’t recovered from it by 1939. That’s why they were as they were, not able to get ready in any way or to meet the Germans. They were still suffering from what had happened to them between 1914 to 1918. They built a wall and called it the Maginot Line. Now I am not a military man but I know that men defend forts, forts do not defend men; you can’t just put up a fort and hide... But they were so lost after what had happened and they went to pieces, the whole nation. Maybe they have recovered by now, I don’t know, but certainly after 1918 France had not. I was often in France up to 1938 and they were not the same people whom I had read about.

So there you have two examples of what barbarism is. It is very hard for us to understand. They teach us in school that when a man like Amin kills a lot of people, that’s a barbarian, but Mrs Thatcher and Lord Carrington are not that at all. Although they did their best to make the Bishop [Abel Muzorewa] sound as if he was one of the competitors for Zimbabwe, when in reality the Bishop was not there at all, he got three seats. I listened on the radio and read in the papers and you would believe that in Zimbabwe there was a competition between the Patriotic Front and the Bishop, which was a huge and monstrous lie that was being perpetrated, put on to you. That to me in a modern world is a form of bar-
barism. To use your powers in charge of a country and having
the media at your disposal to perpetrate a monstrous lie
about people — well, you can choose, but that is what I
think.

So World War One is the first thing I wish to draw your
attention to; I didn’t always think about it, you know, but
I only realised over the late years that by the time you kill
ten million people you are going to kill plenty more, and the
present generation is descended from that generation and
they are ready to kill. The only thing that keeps them away is
that they might get killed too, so they have a beautiful
name: “a deterrent”. It’s not a moral matter not to fight
any more; no, something prevents us, something is in the way
of our killing and that deterrent is that we might get killed
too, but still let us prepare because we don’t know what they
might do. What kind of life is that, what kind of life is that?
That is the way we are.

Now I want to go into another example of barbarism: the
collectivisation of agriculture in Russia during the Stalin-
ist regime — because Stalin was not a single person, there was
a regime, there were a lot of people who thought that he was
the man who should be there. He didn’t collectivise any-
thing, or he may have, I don’t know, but I know what he
did: he destroyed the Russian peasantry. . .that after 1914
to 1918 you could kill and do what you pleased. He des-
stroyed the Russian peasantry. Now to collectivise means you
have to build roads, you have to build shops, you have to
build schools and you have to build places where the doctors
go etcetera; you modernise the area and you drag the peasant
from that rural backwardness into something more advanced,
and it was decided that they would collectivise 20 per cent
of the Russian peasantry in five years. That was the first
statement of the five-year plan: 20 per cent of the peasantry
in five years, which sounded reasonable enough. But the
peasants held back their grain in 1928; they said, “The price
the state is offering to us is not satisfactory and we will not
give it,” whereupon it struck Stalin that there was the ele-
ment of resistance to his regime, and it is characteristic of the
age of barbarism that he decided there was one thing to do:
destroy them. He smashed the peasantry altogether. When he
was finished there were no people on the land, there were no
peasants; he broke up the households. He must have killed
about 20 million people and what did he do with others?
He sent them off to the northern parts to different areas. Once you begin with 1914, you know, you can end anywhere. You can end in the total destruction of a peasantry, you can end, it is possible, in the destruction of everybody or nearly everybody.

Now all the other people — the Hungarians, the East Germans, the Russians — they all collectivised too. Why do they collectivise? Collectivisation has been a disaster for Russian agriculture but they collectivise because that is the way they destroy the peasantry and bring it under their control. There are no limits to the result of that collectivisation. I have noticed this marvellous book by Solzhenitsyn: *The Gulag Archipelago*, he doesn't understand why Stalin did it, he believes that Stalin was following a theory that was given to him by Lenin. Shapiro and a lot of them preach that business, that Lenin had worked out from Marx some theory about the mathematical movement of people's social engineering and, following this theory, Stalin did what he did to the Russian peasantry. Absolutely wrong. It is one of the finest books I have ever read but Stalin knew what he was doing. The peasantry were a danger; a hundred million peasants could provide a number of soldiers behind someone leading a counter-revolution. So he just destroyed them and set the pattern for the collectivisation. Let me go into some detail as to that kind of society. I have here *The Gulag Archipelago* and Solzhenitsyn says: In May 1938 you can read the appeal of workers in higher education to comrade Stalin. This is what they say in the party press: “Heightening our revolutionary visions we will help our glorious intelligence service headed by the true Leninists, the Stalinists, people's commissar Nikolai Yezof, to purge our higher education institutions as well as our country of the remnants of the Trotskyite, Bukharinite and other counter-revolutionary trash; carried by a majority of 1,000 present,” and Solzhenitsyn says, “We certainly do not conclude that the entire meeting of 1,000 persons consisted solely of idiots, that is an idiotic thing to agree with, but merely of degenerate liars acceding to their own arrest on the morrow”. We have lived that way, they are part of the modern world. They had preached about Yezof. Now Yezof himself was arrested shortly afterwards and beaten up during his interrogation; and arrested with Yezof was the chief of the financial administration of Gulag, the chief of the medical administration of
Gulag, the chief of the guard service of Gulag and even the chief of the security operations department of Gulag; the whole lot of them were thrown out, and in there went Beria and as soon as Stalin went they saw after Beria. That is the kind of life that we lead. I want you to be aware of it. That is the way we are living. And I want you to take note of what happened to Tukhachevsky, who was a general. When Tukhachevsky was repressed, not only was his immediate family broken up and imprisoned, it hardly needs to be said that his daughter was expelled from her institute, but his two brothers and their wives, his four sisters and their husbands were all arrested, while his nephews and nieces were scattered about various orphanages. He was a marshal in the Russian army, a famous soldier. His wife was shot in a camp in Kazakhstan, his mother begged for alms on the streets of Astrakhan and died there; that is the life that is going on. The result is very strange. You find among educated people a certain revulsion against all aspects of western civilisation. You will find that in Kampuchea where all the heads are people educated in Paris with long degrees, they get into power and they just tell all the educated people to go into the forest and dig and live. This kind of life is no good and they try to go back to primitive communism. What they went back to was primitive but it wasn’t communist in any way. So that is what is going on all around us. I don’t want to take up too much detail of this but in Italy today they are balancing — if anybody thinks I am wrong that is up to you Italy may go in any direction. But I wanted to show you what is happening to you here. In volume 3 of The Gulag Archipelago by Solzhenitsyn the preface to the English translation is, “To those readers who have found the moral strength to overcome the darkness and suffering of the first two volumes, the third volume will disclose a space of freedom and struggle.” (Do you know about that, by the way? Not in Poland: I am speaking about Russia).

Inside Russia, he says, the secret of the struggle is kept by the Soviet regime; “more than anything else the communist regime fears the revelation of the fight which is conducted against it with a spiritual force unheard of and unknown to many countries.” Do you know that there are many people who don’t know that at all? And he goes into details of that here. My business is not to deal with these details but you will find it in Volume 3 of The Gulag Archipelago where
the Russian people are fighting not only the Poles, and I will
give you an experience of mine with an organisation whose
name I will not mention - not the Trotskyists. I pointed out
at a meeting an international meeting that there was a move-
ment in Eastern Germany in 1953 when they had the marvel-
ous slogan: "Ivan go home". People have to make those
Ivans go home, '53, '56. . . in Poland 1956, the Hungarian
revolution, the greatest revolutionary movement that has ever
taken place. Then in '56 the commander of the Russian
troops in Poland, had to go and ask Khrushchev to come
They took Gomulka out of jail and put him in because
the Polish workers were ready to go on a national strike.
The Polish army had a lot of Polish soldiers so they had
to accommodate themselves to it. In '68 you had the
movement in Czechoslovakia. I don’t know exactly about
that one but I know Russian soldiers had to go, East German
soldiers had to go, Polish soldiers had to go, all those soldiers
had to go to stop whatever was going on in '68. In '68 or
'69 I wrote an article and I said, watch that, watch that,
the next one is Moscow; so you talk about the Moscow revolt
that is on the way. You know, they didn’t print it, they
weren’t in favour of Moscow, they were notorious anti-
Stalinist. They were for anything but to say that the next
stage of the revolution would be Moscow, that they could
not do and there are a lot of people who feel, "It may not be
good, it is not socialism, but at any rate it is something by
which I can fight against the Americans." Not me, all of them
to me are the same, the whole lot. There is no special reason
for me to defend Moscow, there is no special reason for me
to defend New York. . . and I tell you something, I just
mention this, if need be the two of them will join together
to suppress something, you know; don’t be afraid about that.
We must have our minds open as to what they will do and
my opinion is history has shown us they will do anything,
anything except they are deterred by the deterrent.

Now I want to move on to talk about socialism. People
are in a lot of trouble about socialism. I was talking to a man
the other day and he told me, "Well, we have to be careful,
we have to work it out and know what we are doing." I said
yes; he said, "For example, we should go to Yugoslavia." I
said, "What in the name of God am I going to Yugoslavia to
find out about? What are they doing in Yugoslavia that is to
teach me about socialism that I don’t know already?" Now in
his famous chapter, “The historical tendency of capitalist accumulation”, Marx says something which horrifies people when I point it out to them. The socialist basis of society is not in Yugoslavia, it is right here in England; Marx was saying that in 1867 so in 1981 it’s long past its eightieth birthday. Now listen: “One capitalist kills many, you have the growing centralisation of capital, at the same time you have the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialised labour, the entanglement of all peoples in the rest of the world market, and with this the international character of the capitalist regime.”

Now Marx goes on to say what happens to the working class during this period: ‘It is always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself.’

Now it is perfectly clear, I hope, that the working class does not need a communist party, a socialist party, an SWP or all the other initials to lead them. They are disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself.

That is socialism. There is the development of the mechanical means of production. We have them all around us. And at the same time we have a working class growing in numbers and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of the capitalist production. That Marx says cannot continue. There comes a stage when that conflict explodes.

I shall end by pointing out to you that the working class, the great mass of the population, formed one party under the title of Solidarity. Solidarity is merely the development of a movement which began in the Commune, went on to the Soviet and now has reached the stage where the whole country has mobilised itself to put an end to government by the few. That is the movement towards socialism: the mobilisation of the great mass of the population. They may be defeated by the Russian army but the great mass of a population organised for struggle is the final stage before the achievement of socialism. They may even be defeated, but ultimately the victory is certain.
Question: I would like to try to clarify exactly what your thoughts are on the role of the party. It would seem to me from Lenin's writings, and the experience of old Russia in particular, that although working class organisations may spring up because of the economic struggles you would still require the existence of a Communist Party as such.

CLR: When the Hungarian workers formed councils in every department of production they said, 'We don't want any parties here: into this factory comes the Catholic party, there comes the Socialist party, there comes the Communist party, and in the work of the factory they are fighting for different political positions. We don't want that: we want you to be elected by the work you do in the plant.' And that to me was very good; they did wonderfully well. I'm not saying that you shouldn't form a party. But there is a kind of theory which says, 'No revolution can succeed without a party,' point one. Point two: 'We are the party, we know; we know the past, we understand the future and anybody else who comes along and claims to be a party we are their mortal enemy because the revolution cannot proceed without us,' I know those people, I have been against them continuously; that's the kind of party for many years I was in — Trotskyist, and used to go around telling people, 'You have to leave the Communist Party and join the Trotskyist Party and then we will make the revolution.' I know that stupidity well. I was guilty of it.

Question: It seems to me that on both sides, East and West, at the moment and in what is called the Third World there is a vast movement against war, against nuclear weapons, against the great powers — it's against totalitarian structures and party and so on.

CLR: Now it is very good that you have put your point forward; it enables me to deal with what is wrong with nuclear weapons. What is wrong with nuclear weapons? Nuclear weapons are a bit of machinery; there is nothing wrong with nuclear weapons as such, it is the persons who are in control of this society and use them. So to be against nuclear weapons may be a good sentiment, but those who control them — that is what you have to be against. To be against nuclear weapons and to be for this and for that and for the other is not good enough. There are people who deal with these things and you have to deal with those people.
Question: What I am saying is that both in Western Europe and Eastern Europe and all over the world there are people who reject these men who control these appalling weapons.
CLR: I agree with you that by and large there is great hostility to the kind of life that is imposed upon people... I believe we have reached a stage where people are not going to take it much longer...

Question: I'd like to ask what do you propose for small countries, for example the West Indies, small economically dependent countries who are trying to fight certain powers...? As I understand it, for example, Grenada is trying to fight against imperialism.
CLR: Yes, that is a notable example, one in ten thousand. I have been to Grenada, I have seen them at work. I think they are doing splendidly and that is the kind of thing that ought to be. But may I tell you, my friend, most of the other governments in the Caribbean are not too sympathetic to Maurice Bishop, you know.

