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Obi B. Egbuna, C. L. R. James and the Birth of Black Power in Britain: Black Radicalism in Britain 1967–72

Abstract

This article considers the emergence of black power as an ideology and a movement in the UK in the period 1967–72. It argues that two different interpretations of black power appeared immediately after Stokely Carmichael's appearance at the Dialectics of Liberation conference in London during the summer of 1967. The first, embodied in Obi B. Egbuna's manifesto for the United Coloured People's Association, was broadly Marxist–Leninist and separatist in tone; whereas C. L. R. James's interpretation, set out in his 'Black Power speech', looked to a mass movement to bring about change. Through a consideration of agitational material, Home Office documents, and interviews with former members of the British Black Panther Movement, it is clear that the Panthers quickly diverged from the path set out by Egbuna. Indeed, by 1970, under the leadership of Althea Jones-Lecointe, the Panthers were a community-based organization who had rejected separatism and the vanguardist aspect of Leninism. In this sense while the Panthers were not a Jamesian organization there was enough common ground for a collaboration of sorts between James and

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the British Panthers. This collaboration was facilitated by James's great-nephew Darcus Howe and coincided with the Mangrove Campaign, the high point of black power's influence in Britain.

The Dialectics of Liberation conference of 1967 brought the 1960s' counterculture to the heart of London. The two-week conference convened by R. D. Laing, Joseph Berke, Leon Redler, and David Cooper, all leading figures in the anti-psychiatry movement, featured contributions from 'Beat Generation' writers William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg; Emmett Grogan, founder of the San Francisco anarchist movement the Diggers; and the 'Frankfurt School' neo-Marxist, Herbert Marcuse. The conference was intended to provide a theoretical critique of the self-destructive nature of the modern world and practical advice concerning future liberation.¹ The conference practised the countercultural values that it preached, spontaneously turning the Roundhouse and Camden's pubs and bars into informal collegiums, the founding event of the Anti-university of London.² The most controversial speaker by far was Stokely Carmichael. The *Mirror* branded him 'an evil campaigner of hate', while the *Daily Sketch* portrayed him as 'the most effective preacher of racial hatred at large today'.³ The British government, conscious of the troubles in Detroit, Newark, and New Jersey, was concerned that his visit might spark similar unrest in cities across the UK. Carmichael's visit did not have the destabilizing effect that many had feared but, in spite of this, it sent shock waves through the British polity. The consequences for Carmichael were all but immediate. According to the activist Roy Sawh, within a week of his Roundhouse speech, Special Branch agents arrived at Carmichael's secret London address and 'advised' him to leave the country. Carmichael clearly took the warning seriously and left earlier than planned, breaking an engagement to speak at a meeting of Michael X's Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS) in Reading. Three days later he was banned from returning by the Home Secretary Roy Jenkins. The impact on the British black movement was just as swift. Within a week of Carmichael's Roundhouse speech the United Coloured People's Association (UCPA) had expelled its white members and adopted the ideology of black power; and, within a month, Michael X, who quickly

¹ David Cooper, 'Introduction', in David Cooper, ed., *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 9.

² Cooper, *Dialectics of Liberation*, 11.

³ Derek Humphry and David Tindall, *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X* (London, 1977), 63. The British press's attitude to Carmichael seems to have taken its lead from the American popular press's initial hysterical reaction to the advent of the new movement and ideology. See Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, 2004), 63–5.

became the media face of black power in Britain, was arrested for inciting racial hatred. Finally, by the middle of 1968 the British Black Panthers was created. In short, Carmichael's visit led to the formation of an indigenous black power movement.

Obi B. Egbuna and C. L. R. James were two figures central to the reception of black power in Britain. Egbuna, a Nigerian-born playwright, author of *The Anthill* (1965) and *Wind Versus Polygamy* (1966), had been involved in anti-colonial politics since the early 1960s. He was a member of the Committee of African Organisations (CAO), the group that had organized Malcolm X's visit to Britain in 1965.⁴ On an educational exchange trip to America in 1966, he collaborated briefly with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).⁵ Impressed with what he saw of the new black radicalism he returned to Britain determined to establish a black power group in London. However, finding little appetite for the new politics in London he bided his time, reverting to his 'old activities in the Pan-African movement'.⁶ James, born in Trinidad and Tobago, is widely regarded as the most important West Indian intellectual of the twentieth century. Initially he set out to be a writer. However, he turned to politics early in his career and dedicated himself to revolutionary action. He championed West Indian self-government and convinced Trotsky of the need for independent black organizations within the American workers' movement. In the 1940s he critiqued Trotskyism, rejecting the vanguard party. Farrukh Dhondy, one of James's biographers, argues that James had been predicting the emergence of an independent black revolutionary movement for many years, and viewed the black power movement as the realization of this hope. Both James and Egbuna were in London for the Dialectics of Liberation conference and they both responded quickly to Carmichael's London speech.