Question: That is what I would like to ask you – what do you propose for such a country that is trying to fight against so much external pressure, so much more powerful neighbours, economically, militarily, etcetera?
CLR: I have been to Grenada and I can tell you what I saw there. I saw one set of people preparing defence; there were about fifty of them, twenty-five were women each of whom had her gun. I thought that was wonderful...

Question: But can they retain their independence even when they get aid from other countries?
CLR: He is doing his best. Now I am going to the USA at the end of this month to speak at a Grenada/USA association which is getting ready and doing things to help defend Grenada. If one is serious about that one finds a way. I can't tell you from here, but if you really mean it you will find out there are ways of assisting Grenada...

Question: With all the things that are happening in Jamaica and with Seaga now in control, what do you see?
CLR: Now when Manley won the election in 1976 he got 56 seats... Seaga had 45 per cent of the population and Manley had 55. Now it is reversed, Manley has only 9 and Seaga has
50-something. But Manley has 45 per cent of the votes cast, so a substantial part of the people of Jamaica are still supporting Manley. You can be misled by the election results. Number two is the question of policy. The only thing Seaga has is 'I depend upon the United States,' and, boy, if that is all you depend upon, . . . [laughter]. They will help him out but he will have to pay for that; so Manley has a solid part of the people still with him and Seaga has got to show what he has, and he has shown nothing at all except that the United States will lend him money and they wouldn't lend Manley the money: Manley says, 'I can't take it on the conditions that they give it to me,' but he still has 45 per cent of the population. So I can't tell you what you have, but I know Seaga hasn't settled anything. Neither does he claim to settle. . .

Question: Do you think Manley is a better person for Jamaica? CLR: I personally believe that the politics of Mr Manley in the Caribbean today have this at least: he says something. None of the others even say anything. Manley says, 'This is the situation, it's a bad situation and we ought to go along this road and I am not going further along that road.' This is what he is doing. I know the weaknesses of Manley's position, I'm sure I don't know them as well as he does, but he has very positive elements to what he is doing and I say between them all I am for Manley. I don't say that Manley has a solution. I believe that there is no solution to the Caribbean situation but a federation of the whole Caribbean, beginning with Cuba and ending with all three Guyanas, otherwise what is to happen? Will anybody tell me what Barbados is going to do? St Vincent? There is a little scrap of dirt called Barbuda, they are now independent. I don't believe a factory could go up there; it would sink the country. What is all this independence? It's a lot of words. No, no, I am for independence but I don't believe independence. . . settles anything.

Question: While we are on this question of unity talk, is there a point in the strengthening of the non-aligned movement as a whole force between the super powers? CLR: What is the non-aligned movement, please, tell me, please?
Question: The only explanation is mainly puppets, as far as I can see. .. I am asking a point in the popularisation of the concepts of non-alignment and the implication of the grand resolutions that they pass, anti-imperialist, anti-racist.
CLR: Yes, they need a new financial system, that is all that they pass. But these fellows aren’t doing anything, you know, they are not doing anything because they are more afraid of their populations than they are of the imperialists. The imperialists will manage with them, but the populations if they start anything can be very unpleasant.

So they are there balancing in between, but I believe the period of balancing is about to come to an end. I believe your Labour Party in the United Kingdom is in a lot of trouble to maintain that balance. You can’t balance forever; you fall down on one side or the other. From what I hear they are not doing so well on the balancing.

Question: Would you say that the situation in Poland is because of Russian intervention?
CLR: I can’t tell you at one minute to nine about Russia when we are ending at nine, but I suggest you keep your eye on Poland and see why Poland is doing what it is doing. Is Poland revolting against American imperialism? Is it that the Polish people are against the United Kingdom? Are the Polish people against French imperialism? Are they against Chinese? What are the Poles objecting to? They are objecting to the fact that the Russians are once more sitting on their backs, and when you know that, you know some politics; and if you don’t know that, you don’t know it. I don’t wish to be rude but I wish to be strong. The Poles are telling us what is the Russian situation. Poland has constantly been divided – not that the Poles love to be divided but the geographical world situation there: any country that wants to dominate Europe has to get control of Poland, so the history of Poland is being divided and the Poles don’t like it...

I have spent some time on the Russian question. I have no use politically for them and I want everybody to know that. I want to tell you one thing that in 1914 Lenin believed in the Second International; When he heard that they all had voted the finances for the war he said, ‘That’s not true, that’s capitalist propaganda’. He believed in them but when he discovered that they had, he said, ‘The Second International is dead and the policy should be to turn the Imperialist war
into civil war.' You are all waiting. Something must start in Russia before you say you are for that, but Lenin didn’t wait for something to start; he said it is there. I know it is there so I say in advance, I know it is there, and turn it into a civil war. You say so about Russia I say . . . Russia, it is there. I know it is there but you are scared, but pardon me, of course when I say you who are asking the question, not you personally . . .
 Britain and America: Two English Speaking Democracies

Now I want to say a few words about the last lecture. 'Socialism or Barbarism'. I think we got on very well with the Barbarism, and Socialism was a little more difficult but still we got two things clear, I hope. One, that the socialist structure that is needed for a socialist society exists now. You haven't to go looking it up in books, you haven't got to go to Yugoslavia, you haven't to go to Moscow. But it is around us as there is the basis of the co-operative form of the labour process. It was so when Marx wrote his book, it is infinitely more so today. And then we made clear that it requires a new social organisation — and if I didn't make it clear last time, it will be clearer this time — that that social organisation has got to come from the working class, that the working class has not only got to emancipate itself but it has to emancipate the society as a whole.

Now today, why the English-speaking democracies? For one thing, we all speak English, so it is comparatively simple; and secondly, though these nations speak English mostly, they are as wide apart as could be. Now America has nearly 250 million people — it's a huge country — and I am supposed to talk about it in half an hour or less. That is not an impertinence if I know what I am doing and you accept it. I am going to do two things. I'm going to try, number one, to give you some idea of what the rulers in America think of the people. I chose that because I find a lot of vagueness and
uncertainty and illusions about it; I want to make it clear in certain aspects. And, number two, I want to make clear also the place of blacks in that society. . . Next I want to go to the situation in Britain and that is a little more difficult, because most of you live here all the time. What I am going to do is this: I'm going to give you some idea about what I thought about the situation in Britain in 1948, then I'm going to take certain contemporary publications in Britain that have been handed to me or I bought, I picked up, and I will go through them with you and tell you what I think of this one and that one and the other, and then I'll tell you what I think of the one that seems to me the clearest, the closest to what I think and, I believe, the closest to the truth.

So then, what do the people in the USA and the governments think about the people? There is a feeling about that everything in the USA goes ahead very smoothly, that although the people do things, people kill one another etcetera, socially and politically there is a certain stability about the USA. That is not so, and I can only give you one example. Some time a few years ago Mr Nixon was the president: a war was being carried out in Vietnam and he sent to tell the soldiers to invade Cambodia. He sent secretly but it got to be known, and when it was known 400,000 people from different parts of the USA came down to Washington to tell him they didn't like it. Now believe me, 400,000 people telling you they don't like something is quite a thing. What can you do about it? I am going to give you the proof that Mr Nixon was as scared of them as anybody could be. . . Here are the facts of the case. At 10.35 that evening he began to reach out by telephone, to Rosemary Woods, his secretary, to his daughter Tricia, to Secretary of State William Rogers, two minutes later to Henry Kissinger at 10.37, to Bob Haldeman a minute later, 10.38, to Mrs Nixon a minute thereafter, 10.39, to Dr Norman Vincent Peele, 10.50, then racking up thirty-eight more calls in three hours he rang on. Transportation Secretary Volpe, Congressman Fountain, Hobard Lewis, William Sapphire, Secretary Schultz, Secretary Laird, Henry Kissinger again, Billy Graham [laughter] — he wanted some blessing, I suppose — John Erlichman, Bob Haldeman a second time, Secretary Hickle, Rosemary Woods (second), Bebe Rebozo, Pat Moynihan, Congressman Monagan, Haldeman (third), Cliff Miller, Rose Woods (third).
It was now past midnight and the calls went on. Haldeman again, 12.18, Haldeman again 12.20, Kissinger again at 12.24, and Alexis Johnson, Kissinger, Haldeman, Ziegler, Buchanan, Kissinger, Nelson Rockefeller at two minutes to one in the morning, Herb Klein, newscaster — Nancy Dickerson, Ziegler, newswoman Helen Thomas, Bebe Rebozo again, John Mitchell, Governor Thomas Dewey, Bob Haldeman again, Rose Woods again, Kissinger again at five minutes to two, then came a pause. At 3.24 he began telephoning again, to Paul Keys, to Kissinger, to Ron Ziegler, to Helen Thomas... Now how would you interpret that? I would say that he was scared stiff. Now Theodore White says Nixon came close to a nervous breakdown. I don’t think so; he was very much aware. What happened after that? He gets up and he calls his chauffeur and he goes down to the Lincoln memorial, that's where the youth were staying, sleeping out: so he gets into a state and he goes down to talk to them. Just a few days before he had been calling them bums, on television, but now he can't sleep, he is scared stiff of them. What to do? So he goes down there and he talks to them. They don't pay attention to him. They tell him, ‘No, we think you were wrong to do it and how you did it was wrong and we are absolutely against’. And then guess where he goes next? He doesn't go to church, he goes to the Senate (very different from Parliament where you talk, you propose, you oppose, you suppose, you repose, you do) and he went and he sat down in the senate house in his old seat. That was very different from the students telling him they don't like him, and he sat down there and by that time his people caught him up and they all went and had breakfast together. Now I could give you further examples. Nixon was scared stiff and that was his attitude all the time to the American people, to the youth in particular. Why was he scared so stiff, I wonder if anybody can answer? He didn't have a Labour Party; if they had a Labour Party they would have protested vigorously in Parliament but would have kept the people quiet. But he had nothing in America; there is nothing between the President and the people when the people move straight to him and say, 'We don't like it.' So that is characteristic of the United States. I have listened to a big investigation that Senator Irving did and Mr Mitchell the Attorney-General was giving evidence — now that is quite a situation, you know. The President escaped jail because they let him out but Mitchell
the Attorney-General went to jail, Dean his lawyer went to jail, Erlichman his man dealing with foreign affairs, Richard Haldeman went to jail. And I tell them when they ask me about it in my university class, I say, 'I am here on a visa and they didn’t give me a visa to come here to criticise the government of the United States, but I tell you this: I have never heard any time, in any kind of society, where they have to put five of the leading people in jail and their chief only escaped because he was the chief.' And then I say I can’t say any more, I can’t say less but I can’t say any more. So that is a picture you get, I hope, of the United States. That is the attitude of those who are in charge to the people, especially the blacks and the youth. Ramsey Clarke, who was Attorney-General, wrote in the public press, I think in an article in the New York Review of Books, where he says you have about 25 million Negroes here (it is nearer 30 million but they always mix up the numbers, make it less than they are), and he says you have about five million youth in the universities and the Negroes are very restless and the youth are very restless; that combination of the Negroes plus the university youth could be very troublesome. That is the Attorney-General of the United States, and I heard Mr Mitchell say that they had done what they had done because they were scared of the man who was going to be elected president, a popular man — McGovern. . . he said that he would give a thousand dollars to everybody in the United States if he became President, and he was badly beaten, but he was the man who took over the Democratic Party, had a lot of women there, a lot of youth, a lot of blacks — troublesome people. And Mitchell said that they would do it again to prevent McGovern being President of the United States. They were scared of McGovern, they wouldn’t have been scared of a Labour Party leader. He could be trusted as far as people could see to keep the people quiet, but McGovern had reorganised the Democratic Party and wanted to be President. So Mitchell said they did what they did and they went to jail for it; and they would have done anything as long as McGovern was running for President. I think that illustrates their attitude to the population — all of them, the Attorney-General, President, Vice-President, all of them.

Now I want to speak about the blacks. Now Kennedy who was shot had shown sympathy for black people. When his campaign was going on they had arrested Martin Luther King
and put him in prison, and Mrs King was six months pregnant; so the campaign was going on and Nixon was Vice-President and had at his disposal the whole department of justice — should he say anything or not? He thought it over, and the more he thought it over the less he was likely to say anything — but Kennedy called up Mrs King and told her that he was concerned and he would do what he could. That didn’t win the election but it didn’t help him to lose — not at all. So he was quite popular with black people and he carried through some legislation sympathetic to the blacks… but he got shot — people didn’t like his methods. Who shot him, they don’t know, or they can’t say; but his brother was going along the road he had followed and he got shot too. Then the blacks had a man who was middle-class and on the right, but he was attacking the system very hard — Martin Luther King — and he got shot. And there was another black man, a marvellous man, Malcolm X — he’d written an autobiography — he got shot. Now people do get shot like that in the United States. It is a democracy and this is a democracy and both speak English, but things that happened there are very different; that country is very unstable. They were shot, and most important to me as an observer is that they have recently shot a man called Vernon Jordan. Now Vernon Jordan is the most inoffensive political person you can think of. He’s an official of the Urban League, which is well to the right of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Vernon Jordan says, ‘Mr President, you promised us that and you haven’t given it to us.’ That is the extent of his attacking the President; but they shot at Jordan too, and that shows me something. There was a meeting some months ago, about a year ago; several black people were there, notable people, too — by notable people I mean people who were aware of things and had some responsibility. And they were concerned that they were no longer able to point to any black man who could voice what was the situation and the thoughts of black people. They said they had Frederick Douglass, then they had W.E.B. Du Bois, then they had Paul Robeson, then they had Malcolm X, they had Martin Luther King — but they seem to have come to a dead stop; and I told them why. I said the last two have been Martin Luther King and Malcolm X; anybody who comes forward now has to begin where they left off and nobody is likely to do that very lightheartedly — someone may come but there is no getting away from the fact that no leader has come forward—
because that is a very hot seat in politics today. It is said that there are people there who don’t want any black man getting up and saying anything, even if it’s to tell the President, ‘Mr President, you promised us that and you haven’t given it to us.’ So that is the situation with the black people I know and that is the attitude of people to the two Kennedys, to the two leaders and to the man today who is saying something. That is very different to what Britain is today, very different. The country is uncertain; it doesn’t know what is taking place. They are very much aware that an explosion can take place. That’s why they shot Jordan — to tell him, ‘You’re not saying much, but keep still.’

In that respect I can only mention one more point. I want to take up a statement by Mr Moynihan. Mr Moynihan is a senator, or he was a senator; he was an ambassador to India, a man well placed in politics, and Moynihan took an interest in the black question, and it seems to me that the white youth, the students were telling him, ‘Look at the blacks, look at what the constitution says, and the blacks are protesting,’ and Moynihan told them: ‘The blacks are protesting? They have every right, but we cannot do anything about that, therefore I propose to you that we treat that problem with benign neglect.’ Benign neglect — what was the neglect? ‘We can’t do anything about it’ and ‘benign’: don’t get angry with them for doing it, it’s natural that they should do that — but ‘benign neglect’, that is Moynihan’s view.

I think I have touched upon points expressing the attitude of those who are ruling the United States to black people... They are aware that there is a storm brewing down below and they won’t do anything that will unleash that, but they are aware that things are going on. Well, for the time being I think we will leave the United States alone. We have touched on the essential points.

I now go on to the other English-speaking democracy, and I want to make it clear that the only thing common to both of them is that they speak the same language. Britain is a European country, the United States is a New World country. Now first of all I will tell you the way I look upon what is happening in Britain. This book was written in 1948 and I was dealing there with these working-class parties and I say:

_The paper of the French Communist Party, L’Humanite, is the largest morning paper in France. The Stalinists print_
five provincial dailies, and eight more daily papers are associated with them. They print the largest sports magazine in the country, the largest farm magazine, and one of the largest women's magazines. They publish in Paris thirteen professional weeklies, sixty-five regional weeklies all over the country, literary reviews, economic monthlies, magazines for the movie industry, and even a monthly on military affairs.

They are at work on an Encyclopedia of France. And Marxism, French history, world history, science and art, these they treat in a never-ending flood of books, articles, lectures, classes, etc. It is petty bourgeois in every sense.

(Notes on Dialectics, pp. 218-19).

That is a class of people who are behaving in that way; they are a body of people who are satisfied that French capitalism can get no place in Europe on the whole but they don't want to unloose the French working class, they know it better than most people, so they join another ruling group and they carry on; one thing they don't say is that the emancipation of the working class must be the emancipation of the working class itself, no. But they are building up the position of the French petty bourgeoisie, able and ambitious labour leaders, intellectuals who will join something, and they claim they have some way out of the difficulty, and I mention them because they very clearly show what the Labour Party here is. I am astonished to see people being disappointed in the Labour Party. I wasn't disappointed in 1948 and I haven't been disappointed in them for thirty-two years. This is 1980. I know them for what they are and you have to get clear in your mind what they are. They are not making any mistakes: they know what they are doing, they know what they are not doing, and sometimes this party will follow the United States because that is what labour parties do in the democracies at least, or as in France they will follow Moscow. In Europe today they are uncertain as to which, between the United States and the USSR, so they join them in one and call themselves Euro-Communists – Euro means the United States in charge of Western Europe, Communist means Moscow – they don't know which to choose so they have both of them in one and according to how it works out they will join. Euro-Communism – but you have to understand it, those are a definite set of people
who have definite ideas and a definite conception of society and know what they are about. Now that was my view in 1948...

So now you see what my attitude is to the Labour Party. To me it is not an accident; the things they do are not mistakes. They definitely realise that something has got to be done about the society in Britain, but they will not unloose the working class, they don’t believe in the British working class either. They represent a certain class, the petty bourgeoisie, and they have that orientation, and if you begin to look at them at all you have to bear that in mind, otherwise you go all over the place. I have here a pamphlet, I suppose some of you know it. There was a debate – Tony Benn MP, Stuart Holland MP – a debate on the crisis and future of the Left, ‘The debate of the decade’ – Hilary Wainwright, Paul Foot, Tariq Ali. I’m not going to go into all of this but you must have some of it... Here on page 32 of this pamphlet Paul Foot, who has been in politics for many years, says, ‘Why was the Labour government so awful?’ I wonder if you feel about that as I do. In 1980 you are debating and you ask, ‘Why was the Labour government so awful?’ In 1948 I said that’s how they are, that’s how they are going to be, that is what they represent and these are the limits of their policies; but in 1980 you are asking why is the Labour government so awful? Tariq Ali is not very different from that. Now some people seem to understand it very well. I don’t know about brother Widgery, but David Widgery has published a book and he gave a copy to me, for which I am grateful. I found it invaluable, and in it he says that whatever else Wilson is seen by history as achieving, an irreversible destruction of social democracy’s active working-class following may not be his least important achievement. Now I wonder if you realise what that means, that Harold Wilson has irreversibly destroyed the working-class following of the Labour Party? I don’t know whether he is for the Labour Party or not...

Now to Tony Benn. He says: ‘My starting point is a very simple one [he is mistaken, it is very complicated], it is that everybody here who calls themselves socialist, apart from the failure we are discussing, assumes blame. I say that without criticism of others... but Paul Foot has had the absolute freedom to organise the SWP for many years and go around and make his impassioned speeches; he is part of the failure
just as I am who have served with Labour governments since 1964.' So it has been a failure since 1964. What have you to do about a man who in 1980 says we have been failures since 1964 and stops there? In other words there was nowhere for him to go. I hear Mr Benn has got the support of many people, labour, union people, but here he is saying nothing. Now I find this everywhere, but I want to get to somebody who is saying something. Does anybody know somebody called Hilary Wainwright? She asks, is the extra-parliamentary activity, the mass movements, merely like extracurricular activity, just a worthy back-up to the real thing?. . . Hilary Wainwright says the shop stewards’ combine committees, tenants’ groups, black people getting together — are they the real thing for which parliamentary activity is just one source of support? And she says those are the people who matter; she says people are fed up with the regular Labour Party and are tired of it. She says that from Tyneside, South Wales, Clydeside, formerly those people were Labour Party people to the last, now they don’t know what to do at all. She goes on to say that it is these women’s committees, the black movement, the shop stewards’ committees, those forms are what is to be the future of the labour movement, and she is the only one that recognises that the Labour Party has done nothing and will do nothing. That is one of the first things you have to make clear, to get it out of your minds that you will be deceived by them or you will be hurt by them and their behaviour. You have to have a clear mind as to that. Hilary Wainwright says clearly that some of the strongest places where Labour used to be supported are no longer able to look to it and don’t know what to do; the parliamentary Labour Party which they believed was going to do something is giving them nothing. . . and I want to make it quite clear, I believe that these committees will do something, and if the committees don’t do something, nothing will be done. . .

Now I have here Mr E.P. Thompson, a man who writes very well and who is quite a scholar, and he says in his book *Writing by Candlelight* that one would have supposed in these circumstances that the libertarian tradition would have migrated to their archipelago to the left and outside of the official parties, New Left, women’s movement, the movements of ethnic minorities and so on. . . ‘potentially it may yet prove to be so but in fact no coherent, impassioned or consistent
agitation or education in civil rights or in libertarian positions has come from this quarter'. Now there you have it, it has to come from there and I agree, and he goes on to say: 'to diagnose this failure is to touch on sensitive issues and to provoke furious counter-polemics but since I believe that the nerve of outrage has always in our history been carried in the first place by the minorities and since I also believe that the failure of our present minorities to react with sufficient clarity and consistency is a significant contributory element, that is why I think they are as they are.' Thompson recognises that in the past, in history generally and in British history, it is movements of that kind that defy the regular type of domination from which something has come, but he says that historically speaking and he hasn't anything to say about it at all; he merely observes, 'Well, they ought to come from there and it hasn't come from there,' and he doesn't want to go into any discussion about it because it may give offence. Well, I sincerely hope I am giving great offence because I am merely saying what is being said and what you are being told. I want to go further with Thompson also. In *The Poverty of Theory*, page 354, he said that 'when Major Atlee came into power the British Labour movement attempted to construct and to enlarge within the framework of the capitalist system alternative institutions with an alternative socialist content.' He says, 'the mines, railways were nationalised, a free health service was introduced, educational provision was expanded in ways in which children of the majority of citizens would get benefit. Some attempts were made to make taxation redistributed amongst them and to develop social services and benefits according to need. In classical social-democratic theory these measures, taken together could be seen as... a step upwards to a steady grading, leading from a capitalist to a socialist society.' He said that the years 1944 to 1946 were a high water mark in the morale and consciousness of British working people, miners and railwaymen wished to bring mines and rails within common ownership... Then he goes on to say it failed completely. He says that when it went to Parliament the people who were in and around were able to manipulate those so that instead of education being the means by which the people are educated it became the means whereby a bright boy was educated to take his place among those who were better off than he was. So he says they failed from
1944 to 1946. That is the situation. . . ‘my conclusion is therefore to question whether class unity, class consciousness and class struggle can be developed merely by a strategy of politicising trades-union militancy in its present form’ — that’s the question to ask and he is doubtful of the answer. I merely wish to say this much: that in 1948 perhaps I was too precipitous but I had come to the conclusion that there was nothing to be got from them, either the communist Labour movement or the social democratic movement. And nothing has happened between that time and this day which has changed my view. I want to say here there is absolutely nothing to be got from them and the first thing you have to do, you have to get clear that they know what they are doing, they know what they are afraid of and they will stay there as long as they can. . .

But the situation has reached the stage where I believe that the British working class is surely coming to the conclusion that that is no longer a route to take. . . And if I go by history as I have seen it, they are not going to say, ‘Well, Labour cannot do it therefore we don’t know what to do,’ they will find a way. They have always found a way and the British Labour Party, the British Labour movement is one of the most powerful in the world today. It has the extreme benefit that it is unified. You go to America, it is split: there is the south, which was feudal, then there is the middle-west, which is the farming area with huge farms, and then there is the north-east where you have Detroit and the rest of the big industrial towns. But by and large in Britain one part of the country is not so different from another part; you have Welsh and Scots but by and large the British working-class movement is pretty strong, and I believe — I have to believe that — that it is now reaching a stage where it is realising that it cannot depend on the Labour movement. The Labour Party is not getting anywhere. . .

That is my view, that the movement has got to come from people outside the Labour Party, from these committees, the black committees, the shop stewards’ committees, the women’s groups, and the rest of them; as E.P. Thompson says, all movements in Britain have always come from there. . . That’s where we are today, and you have to begin by absolutely cutting out clean any idea that the Labour Party or trades-union movement will do anything. It will do nothing except try to keep as quiet as possible
those movements that are still remaining alive.

Thank you.

Question: CLR, it seems to me that one of the basic weaknesses of the British Labour movement is that it is orientated towards struggle for immediate bread-and-butter objectives only, without relating these to the larger proletarian tasks of the restructuring of society, and what I find defective in your suggestion that the women's, black peoples' and shop stewards' movements are the hope for the future is that those organisations are of necessity and logically directed towards the achievement of reforms and improvements within the existing social structure; and therefore, left to those movements without a theoretical awakening of the class cannot achieve what you envisage is needed for Britain.

CLR: Who is that — Paul Foot or Tariq Ali? I was careful to say that I found this stated and very carefully pointed out that Tyneside, Clydeside and South Wales have turned away from the Labour Party. EP Thompson says that in 1944-6 the Labour Party was ready and made its proposals and took them to Parliament: complete failure. Well, what are we going to do about it? Thompson goes on to say that all movements in the British movement that have gone places always began with these extracurricular, extraparliamentary activities. Now what is wrong with that? . . . When some miners come out and say, 'Tell Mr Heath, nothing doing,' I don't know how theoretically clear they were but they were politically very effective. . . . I prefer a movement more than any theory; they can do something, they will do something. Everything depends upon them. . . That is what I think and nobody has said anything to make me feel otherwise.

Question: I am not challenging the concept that the movements you mention are effective instruments of struggle; what I am saying is that it cannot be left there, it is not enough. In addition the objectives of the class must be raised to a restructuring of society not simply for struggling for the bread-and-butter interests today.

CLR: I believe that in Britain today and in any modern country any really structured mass movement finds that the fundamental realities of the day are put before it as in a play. Once they have made up their minds they are not parliamentary, you haven’t to have too much theory. . . . You
have the facts of the case to deal with. . . There has got to be a movement that sees the Labour Party and the trade-union movement for what they are: definite defenders of the capitalist form of society; and until you get that clear in your mind you really can't get moving.

Question: Would you agree that the notion of legitimacy as a political concept has always been used to maintain the status quo, and if changes are indeed to be achieved would you agree that the prerequisite is for a new notion of legitimacy?
CLR: I believe that it is absolutely legitimate and not a new notion that the fundamental meaning of legitimacy is a substantial number of working-class people saying, 'This is what we want and we are not going to be satisfied with anything less than this, because we are the foundation members of this society and if we are not moving well the whole society is drifting apart.' That, I think, is as legitimate a view as you wish.

Question: But when you do this and the powers that be send the police out. . .?
CLR: Sir, if you begin by being afraid of the police you may as well stay home. [Applause.] I tell you what I know: a man who was a member of the British army told me that in 1919 the British working class was very strong, very powerful, and he was walking around demonstrating and a policeman was there pushing him around. He asked the policeman, 'Why do you behave to us in this way? You are just one of us, like us — why do you?' The policeman told him, 'You are all just marching around, what do you expect me to do? To join you marching around?' That would be the end of me. But if you all do something then you will find that some people who are sympathetic to you will do something. But if you are just marching around, we are not going to help you.' Now you begin by marching around, but you march around some more and a thousand people marching around are very troublesome; 10,000 means much more and if you get 100,000 people marching around then that is more than a march-around, that is a hellraise-around.

Question: I think it would be wonderful if the women's movement and the black movement and the shop stewards'
movement could have workers’ control, but as you said you’ve got to have more people. My anxiety is that people are leaving the Labour Party but they are not going further left, they are going to the right. They don’t see the solution being in working-class organisation. They are very much affected by the ideology of the ruling class and they seem to move to the right now, that’s what depresses me. I feel the problem is how to reach the masses, make these movements not just movements of intellectuals, like most of the people in this room, but movements of working-class people.

CLR: You said something that startles me, that people are moving to the right, but you have to get the number of people who voted for Labour at the last election. I was reading in the press recently that the year 1979 had the biggest number of strikes and the greatest number of days of labour lost since statistics started being kept around 1893; in other words, the workers in 1979 were taking the steps that they thought necessary, but that doesn’t mean they are going to the right. I want to know how many of them did not vote or how many of them voted for Tories against Labour. I doubt if it was very much.

Question: You have pointed to the women’s movement, the shop stewards’ movement and the black movement in Britain as a way forward in Britain. Did you see any similar forces emerging in the United States of America?

CLR: There are plenty. The black movement in the ‘60s upset the United States completely. It brought the Vietnam war to an end. I tried to make it clear that the people who are concerned about what is taking place in the United States are those rulers, and I took Nixon, the Kennedy brothers and other people – Moynihan with his ‘benign neglect’ – as examples. I was in the United States for twelve years. I have spoken in every state there except Alaska, because they didn’t ask me, and I didn’t speak in Hawaii because when we were talking about it I was about to come back and the time didn’t suit them and it didn’t suit me – but I have spoken everywhere else; I have been to the West Coast about five times. The potentiality of that country is tremendous and I wanted you to get that clear, and the best way to do that in half an hour was to let you know what the rulers were thinking. By the way, the people in the United States are very much concerned about the situation in Britain. They believe
that the Labour Party has too much power in Britain, that's the trouble with Britain. The Labour Party and the trade unions have too much power, that is what the American intellectuals and the progressive liberal left think is the problem with Britain. . .

Question: After nearly thirty-five years in this country I find that I can only make sense of those failures when I begin to think of this country as the last colony. Here we have in government people who are real inheritors of the imperialist rulers, who are repositories of those strategies and techniques and who command. . . To me the working class of this country always saw themselves as part of the ruling class vis-a-vis the Empire and the Commonwealth. And I think they still see themselves as this, not as they ought to, as the natives of the last colony. When they begin to look at it that way then I think they may be able to see more clearly, to have a goal and find the means to reach that goal. . . then there will be hope for them and hope for us.
CLR: Well, I don’t agree that they are (natives of the last colony). I have a tremendous respect for the British working class. I know its weaknesses — I’ve been aware of them a long time — but the working class as such, I know it well. . . The working class fought behind Mr Churchill in the last war. And when the war was over they put the Labour Party in. That was for the Labour Party to do something — that was a very striking point, you know. . . From ’44-’46 the working class movement was ready for anything it wanted — it was ready to support, the miners were ready to support the political movement, and as we said the Tories took it and made it into something else. And that has been going on for thirty-five years. . . But what I believe from what I’ve been reading is that we’ve reached a certain stage and over the next five years we are going to see changes. But you don’t have to say the British working class is one of the colonial territories, or that they’re naive and so on. . . There are many positive elements in the British working class movement. It was formed in 1900. In 1923-28 it was the party with the largest following in the country; believe me, that matters.

Question: You talked about the shop stewards’ movement and the shop stewards’ movement in 1958, but there’s one
thing you don't talk about... Ireland. And secondly, when you talk about Thompson you say that he's very good, he understood the nature of the Labour Party. The trouble with Thompson is that he is a member of the Labour Party and that everyone bows down to him as the great theoretician of the left, as the great Marxist historian; but I don't understand why they bow down to him as the great theoretician when his practice is so outrageously ridiculous. I can't understand how you can break down this unity between theory and practice as you do and say, well, there's no need for the theory and we've got to look to the new forms of struggle and there's no need to take on any of these theoretical debates.

CLR: Well, quite frankly you're saying things about Mr Thompson which I wouldn't say. I believe I would be happier if he were doing something else, but I can't suggest to Mr Thompson that what he is doing is not profitable. I believe he is playing a very important role in making certain things clear. He is an intellectual and he knows that he is. You know he's been through the Communist Party. He's been through that and he knows the weaknesses of the party. I wouldn't join you in criticising Thompson. He's a positive force — a man from whom I learn a great deal — from his books and his writings in general. And when I disagree with Thompson, I'm quite happy to disagree with him because I know something is up. Something is going on there, and maybe I'm not seeing it correctly, or maybe Thompson is wrong—that is something to be worked out. You spoke about Ireland. I didn't speak about Ireland, I didn't speak about Scotland, I didn't speak about British agriculture — I didn't speak about many things, I just chose a few things and I stated clearly about the British Labour Party and the British trade-union movement, I purposely didn't touch this, that and the other.

Question: It seems to me that part of the problem is that there is a theoretical void on the left and it is probably because of the empiricist position that exists in this country and in the United States; it seems that EP Thompson is regarded as the theoretical alternative to orthodox Althusserianism and all the rest of it. As has been pointed out, Thompson is in fact in the Labour Party and it seems to me
that for us who choose not to be inside the Labour Party we do need the same kind of Marxist theoretical profundity that you yourself displayed in 1948 in your book Notes on Dialectics — I was wondering what you thought about that. CLR: I thought it was a fine book. [Laughter.] There’s something I think I ought to say. I don’t think that Thompson would think about himself in the way that you are thinking of him — as a great leader of the British working class — I don’t think he thinks that way. He has a stronger sense of what is required. But he’s doing what he can and I think what he’s saying is quite important, and I have a lot more people to quarrel with than Thompson, I can assure you...

Now I want you to take note, for example, of what has happened to the British ruling class in one of the spheres in which it has been very famous. Beginning with Chaucer, century after century, the British people produced one of the great literatures of the world. About 1900 it came to a dead stop. Who are the great figures in English literature of the twentieth century? Poetry — W B Yeats, an Irishman; fiction— James Joyce, an Irishman. Playwriting — Sean O’Casey, an Irishman. The men who have done great literary work for the language are three Americans: Henry James — he left America and came here; T S Eliot — he left America and came here; and Ezra Pound — he left America and came here. Then another foreigner, a seaman from Poland — Joseph Conrad... So that when you look at the twentieth century, at the great literary figures in a country with a great literary past, there is only one Englishman, D H Lawrence — and he couldn’t live here. In other words something has happened to the country as a whole. When you take the political leaders — England has had great political leaders: there were men like Cobden, Bright, Mr Gladstone did a good job for them. But when it comes to the twentieth century they haven’t produced two remarkable men; one was a Welshman, Lloyd George — he started the welfare state, he put the House of Lords in its place, he patched up the mess with Ireland, patched it up for the time being, and he won their war for them. And there’s been a very distinguished man, a very able man, Aneurin Bevan — but he was taken over by them. And nobody else has ever done anything noteworthy. You had a lot of people but nothing is happening now — there is a blank in the country as a whole. The blank is not only in political matters, it’s in
literary matters also. . . The Liberal Party and the Tory Party started to be in trouble when the Labour Party was formed. And the Labour Party in 1945 gave this country a vision of what could be; it hasn't followed it up.

Question: I've just come back from America, I was working there illegally with hundreds and thousands of illegal British workers to the tune of about 300,000 in California alone. Now there's about, as I understand it, 84 million illegal migrant workers principally from Mexico and South America working in the United States. Also there's a lot of migrant workers in Britain and Europe as a whole now. Turkey, Italy, Scotland, Ireland, the Arab countries, the West Indies and so on. It strikes me that more and more as capitalism develops, the pressures on the generation of migrant labour becomes more and more great. The problems we have to face, of race, nationality and class becomes more and more immediate and urgent. This is why I wanted to hear what CLR has to say about America and Britain because when I was in America one of the things which struck me there was that the problem within the different groups of migrant workers is becoming more acute. You've got tensions in black workers, in Mexican workers, in white migrant workers who are very much in the same position but whose antagonisms are developing in not just black and white but black, brown and various other divisions as well. And this is the same in Europe to an extent. The major difference is the absence of social democratic forces in America so it is an extremely volatile position whereas in Britain and Europe you have social democratic parties which can alleviate these tensions. What I would like to talk about is how if at all CLR sees the possibility for the migrant workers who are in existence being a very serious force in America coming together across these kinds of divisions to form a united class, a working class. Not to talk about the Labour Party — I don't want to waste any more time with the Labour Party.

CLR: No, I'm sorry. I had to talk about the Labour Party. But I talked about a certain section of the working class in the United States. I could have said plenty more — but I could only give you an indication, that's all I could do. I showed the attitude of the ruling people in America to the working class was what you can call volatile in attitude — they were scared stiff — and I gave you examples. Now you
could talk about the Mexicans — they are playing a tremendous role — people are beginning to say that they are a minority which is stronger and larger and more likely to be effective than the blacks. I don’t think it is so, but it shows you where these people have reached. Undoubtedly there is a lot to be said about the Spaniards and the Mexicans crossing the borders but there is a great deal to be said about the different types of people that there are. They are all American in the sense that they are part of the nation and their elections are concentrated upon the President. I could go through elections of presidents with you: Since Roosevelt is dead, they haven’t been able to find one person whom they could put there. They haven’t been able to find one. You want to talk about America? — Roosevelt started it and it ended with Nixon. Roosevelt said, ‘Up to now free enterprise is what has governed the country,’ but in 1932 he said, ‘Look here, your free enterprises have made a mess of it and in future you are not going to do as you please; the government is going to take care of you.’ And Roosevelt began the steady incorporation into the government of activities used to be left to free enterprise; until today the US is completely under the control, at least theoretically, of the state. When there is unemployment or rising prices or something, people don’t look to capitalists in general, they look to the government — so that there is a concentration of concern in the American government that accounts for the fact that they are so scared. Well, I could talk about that, but I didn’t want to bring that in — I prefer to talk about certain concrete personal things. You are quite right, there is a great deal to be said about the United States. I’m sorry if I didn’t say what you wanted but I had to say what I wanted — I regret to say.

Question: I would like to ask CLR for some clarification. On the one hand you seem to be saying that you said something in 1948 and on the basis of that and a lot of the things people had to tell you are redundant — they were based on delusions which should never have existed. On the other hand you have reminded a number of people who asked questions of the importance of the labour movement, suggest the labour movement rather than the Labour Party and this is something very traditional on the left in this country to suggest that the labour movement particularly with some of the older trade-union people — and you’ve
also referred to the kinds of women’s groups and black
groups and stewards’ committees and tenants’ committees
which have been referred to by Hiliary Wainwright. Now
those groups at a local level are often in a position where the
Labour Party in the kind of areas in which they exist, even
on Tyneside, is having to recognise their existence... and has
sought to deal with this. Sometimes this is at the level of
local councillors saying to people, well, if you were in the
Labour Party you would be able to get more. If you then
object to certain things about the Labour Party — their
national position, their democratic procedures etc — they
will tell you, “Well, it is because people like you don’t come
into the Labour Party that it isn’t any different’. And a lot of
people over the last few years have moved into the Labour
Party, previously having in a sense become adult in the period
of Vietnam and things like that, and not joined the Labour
Party. There’s a group of people who joined the Labour
Party ten years later than they would have done previously.
And this thing is becoming formalised — Tony Benn and the
guy who organised boycotts of Rugby matches, an ex-Liberal
Peter Hain, have both now published books in which they
urge the Labour Party to offer the same incorporation into
the Labour Party of community organisations and black
groups which they offer to the trade unions. Now in this
situation you on the one hand request that no one has any
illusions about the Labour Party and on the other hand
stressing the importance of the labour movement leaves us
in some ambiguity; not that you can answer our questions
for us — we can’t ask for you to do that — one of the things
which is a strength in the British working class which is an
incorporation of the trade unions into the Labour Party is
also a break with the Labour Party. Because I am a trade-
union member, I am not a member of the Labour Party but
I come out of the Labour Party. The tradition is that if you
opt out of your union fees then that is a right-wing position
and so this question of the Labour Party or the labour move-
ment and even the groups outside the Labour Party, com-
munity groups, and the question of do you go in and you
try and change it or do you stay out and try to develop
something else.
CLR: Now I can only answer the question by saying this
much. That it is obvious that the Labour Party is in a great
deal of difficulty. I haven’t mentioned it here because I
didn't want to go into it. It seems that about ten or twenty of them want to get out and form a centre party — they are feeling the pressure — obviously that pressure is taking place but I can't tell you what to do. All I can say is that it is necessary to get clear in your mind what the Labour Party is and what is it going to do. What the trade-union bureaucracy is and what it must do being what it is. And that it is elsewhere in these libertarian movements, that there lies the future — that is what I have always thought and that is what I see Thompson thinks and that's what I see Hilary Wainwright thinks. And there are a lot of them here but she said something that I thought I would bring to your attention. I can't give you any advice. I'm not telling you to leave the Labour Party. There are some Labour Parties you shouldn't leave — there are some you should get out of as fast as you can. But there are some, it depends on where you are — you can form part of a women's group and still be in the Labour Party — that is a matter you have to decide — what I'm trying to get at is the fundamental movement so that you see what are the basic forces and which you are going to join. I couldn't give you personal advice on that. I would have to go into a lot of things but I think what I've said is fairly clear.

Chair: I'll take the last question.

Question: It's more of a comment really, following on from what was said earlier and your comment in return about a socialist women's group and what was said by a sister over there. I think there is a small but perhaps quite significant shift within the left and the women's movement and the black movement towards autonomy (and I'm speaking as a feminist myself). I think there's always been a problem with the democratic centralist parties of groups in their relations with women and with blacks. But I think it's not just their problem now. I think even attempts that have been made recently in Britain to connect together the non-aligned movements and groups such as even the ones that Hilary Wainwright is talking about in the Beyond the Fragments initiative that she and two other women took at the end of August, this summer, to bring together those unaligned groups. There was even there, I felt, and it could be just my feeling, but I think I was part of a group of people who felt that even that was ignoring to some extent or under-emphasising the
autonomy of the different movements, and I myself have just left a libertarian left group which does support the self-activity of the working class because I feel that it subordinates feminism to class. I think it's worth making this comment because there are quite a few women at the moment who are doing the same thing. I can't obviously speak for the black movement but there are at the moment quite a few women who are leaving socialist, even quite libertarian socialist groups in order to take part in the autonomous women's movement. The main problem there, of course, is that it is not yet a mass movement, it is a movement still largely of middle-class women and predominantly still white women. There is another problem which is that many of the left groups in response, I think, to the crisis and Thatcher are having the wrong reaction, which is to try to tighten up and close ranks when in fact I think what should be happening, and what the autonomous movement seems to be ready for in Britain, is a loosening and an ability to start from their own oppression and to work from that. I feel myself that the left groups are lost until they start from the oppression of people themselves and only maybe in 10 or 15 years connect together. We always have to start from where we are.

CLR: Well, I was glad to hear you say that— that is something positive but don't think of 10 or 15 years— no, five at most. The next election and then after the next election within the next five years. You forced that out of me— I didn't want to say that but I don't like to hear about 10 or 15. It's closer than that because there's lots of them in the Labour Party who want to get out— they feel it, they feel that the Labour Party left is taking over the party... They wish to go out and form a centre party. All that is very important to me. I haven't come here to tell you about that— I prefer to take the fundamental movement. I'm glad you said what you said— you certainly helped to advance a lot into the deeper way and maybe come back later, come back with something but to go out and feel what's happening. You are quite right— I'm glad to hear that somebody could say that at any rate. Thank you.

Chair: OK, I thank everybody for coming the next lecture is on the 12th, on Monday, and the title of that will be 'Immigrants to Britain: Formerly Colonial Peoples.' But, CLR, one thing that I would like to say perhaps on behalf of the organ-
isers is that our work within the black community, West Indians, Asians, would indicate that by and large there is a general feeling among blacks in Britain that the Labour Party is not taking them anywhere. I expected somebody to say that from the floor but nobody has said it and I want to tell you that that is the general feeling of the black community in Britain.

CLR: I'm glad to hear you say that. I know what has happened, you know. I have said something and they didn't expect it — and they said well, well, and they stopped there.
Immigrants to Britain: Formerly Colonial Peoples

Now, we have come to the end of the three-part series of lectures. I am very much aware that it’s a three part affair. I hope you are also. It’s very good to see people who came the first time have returned. That is a very good sign. But this lecture is going to be somewhat different. I’m going to do a certain amount of introduction but, hitherto, most of the lectures have gone from me to you. This time, I hope, much will be coming from you to me, otherwise we wouldn’t have used as much of the space and time as we should have done. I’m expecting much of you, but there are one or two things that I have to say to begin with.

First of all, these three lectures. The first was ‘Socialism or Barbarism’. I think we got clear as to how far society had progressed towards barbarism, and there are one or two things I want to add about socialism, but that can wait till later.

The next lecture dealt with ‘Two English-Speaking Democracies’. In other words, we took a universal characteristic of society and saw how that applied to two important countries who were together in that they spoke the same language. I hope I made it very clear that the state of affairs in the United States was very different from the state of affairs in Great Britain.

Now, today, we come to the immigrants. By immigrants, I mean the black people from the Caribbean, black people
from Africa, Asians from Pakistan and from India, those who are here — nearly three million, I believe. Now, I want to speak about the role you have played in the past and the role you will have to play. The first thing I want you to get out of your mind is that you are not visitors here. The other day the English cricket team going to the Caribbean selected a Barbadian. I could have told in advance that, if it was one of us, it would have been a Barbadian [laughter]. Well, he said that he was a bit disturbed at first least the West Indian people should object to his playing for England, but he thought that in the end that is what he had to do. He said, ‘I live here, I’m married, my son is being brought up here’. He said, ‘Who else can I play for?’ I don’t think the West Indian people are going to do him anything. I don’t think so. If anything happens it will be brought up by other people but the average West Indian person is not going to be subject to that.

Now, you belong here. You are living here, part of the English society. That means you have to take part in it. You have to join or not join as the case may be. And what we discussed the second time was the Labour Party. Now what I want to say is that one can join or not join the Labour Party. There are certain places in England where if you don’t join the Labour Party you join nothing else. I remember Aneurin Bevan used to say, ‘I never joined the Labour Party, I was brought up in it,’ and many of your young people or your children are going to be people who have been brought up in Britain and have to make decisions as British people. But that does not limit your situation at all. You have to be able to understand something of the history of this country, wherever you came from. You’re living here, you must understand something about Great Britain. You have to do that. Maybe you do it in school, maybe you do it out of school. But, at any rate, you have to understand that part of the colonial population wasn’t brought here and others didn’t grow up here. You are living in another country and you belong here. You have to know something about the country. You have to know something about the Labour Party and the various other parties. It is imperative that you know that if you are going to live here and take part.

But there is something else that I want to add. You also represent those places from which you have come. Unless the man from the Caribbean is able to talk about the Caribbean people and relate the kind of society that exists there with here, then he is not undertaking the responsiblity that
history has placed on him. When 3 million people who were colonials come to the metropolitan country, that's quite an event you know. That's an historical event of immense importance. You have to know something about the country and you have to relate something about the Caribbean where you come from.

Now the people of India have a special responsibility. India is one of the most important countries in the world. Much of the future of the world depends on what happens in India. If India went tomorrow the way China went a few years ago, then the whole of the Far East and Middle East would be thrown into great upheaval and disorder. Much is depending upon India. And those people who come from India and who are here, and from Pakistan too, have to be able to tell the British people and other colonial people what is going on in your countries. I'm very much concerned with that country because of where it is placed, what happened there and what has not happened in India. In Trinidad where I come from, half the population is Indian, so I feel involved with them in spite of myself. So those are two things you have to do. Number one, you have to be able to find out something about the country you are living in now and you have to be able to report the state of the colonial territory you come from. You are not supposed to know all of them. You can't know all, but each one, from the country you come from, you ought to be able to speak about it.

Now, I have one or two things to say about the fact of two or three million of you living here in Britain. You are not at the back of British society. You occupy a peculiar place in it and I can best explain that by taking up the position of black people in the United States. The position of black people in Britain is not the same. Black people have been nipped fundamentally into the structure of the United States in certain positions. You are not that way. You only came here very recently. But, nevertheless, what happened to them indicates what can happen to you and I can state it quite simply. In every upheaval in the United States, the black people have always been foremost. Now that might come as a great shock to many of you, that the black people have led politically in the struggles that are taking place. Take the Civil War and the War of Independence in 1776. George Washington, Jefferson and the rest began and they said they didn't want any blacks in their armies. But the
British were very revolutionary in regard to the racial question. They said that for blacks to be slaves was a shame. 'If you come over to us then we would be glad to set you free.' As many of the blacks that remained from certain states came over to the British side. The British didn't set them free. They sold them to the West Indies or they brought them to Britain. But the fact remains that those blacks were ready to decide that their freedom was more important to them than the national struggle that the American people were talking about. So that, politically, they were not in the back and ultimately that event was very important to those that were left behind. The Americans realised that they had better bring the blacks into the army. First, they needed them and, secondly, they were carrying on a great agitation and thirdly, if they didn't take them, some of them would go on over to the other side. So in the end they brought them into the army and they played a most important role in that 1776 War.

Now we come to the greatest event in the history of the United States – the Civil War that lasted from 1860 to 1865. Now the Civil War didn't come at once. From 1830 to 1860 they were getting ready and the blacks in the South were getting ready too, and they were getting out of the South. One black woman, Harriet Tubman, she went in and brought out secretly 300 blacks at a time. Now that is quite something, you know. 300 blacks. And she didn't make any nonsense. She carried a gun and some of the blacks used to find it difficult and she would say either you go or you stay just where you are because she couldn't afford for them to make any noise. They'd give the children a pill to keep them quiet, which was legitimate in those circumstances. She brought out 300 at a time. So, from 1830 to 1860, they had tried revolution in the South and they came out. And there was a special road that they took called the Underground Railroad. So, from 1830 to 1860 that was a constant cause of irritation between the North and the South. And they would settle on some terms and they would have an agreement. But they couldn't keep the agreement because the blacks kept coming. Finally, the South said, 'Well, we want in the agreement that you will fight to capture the escaped slaves,' and the whites of the North said, 'To hell with that, we don't mind you having your slaves; the Constitution said you could have them, but we're not going to be any slave catchers for
you.' And that is one of the reasons why the war took place. The slave business of the South and the unrest of the slaves kept up a constant cause of dispute and disagreement between the North and the South. Secondly, Abraham Lincoln had said that if we lost those blacks who were fighting for us – 200,000 of them – and who had served us in various ways we would lose the war in three weeks. At a certain stage the blacks were absolutely necessary to the winning of this war by the North, and you know what role that has played in history either positive or negative, but it was a tremendous struggle and the blacks were decisive.

Now, I give you my own experience. That was what they found out; that the blacks were absolutely necessary for the North to win the South. Then there was a great movement in the United States called the Populist movement about 1890. The farmers and workers were joining together. And I went to America and I was studying the history and I saw the blacks in the American War of Independence and I saw the blacks in the Civil War and then comes the great movement, the populist movement, and I don’t see any blacks. So a person working with me, Raya Dunayevskaya, I told her, ‘Raya, look and go and see for me please if there are not some blacks in the populist movement.’ She turned up the same day or the next day. You know how many she brought? A million. There was a million in the Colored Farmers’ Association but the historians had not bothered with them. And they played a tremendous role in the populist movement. So right through history to the present time, I think I referred to it last time, in the United States, blacks have played a tremendous role. I don’t think there is much history of the twentieth century that will leave out the Rev. Martin Luther King. I can’t go into it but King was one of the reasons and his activity was one of the reasons why so many blacks voted for Carter, why Carter got in. He got in, people helped him. He got out, he did that himself [laughter]. So that, at the present time, the blacks complain they have no leaders. They say, ‘We have always had: We had Frederick Douglass, we had W E B DuBois, we had Paul Robeson, we had Martin Luther King, we had Malcolm X but now we have nobody.’ And I told them, ‘Look at what has happened to Martin Luther King, what happened to Malcolm X?’ They were shot. And the Kennedy brothers who were sympathetic, they were shot too. So that, today, to come for-
ward to be a black leader you have to be asking for it. You may not get it but you are putting yourself in line. And there’s a certain man today who I think is the most important man of all, a man named Vernon Jordan of the Urban League. And the Urban League are the most inoffensive people. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People make some claims, nobody pays much attention to them, but the Urban League doesn’t even make a claim. And they shot Vernon Jordan, which came as a great shock to me. Because I know what Jordan used to say. Jordan used to say, ‘Mr President, you promised us this and this and this and you haven’t given us any.’ That was the limit of the revolutionary activity of Vernon Jordan and yet he was shot. That was a warning that they don’t want any black people to stir up that tremendous burst of activity. They know it’s just there. I know, I’ve been there for ten years. They don’t want anybody to say anything. The President must not be sympathetic and no blacks can come forward. They have to stay right there.

I spoke last time of one thing that was said by a Mr Moynihan. He’s a very talkative Senator. Most American senators talk. I don’t know if Moynihan talks well but he talks a lot. And it seems as if some of the white youths were talking and saying, ‘Well, look here, what have you agreed? Look at the black people — we have promised to do this and that and the other and we say we are democratic; the black people are not satisfied and we ought to do something.’ And Moynihan made what was destined to be a famous reply. He said, ‘Look, we have to make up our minds but we have to treat the black people with benign neglect.’ Benign neglect, that’s a great phrase, remember it, please. Benign neglect. Why benign? Because they’re absolutely right. They can take the Constitution and show us that is what you say every American is, but it says we have to neglect them. We can’t do anything about it. To do something about the blacks in the United States means a complete alteration of the United States as it is today.

Now, you are not in the same situation but you have the same basic political situation in that you are a part of a society that claims to be democratic, which claims to be this, that and the other and denies you those claims that they make. So you are in a position where you can say this and that and we are outside and we want to know why. And the situation of black people and people from Pakistan and people from India is going to get worse and worse
every year. By ‘worse’ I mean most dissatisfied with the situation because the children will have not been born abroad, they will be born here, they will go to school here, they will not know any foreign language, they will be British in their general outlook and they will feel it as their parents have not felt it when they are deprived of the things that every Britisher ought to have. So we must prepare for a situation that is constantly developing, putting you more and more into a situation where you will be in the vanguard of the revolutionary elements in this society. And don’t be afraid of it, please.

There is one more thing I want to add. You ought to speak about your country or where you came from or where your parents came from. Don’t hesitate to point out that the politics that most of them are carrying out are much worse than the politics in Britain. I’m not going to call any names because I know that nobody has any bombs to throw, but, nevertheless, I’m not going to call names; but in country after country – and I can say it confidently because I come from the Caribbean – the governments are, of the most reactionary, some of them are the most counter-revolutionary that we have experienced. They have no sympathy at all for the ordinary black people. Some of them in the Caribbean have been caught making arrangements with South Africa, to put part of their territories at the disposal of South Africa so that arms and so forth can go to South Africa from Western Europe and the United States.

Certain of the governments in the Caribbean islands are unable to say that the governments of India are no more praiseworthy or respectable than themselves. But when you are speaking about them please make it clear that in the world at large you are expecting equal or even greater changes in the Third World countries, as much as you expect them in the advanced countries: those governments have won independence, but that is all they have got. Independence, they have a national flag, they have an anthem, they even have a prime minister, although some of them get rid of him and put the general in. But nevertheless that is all.

They have the habit in Africa of saying they have African socialism. That is a non sequitur: there is nothing socialist about it at all and you must be able to say that. And you must be able to educate the British people and in particular the British worker about the counter-revolutionary state of
the countries with which you are associated because your parents were born there or you were born there. You must make it clear and that gives you more power to say. 'They are no good; that they have to be changed, and here you are no good either, you have to be changed.' That, I believe, is the position you ought to hold in regard to the work that you have to do.

Now the Labour Party. I spoke about the Labour Party last time. I don't say never join the Labour Party. The first thing I want to make clear is to know what the Labour Party is, and where the Labour Party has come from and where the Labour Party is going and where it is not going. I noticed in the press today that certain people are prepared to leave the Labour Party. Why? It is becoming too revolutionary. I mean to say. They are now social democratic. They are a little bit shortsighted because Marx gave a wonderful example, and I will say so, of the origin of social democracy. He says, the socialist puts forward as little socialism as possible and the democrat puts forward as much democracy as possible to make the socialist look better and he says that is the origin of the social democracy. And these fellows get fed up with the Labour Party because it is too left and they don't know enough to get another name, now they are a social democratic party – part social and part democratic but not a mixture of the two. Same as the Euro-communist, they are part for this and part for that. There is a great deal of part-of-this and part-of-that in the situation today. I want it to be clear that you who have come from abroad, maybe you were trained abroad or your children were brought here, have every right to be in the front-rank of all those who are seeking to change society. I can't imagine the nerve of those people in the Labour Party who today are saying that the Labour Party is too much to the left and therefore they are going to the right to form a new party, social democracy. Who is too much to the left? Who was the last prime minister – Callaghan, or whatever his name was – which left was he in? Now they have put Michael Foot. Foot finds it difficult to move along he's always [laughter]... well, he is in a lot of trouble. But that Michael Foot is too much to the left is so much nonsense. The next thing we shall hear is that Dennis Healey was not made the leader of the Labour Party because he was too much to the left. That I don't think will come, I would be quite astonished. So that is now the last word on what constitutes Labour, the socialist party.
I read to you from Lenin. I am not going to do that again but I am going to give you an unmistakable example: the Hungarian revolution. This is what the Hungarian workers said after having been trained carefully and brought up by the Marxist Party. They threw out the communists and they said: ‘The trade-union council praesidium recommends that workers and employees, clerical workers embark on the introduction of worker management in factories, workshops, mines and everywhere else. They should elect workers councils.’ Now, after being educated by the Stalinists that is what they did. I don’t think anybody will find that the working class here is not able to do that. ‘Regarding the functioning of the workers’ councils, we will recommend that workers should be elected by all workers of the factory, workshop or mine in question: a meeting called to carry out the election should decide the method of election. Recommendations for workers’ council membership should be presented as a general rule by the work council or by a worker who commands respect. Depending on the size of the enterprise, the workers’ council should generally consist of 21 to 27 members, including proportionate representation of every group of workers. In factories employing less than 100 workers all workers may be included in the vote of confidence. Workers’ councils should elect, should decide all questions connected with production, administration and management of the plant.’ Now, those were the backward Hungarian workers. I think a person will have a hell of a nerve to tell me that British workers are not able to do that. They are being prevented. There are obstacles in the way, but I know them quite well. I have lived in the north of England and being very familiar with the place that used to be called ‘Little Moscow’ [Nelson, Lancashire] and they are perfectly able, in fact they helped to educate me. When I told them that I had just come from the Caribbean, I said, ‘We want independence, you know, and we hope the Labour Party will give it to us.’ Those workers said: ‘You make a mistake.’ They said, ‘Ramsay McDonald, Henderson, Felix Snowdon, Morrison, they never gave us anything and we put them there; why do you think they would give you any? You are making a mistake, you will find out.’ That’s what I learnt from them in 1932. I don’t believe that workers today, 1980, don’t know exactly what is happening. So that’s what you have to do, and there I think I want to stop... except that you join your trade union. That is the natural instinctive
defence and weapon of attack of the working-class movement, the trade unions. The Labour Party is the political arm which has been constructed from the mass of the trade-union movement, so while you have to join the trade-union movement, you are not bound to join the Labour Party. You may join it; the point is that you should know what you are doing and be aware when you are in it. What I think that matters, and I have spoken about, is that at the present time there are organisations outside of the trade-union movement, the womens' movement, shop stewards' committees, ethnically based committees, everywhere they are coming out. It is the belief of this person, Hilary Wainwright, that really the future of the Labour movement in Britain rests with these committees. It is no use looking to the left of the Labour Party. The left of the Labour Party has been there for fifty years and it has never moved at all. It moves out and then some more come into the spot, but they do the same as the previous left. Do you know Harold Wilson was one-time leader of the left — yes, and he was leading Barbara Castle and a whole lot of people. So now it depends on you; it is these committees, and I see that E.P. Thompson, who a lot of people criticise (and I am not going to spend my time criticising Thompson. I have a lot to learn from him), Thompson says that in the past, the movements that have brought democracy to Britain, have always been libertarian movements that were outside of the traditional movements. There was one time when the Tory party and the Liberal party were everything and then these people formed something outside of the regular, and people wondered, ‘what are you doing why did you form that thing?’ and Mr Lloyd-George was very clever, he started the welfare state and went to the House of Lords and altered its composition. He did that to stop the socialists, but he didn’t stop them and today the Liberal Party consists of scraps of people and a lot of people wishing to be Labour. But you have to do something of your own, be not afraid to form these libertarian movements outside of the regular parties. Trade unions yes; you may join the Labour Party to fight against what is going on but strictly speaking, your chief aim should be the formation and support of these extra parliamentary bodies.

I think I have covered enough of the ground. What I want to hear tonight, in particular to conclude this series properly,
is to hear from you. What you have to say, what you have to ask me, on any of the past three lectures and any points which you think that I should have touched upon or I haven't been clear upon, or anything that you wish to say. It is good to see so many of you who were here on the previous occasions back here again. Now it's up to you, . .

Thank you.

[Ovation.]

Question: You haven't really said anything about what you think black people should be doing politically, as a political force themselves in this country, not simply in relation to their work places, trade unions or the Labour Party – do you see, for instance, the building of a black party?
CLR: No, I don't see the building of a black party. First of all, it is sure not to be successful; that happens, you have to remember, because of these parties who are in control of the situation: one of the first things they will be concerned about is the defence of themselves. . . Well, I'm not saying to form a party but I will give you one example: the Race Today people who brought me here – I personally think that that is wonderful, that's a stage forward [laughter and applause] -- they produce a paper (and in the last issue I had an article and I can tell you I said what I pleased in that article. . .) I think that is fine. That's the kind of thing I mean. And I hear that there are shop stewards' committees . . . and I hear also that there are ethnic committees. I hear a lot of the Pakistanis are carrying on a number of political struggles in various places, Bradford and other places. That is the kind of thing I am talking about. You needn't form a political party to go to Parliament, you know, that is exactly what these people are making clear. There is no need to do that. I wish you luck if you try to form a party in the United States against the Democrats and Republicans; they both would join together to keep you out. . . Don't be so concerned about Parliament, it's the people who matter. . . These independent organisations are the basis of the organisation of the future.

Question: Mr James, could I just ask you to give us a brief run-down on Garvey and repatriation, as far as black youth are concerned – about going back to Africa?
CLR: Now, Garvey was a remarkable man. Before Garvey there was no black movement anywhere. Since Garvey there has been a continuous black movement and Nkrumah, who was the first of the African revolutionaries, was educated abroad in the United States, went to two colleges there and he used to lecture at a Pennsylvania university. He came here and met George Padmore and was educated by Padmore politically — but he always had first in his mind Marcus Garvey. . .All of us stand on the shoulders of Marcus Garvey. There is plenty to say against Garvey, but nothing you can say against Garvey can ever weaken the things, the positive things, that Garvey did. Now, you have to be careful. He said, ‘Back to Africa,’ but I don’t believe Garvey ever meant that; he was too intelligent a man to think that a lot of people could go to Africa and get a piece of Africa, I don’t think so. What Garvey signified was resistance. . . He said, ‘Lenin organised the workers of the world, I organise the black people of the world’. He had the big conference in New York, with 20,000 people. Bobby Hill, who has done a lot of investigation about Garvey, has been to London and gone to the army records and the Colonial Office records and so forth. He is finding that many people in various parts of Africa whom Garvey knew nothing about formed organisations and made demands calling themselves Garveyites. . .Garvey never knew anything about them. . . That is what Garvey symbolised, and today people who are doing historical theses may point out some of the things that Garvey did wrong. But from no platform at all am I going to say anything against Marcus Garvey, who is the originator of the movement which allows me to sit here and Darcus Howe to be with Race Today. But when Garvey said ‘Back to Africa’ I don’t think he was too certain about that. There is no repatriation that I can see. . .If you want to organise repatriation, go ahead, but I don’t think there is much in it. . . The idea of repatriation turns you away from the kind of programme that faces you in Britain here.[Applause.]

Question: In terms of the Western powers’ relations with the West Indies, what advice can you give the people in the West Indies?

CLR: Sir, I wrote and published in 1933 The Case for West Indian Self-Government, that’s a long time ago. And now they have had self-government since 1963, but in reality the
old colonial regime and the colonial finance powers still rule the Caribbean. So at present you have not only the national flag and the national anthem, and a prime minister to go and beg for money, but you need to get rid of that domination: and I am glad to say — I have been in the Caribbean for the last eighteen months — the population is very much aware of that. But these people who are in charge there behave to the population in exactly the same way as the Labour leaders here behave to the mass of the population. It’s a thing that is universal, and I am saying that if you join the Labour Party here you ought to be able to say, ‘In the colonial territories we have experience of the kind of leadership that you are giving.’ So you have a double role to play. You have been in double difficulty and you have a double political responsibility — to be in the forefront of those who are attacking the leadership here, or seeking to form something, and to make it clear to people here what is happening in the colonial territories. That’s the job to be done. I know the beginning and I know what took place, who stood in the way and what has happened, and what those who have inherited are doing instead. They killed Walter Rodney, one of the best of the young Caribbean people, a man of international reputation. They killed him. I’m not telling you to go and get killed but go and fight.

Question: I think one of the problems that members of ethnic minorities of all sorts as well as black people find is that a lot of socialists don’t recognise the particular problems faced by immigrants, beyond those faced by the white working class. They try and subsume these type of problems under the general problems of the working class and they try to pretend the class struggle is absolutely everything and that there are no particular problems, racial problems; I think this can sometimes amount to racism on the part of members of working-class organisations, people who call themselves socialists, because they just fail to recognise the very deep racism in society. Now, if black people are to be involved in British politics and social organisations — because I agree with you absolutely, they should be — how can they resolve this problem?
CLR: It’s difficult for me to tell you here how they can resolve it but there are political means. There are people in Britain, British people or people of United Kingdom origin,
who are working against such people and are ready to oppose them in every way; and if you become part of the union and are involved in these struggles I don’t think you will find it difficult. I haven’t found it difficult in the past living in Britain to be able to put forward the case of black people. It’s true I wasn’t in the union, but nevertheless you could find people. Undoubtedly they have difficulty to fight the struggle of black people for one reason — they find it hard to fight the struggles of white people. . . And to deal with Mrs Thatcher and the rest of them, that’s enough to keep them busy. . . But over the last fifteen or twenty years the miners and others have made it clear that those people can be defeated, not for ever and ever but on a particular issue, and those people that are here should be part of those issues and should bring forward the problems. There is going to be a tremendous upheaval in England, you know; that’s coming, there’s no doubt about it. . .

Question: Young black people going through the educational system here find it very difficult to gain a sense of belonging not only to the society through the process of the educational system, they find it difficult to have any sense of commitment to the society because of the way in which they are made to feel, almost as nonentities in exile. Now, you are asking them to get involved in the society, in the structure of the society?
CLR: Not in the structure. I am asking them to get in touch with the Labour movement, the working-class movement or such organisations as they themselves can form with the aim of clearing a way into the society. I think that is what I am asking and I think there is nothing else that can be done. What else can you say, to go back home?

Question: Well, I think we need something much more direct — I am saying that at first the sense of belonging is not even there, in the society, much less what you are asking, to take a position within the Labour movement. We have to search beyond that for something much more positive.
CLR: I wouldn’t say no to that, that depends on what you think about what is to be done. But, you know, we have had some very distinguished people: there is George Lamming, for example, there is Wilson Harris — these are Caribbean people who have entered into what is taking place around
and they have added considerably to English literature. They are very much aware of what it is to be not a part of this society. So there is a literature there that will help to ease the way. . . But I think that you have to make yourself part, part of the movement of protest. It is not necessary to be with the trade-union movement — although if you are at work you should be a member of the trade-union movement — but this belonging is not something that somebody gives to you; it's something that you fight for and something that you insist upon. It is not a negative attitude at all, it’s a positive attitude right from the start to do. He tried to form an anti-black movement, a racial movement and the Conservatives will pass a lot of bills that have racial constituencies and so forth but they are not doing what Enoch Powell tried to do. He tried to mobilise a mass movement against blacks. Conservatives can’t do that; they are trying to mobilise a mass movement for the Conservatives, they have to do that first.

Question: I have been very interested by most of what you said, but it seems to me that you have a blind spot about the racism of the white working class. . . You say that Enoch Powell didn’t achieve his aims of forming a party; I’m not sure if they were his aims. The only thing out of his programme that is left to be implemented is repatriation. All the other elements in the programme have already been implemented by the Labour Party or the Conservative Party.

CLR: He said I had a blind spot in regard to the racism of the white working-class movement. Well, sir, it would be very strange if there wasn’t some racism in the white working class because in any society the ideas that are dominant in the ruling class will find a reflection in the elements of those who work. That’s everywhere. The only thing is, in the working class periodically there arise elements who oppose them altogether and you have to be ready to take part in that. But while you can accuse me, I dare say, of having a blind spot in regard to the racism of the white working class, I would say you have a much blinder spot in regard to the progressive, revolutionary element of the British working class to which I could refer to for a number of years. Don’t forget that there is an element among them and that is a much more powerful element than the racism that is in them.

Didn’t Mr Heath give a three-day week and the miners told him that wouldn’t do, didn’t that happen?
Chair: But more than that I think that we ought to balance this properly, you know, because there was a strike of Asian workers, Grunwick, and these are facts you can put whatever construction you like upon them, and substantial sections of the white working class came in support. That is a historical fact.
CLR: Excuse me, they came from Clydeside, they came from South Wales, they came from all over the place, and it was the Tory leadership that opposed that movement. But the working class in Britain came out for those people and these were some women working, not a big industry. Now, I didn’t speak about that because I don’t wish to sound too blinded, I didn’t talk about that. There are many elements to the working class apart from racism, I can assure you. I could tell you things, but I don’t want to do that, that would alter the perspective of this meeting.

Question: Mr James, there is another aspect that you perhaps underestimate. Mr Powell didn’t really need to form a party when he had the willing co-operation of the British police, and it’s the police who have implemented a great deal of what Mr Powell is trying to do in terms of the black community. It’s the children who have had to bear the brunt of that and the black children who are in the front line of the receiving end of the racism of this country, it’s the black children who are beginning to respond as they did in Bristol, the Bristol riots last year, but I think it is wrong to talk about the black community joining trade-union movements or other unions when it’s many of the black community who are most at risk and have had difficulties are under the age of 16, and I wonder what you could say to those people who in fact are the future of this country.
CLR: Now I don’t know what you expect me to say more than I have said; be careful, please, that in reality you are not saying what you are against rather than what I am for. I am for black people to seek ways and means of getting rid of the problems that they face. You can add to that or point out where I am wrong, but at the moment people start to tell me of the inexplicable racism of the white working class I get, I begin to wonder what is the origin of that. Now what is it you propose that black people should do instead of what I am saying? Do you say anything? Be careful, you know...
The police are not implementing what Mr Powell was proposing. ... Mr Powell sought to get a mass movement with a lot of people saying to get these black people where they belong. The police are not doing that, the police are being objectionable to certain elements of the population as they are in France, in Germany, very much in Russia and in India, everywhere, that's what the police are doing. Mr Powell was not after that. He was building a theory, he was saying, 'The black people here are fundamentally enemies to our white civilisation and we ought to get ready and get rid of them.' The police are not doing that. I know what the police are doing. Believe me, you can't tell me much about the police, I know them before you were born, but they are not doing that. The police are doing what police do everywhere when elements in the society which are not following along in the regular line of the regular leaders. The police will always give them trouble, as much as possible, and the blacks constitute an element who may give a lot of trouble at a certain time in this country...

Comment: I think we need to explore more fully the nature of the racism in this country and examine the position of Mr Powell. Mr Powell did not fail to arouse and make respectable the racism in this country. He failed because he turned his attention to the Tory Party and he advised Tories to vote for Labour in the general election and that is the moment when Mr Powell fell. The other thing I should like to say is that many people believe that Mr Powell created racism in this country; Mr Powell did not create racism in this country. What Mr Powell did was to take the mantle of another gentleman, who throughout the 50s had been sowing the seeds. ... When Winston Churchill was saying words like 'the growing preponderance of black faces in the United Nation holds ill for the future of European civilisation', when the Tory party tried to set up a two-tier empire with the older Commonwealth as they saw it as the first upper tier and all the blacks merging at the lower tier. At that time the idea of Commonwealth was partly being scuttled out of sight. And into the vacuum of those people's mind was planted the idea that all the black people coming to this country were bringing tuberculosis, VD, all the usual red herrings. I would advise anybody interested in this to look at the newspapers from the year 1950 to about 1962, examine the words of a
man named Colonel Osborne in the House of Commons and you will see that when he died, opportunist Enoch Powell simply harvested from the crop that had been sown by this other man named Colonel Osborne. He is a political opportunist....

Question: You spoke of the involvement of black people, that rather than remain detached they should involve themselves in what is happening. But if these organisations have no true understanding of the problems that we are facing, we should create autonomous organisations and seek alliances. CLR: Yes, I am in agreement with you about forming an autonomous organisation. I have been saying that since last time, that what is required today is the autonomous organisation — and I speak with a certain humility, a certain reserve about the autonomous work that is being done by Darcus Howe and Race Today....

Question: Comrade James, a black comrade here talked of being unwilling to take part in the Labour movement, in the trade-union movement, and you exhorted comrades and militants to join with the libertarian left and the people to the left of the Labour Party who are fighting for social principles and are fighting against racism and against fascism... I would be pleased to hear your comments and criticism of the revolutionary left in this country, I mean the revolutionary groups outside the Labour Party.
CLR: You mean Paul Foot and Tariq Ali and those? I used to be a member of that and I left it. That is my comment on it because I don’t believe... Now, I have written at great length as to exactly why I don’t think those small movements are going to get anywhere in 1980; I have written books and published pamphlets about that. First of all you have a Labour Party, then you have another Communist Party, then these people turn up — I did it — and say, ‘Not the Labour Party, not the Communist, but we are for 120 Trotskyists — join us and we’ll lead you to the revolution.’ I did that for a number of years and then I got tired of it... But I don’t quarrel with them, some of them are excellent people. I have known Paul Foot for years, but if that’s the way he chooses to go he can, but I’m not going that way, and I’m saying so. I’m not going to make any comment on that from this platform except that I don’t think he’ll get any place and I don’t
Question: How do you think the form in which black people organise themselves here relates back to their experience as colonial people?
CLR: As colonial people they have known what it is to be oppressed by a government and rulers whose first concern was to keep them suppressed; that they know, and they have been able to fight against that. It’s because black movements of resistance were spreading all over the whole world that the colonial powers said, ‘All right, all right, be independent.’ But now they have found that to take hold of the old colonial government was to carry on the old colonial policy... So the movement began with the Arusha Declaration of Nyerere, that is to say, ‘Let us form an African native type of government,’ and that is what is being done in Mozambique to some extent, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mugabe in Zimbabwe, all over Africa today... There is this movement taking place, and we have to be aware of it and be part of it and know what is going on, and not spend time worrying about this and that and the other. That’s what I am trying to say here, that when you come here and you begin to fight against what’s taking place, you make clear also that you haven’t been given any real independence, you know, and the struggle is still going on in the colonial countries.

Question: How do you think that the way black people actually organise themselves here, now, in Britain, connects to the way they organised themselves in the West Indies for example?
CLR: It’s not the same, because you have a great mass of the population in the West Indies who are likely to listen to you, but here it’s not so. Here it’s a small percentage only, but if you have two or three million people you have a hell of a lot of people who are ready to listen to these ideas and I’m sure you will get some place, if you make it clear that you know what you are about; but if you begin with the inevitability of white racism then you are going to get nowhere.

Question: Mr James, you suggest that the immigrants in this
country should get involved in this country. What value, what benefits do you think they'll get out of becoming part of this society and contributing to this society? What spiritual value for their souls do you think they will get out of contributing to this society?

CLR: Will you tell me what spiritual values to their souls they would get elsewhere outside of Britain? Could you tell me that? Tell me what are the spiritual values that are being served out that are not to be got in Britain? Tell me, so that I know what you are thinking about.

Question: Well, I'm thinking maybe there will be more feedback or spiritual benefit if they went back to the Caribbean and tried to make the kind of society down there instead of fighting here for nothing.

CLR: Look, it's going to take me a little time; I hope that you will give me five or ten minutes. There was World War Two, in which Hitler attempted to make Europe purely German. He was going to take the Ukraine, he was going to take Holland and Belgium. He was going to take the north of Africa, the north of France and he was going to take Yugoslavia. Good. Now, World War One was different. In World War One they were thinking of dividing up Africa. They had done that in Bismark's room in the '80s but they couldn't divide it up any more so they fought over it. But in World War Two Hitler came and he said, 'I'm going to make colonies in Europe itself,' so they had to stop that. They stopped it. Then came great movements of populations, the world is moving tremendously, and part of the movement of populations is the movement of people from the underdeveloped countries to the more developed countries; that is taking place in Germany, they are bringing them in from Southern Italy, and Switzerland is 25 per cent foreign workers at the moment. These are great movements taking place, and I'm trying to say how are we going to meet what is taking place, how are we going to understand it? And you tell me to go back to the Caribbean for spiritual values - I've just come from there, I haven't found any. You must have some general idea of what is taking place and why people are here. People are here as part of a movement that is worldwide in which people from the underdeveloped countries are being brought into developed countries to do a certain type of labour; they are coming because they were invited, they are coming be-
cause they can’t help it. . . But don’t tell me about utterly
mythical spiritual values in the Caribbean. If you are against
what I am saying, you must get some reason for that; you
can’t make me think differently by referring me to spiritual
values in the Caribbean.

Question: If I might ask you for a prediction, what do you
see possibly happening in this country between now and your
100th birthday?
CLR: My 100th birthday? I hope to God I could see it,
because I am positive that the uprising which will attack
everywhere, a lot of places in the world. From some of the
talk here today quite clearly they haven’t been reading in
the newspapers about a far distant country called Poland.
The Polish people have said (it is a tremendous programme).
'We want a free trade union.' I hope you understand that:
free trade union. That upset them in Moscow, they can’t
sleep at nights because of the Polish workers’ free trade
unions. Nobody believes that if the Polish workers moved
against the Polish leaders the Polish rulers could stop them;
everybody knows that they would be swept away and that it
depends upon the Russian army to keep the Polish workers
down. . . .It’s happening there, and it didn’t wait for the year
2000, it started in the year 1980. That is a tremendous
movement, the Polish movement: ‘All we want is a free trade
union. We are not so advanced as to be against soviets or to
be against your socialist type of government: no, we are
backward people: all we want is free trade unions.’ That’s a
masterpiece of politics. Every fool can understand it except
those whose head are tangled up with Trotskyist nonsense —
but you don’t seem to be aware of that. I’m very much aware
of that. . . .I think of what the Hungarian workers did — I
have written about that — and I am waiting to see now about
the Poles. . . .I see what’s happening in Iran — have you any
idea that Iran now has thousands of workers’ and peasants,
councils? And I don’t think that the Iran workers are so
much different from the British workers. In Britain you can
see too in a few years a lot of workers’ councils; I think
they are coming, at any rate I’m working with that in mind.
And I put forward that if you’re against that, that’s too bad
for you, that’s all.

Question: I’d just like to say that I’ve felt very inspired and
privileged to hear the talk tonight and particularly to hear
Comrade James express some optimism and revolutionary vision in a very hard time, and I think maybe it's understandable that people should talk negatively about so many things because we are all suffering from a disastrous, hopefully fairly short-term period, and it is hard to maintain the enthusiasm and vigour that the comrade expresses. ... I have one small comment and that's about the question of the nature of organisation that we could try to create. I completely share the perspective of building a movement out of the existing committees, ethnic organisations, shop stewards' committees, women's organisations, etc. There is only one thing I think needs also to be said which is perhaps justification for being in one of these very small left-wing groups myself, and that is I have found it very difficult to understand what's going on in the world without a lot of talk and a lot of reading and a lot of thinking — and in this Comrade James's work I have found extremely helpful; but I think it is also necessary to be in exclusively political groups in order to add to one's education, add to one's experience. One of the limitations of the group that I am in is that it is predominantly white, but it is only in gatherings like this that I feel I am getting any real kind of experience of what might be happening inside the working class, and I would like to know if Comrade James thinks there is any value in being in exclusively political collectives of one form or another for that benefit at least.

CLR: I will tell you what I think. I believe that if your mind is clear and if you know what you are doing and what you are not doing, you can join one of those organisations and it can be of great value. Take for instance the Monthly Review people; I find their paper of extreme value to me. I read a lot of things there that I wouldn't know otherwise and I subscribe and I'm a supporter — I don't agree with all that they say and I will never join their organisation, but I subscribe. I like to see them. I don't think it's wrong once you know what you are doing, then you are perfectly entitled to be wherever you choose to be, but I'm speaking here generally. And by the way, I want to add something: these small organisations will acquire importance when the mass movement begins; it is the mass movement that is decisive for all of them. My quarrel with them is that they think they are decisive — they are not. [Applause.] I am not saying not to be in them once you are clear about it; once you are clear as to what you are doing and you don't spread any illusions,
why should you not? . . . At any rate I am glad that you were able to say what you did.

Comment: It seems to me that there has been a certain amount of, well, a great deal of confusion in this meeting about what constitutes revolutionary action or what constitutes a revolutionary position. And whether, indeed, people who are not highly steeped in ideology could adopt revolutionary positions. I mean the questions, for example, about the position of black youth seems to suggest that they were somewhat directionless, not knowing really where their heads are or who they are or what they are and that somebody from somewhere needs to pull something out of a hat in order to point out to them what way they are going. Now, I am aware that a great deal of what happens within communities where black people are and where black people struggle on a day-to-day basis arises out of their own revolutionary consciousness as working class blacks. They may not read Marx but the fact of the matter is that as they have to deal with the police, as they have to deal with the bosses and as they have to deal with the agents of the state who batter their heads, like social workers and youth workers etc., they know what to do. So I cannot see why it should be assumed that the population whom the lady at the back suggests that is the most threatened just now, black youth, have got absolutely no revolutionary position and have not exercised it in a manner which has brought us to where we are today as the black population in this country.

A couple of speakers have tried to speak about black youth as though they were pretty helpless victims, that they get drugged, they get beaten up, they get thrown in jail, they get killed. I have heard about those. I have seen that on television. I have read it in the newspaper. I have heard of incidents where people are beaten up, victimised and so on, but as a school teacher — I have been a school teacher for the last eleven years — I have seen that the black youth, especially the West Indians and the Asians to a lesser degree, have given a tremendous amount of trouble to the institutions which try and do these things to them. There is a tremendous resistance. If one was at Notting Hill, if one was at Bristol, one can see that the black youth are not helpless
victims of a racist society. They are, of course, as Comrade James pointed out, in the way of the police because they are dissident social elements at particular times, and it is the police's job to stake that out; that's what they are paid for. So they go about doing that but they are probably in a sense the front-line section of the working class who have fought the police on these occasions. Then people look for parties and things to join. People say that they want to sit down and formulate an anti-racist policy in a Trotskyist group: they have an anti-racist, anti-fascist policy calling blacks and Asians into their group, seeing that these are their friends because they are anti-racist. That is not the way to do it at all. I have been in an Asian organisation in the East End, people have been talking, I believe that is why I am going on in this way, about what goes beyond the fragments. I have been in one of those fragments without seeing it as a fragment. I saw it simply as a movement for Asians in the East End who wanted some housing. They didn't complain about racism, they didn't psychologise about the white working class, they organised themselves and went on to try and get the state to give them the housing that they wanted.

CLR: I believe you

Comment: [continued] It was success, and the propaganda around that success, that brought in a tremendous amount of alliances, I believe that that experience points to something for the future.

CLR: Yes, sir, thank you very much. And I am saying so and do as much of that as you can. And there is one thing that I want to say to Marxists about my experience. It is that some Marxists go and join a local organisation and they go into that local organisation with their minds set on winning people to their ideas. They don't know that by going into that local organisation they will get some place by building that organisation. But their aim is to go in there to win some people so that they will have instead of 25, they have 26 — then they have scored a victory. I hope it is quite clear I am against all of that.

Question: There is just one question I would like to ask. You spoke earlier about black people actually aligning themselves in the trade-union movement with the progressive elements.
Now there is just one fear I have personally as a black person in this country in trying to belong to a trade union, that is when the blacks who actually join the trade unions begin to take a stand, very progressive elements within the trade unions, and I think that's what some people here might have been trying to say, very progressive elements become very reactionary in a sense, because black demands are not the same as the white majority progressive demands and you will find that at times black people find their struggle very much frustrated. What would you have to say to people who find themselves in that sort of experience?

CLR: You have to fight against them, that's all. It's unfortunate you know, but in the working-class movement you have to struggle. You have to make up your mind that if you're not going along with everybody but fighting for something specific, it's going to be hard but it's not impossible and it can become very valuable and very stimulating. It can be. I know that, I have been going at it for many years. And it hasn't worried me, but you can sit down and talk about white working-class racism. I've many examples I could give you against that but I'm not going to do it. There is no need for me to say here that the white working class is not racist, I'm not going to do that. We are sitting here to seek a positive way. You will have problems. I have seen them. I still have problems. But you have to fight against them and you can be certain if you keep on fighting you win people over to you. If you are not getting support something is wrong with you but if you keep on, as I have found, over the years, you keep on going and things come to you. Tell me something about that far distant country Poland? That is for me a tremendous event and they are saying to Moscow you have your Soviets—you keep that, and we do not want to change one boss for another. We don't want to change anything, all we ask for is free trade union. I think that's wonderful and I am tremendously inspired. I know in Moscow they are quaking at these impertinent people who are for free trade union, and you have to feel that way yourself—that they are talking for you and me when they say we want free trade unions. That's what I think. I haven't heard much feeling about Poland or much about Mugabe and his Marxist-Leninist party. I haven't felt that from too many people speaking and it's all one struggle, you know, particularly today.
Chair: We'll take the last question.
Question: This is just with reference to what Comrade James has just said and I take it we were also talking about the other lectures, I would like to say that I very much share your feelings about Poland and how fantastic it is but I also share discontent. I am very discontented about the way you portray the movement and have actually failed to respond to it. I was actually reading an article the other day talking about the way that trade unions in Western Europe have sent delegations to Solidarity and apparently Lech Walensa is visiting Italy shortly. What has the British trade union movement done so far? As I can see, it has virtually done nothing to show its solidarity for what is happening in Poland. It's the most marvellous thing that has happened, it's the most marvellous inspiring news that we have in a long time. I wish that someone would tell me why the British trade-union movement hasn't done anything and when will it do something;
CLR: Now, why they haven't done anything? They will make gestures but by and large they will prefer the Polish workers to keep quiet and not disturb things. That's why they have done nothing. I hope that's very clear.

Chair: OK, could we thank CLR James for the tremendous contribution he has made over the last three lectures. Nello, I believe that the general feeling of the meeting is that you have made an enormous contribution to what we think and what we are likely to do.
CLR: Thank you for your contributions.

Applause, applause, applause, applause applause applause