The reception of Carmichael's message was not, however, a straightforward affair, as from the very beginning there were different interpretations of what black power meant in a British context. Section 1 of this article considers Egbuna's understanding of black power as it appeared in his pamphlet *Black Power in Britain*. Section 2 deals with James's response to Carmichael in his 'Black Power' speech. Although there was considerable common ground between Egbuna and James, there were also notable differences over issues such as the origins of black power, collaboration between black activists and white radicals, and the institutional form black power should take. Sections 3 and 4

⁴ Rosie Wild, 'Black was the Colour of our Fight: Black Power in Britain, 1955–1976', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2008, 83.

⁵ Wild, 'Black was the Colour of our Fight', 90.

⁶ Obi B. Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain* (London, 1971), 17.

trace the influence of these different positions through interviews with former activists and an analysis of literature of British Black Panthers in the period 1968–72. Clearly, there were many other black power groups in Britain during this period, but the Panthers were the only group to have been associated with both Egbuna and James, and therefore, they form the basis of this study. In essence, we argue that Egbuna's influence was short lived. By the beginning of 1969, the Panthers had abandoned much that Egbuna considered essential, and by 1970, the leaders of the Panthers had a broadly Marxist orientation, which, while not Jamesian in its centralized method of organization, was close enough to allow a kind of collaboration between James and the Panthers.

1. Egbuna and Black Power

The Roundhouse conference was undoubtedly a seminal event in the history of black power in Britain.⁷ Carmichael, James, Egbuna, and Michael X all spoke at the conference. Carmichael spoke three times and James was present on at least one of these occasions. Egbuna was one of 'a panel of speakers' including Michael X and Sawh who introduced Carmichael to the conference.⁸ This was Egbuna's first meeting with Carmichael, but not his first experience of black power. Egbuna had been a radical for many years. He had been a member of the CAO, which had invited Malcolm X to visit Britain in 1965.⁹ Egbuna first encountered the new radicalism during his 1966 collaboration with SNCC, three years after abandoning his legal studies at London's Inner Temple.¹⁰

Outside of the Roundhouse, black activists made use of the opportunity the conference afforded to spend time with the rising star of the American black movement. For example, during the conference Michael X hosted a gathering in North London at which Carmichael was introduced to Stefan Kalipha and Horace Ove.¹¹ Darcus

⁷ Carmichael's presence in Britain seems to have been remarkably potent. Egbuna described his visit as 'manna from heaven' (Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 18), and repeatedly stressed that Carmichael's visit was responsible for the emergence of a black power movement in Britain. James too noted that '[i]t is undoubtedly his presence here, and the impact that he has made in his speeches and his conversations, that have made the slogan Black Power reverberate in the way that it is doing in political Britain.' C. L. R. James, 'Black Power', in Anna Grimshaw, ed., *The CLR James Reader* (Oxford, 1992), 362.

⁸ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 18; John Williams, *Michael X: A Life in Black and White* (London, 2009), 155. A photograph of the panel can be found in Roy Sawh, *From Where I Stand* (London, 1987), 34.

⁹ Wild, 'Black was the Colour of our Fight', 83.

¹⁰ The National Archives: Public Record Office, Kew, London (NA), CRIM 1 4962/2.

¹¹ Trevor Phillips and Mike Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London, 1998), 238.

Howe also attended the conference, renewing his acquaintance with Carmichael, who had been a childhood friend.¹²

Carmichael's visit engendered a new militancy in the UCPA, leading to Egbuna's election as chairman, and the creation of a new manifesto, which he penned.¹³ The resulting pamphlet, entitled *Black Power in Britain*, was published on 10 September 1967.¹⁴ Egbuna's manifesto drew heavily on Carmichael's Roundhouse speech, so much so that some passages are little more than unacknowledged transcripts of the speech.¹⁵ It opens with the striking phrase, 'All men are born free'.¹⁶ Egbuna used this phrase to underpin an argument, taken straight from Carmichael, that while freedom can be taken away it can never be granted.

All men are born free. It is men who make slaves of other men. It is therefore absurd to talk about making people free. You can only talk about stopping oppression. There is no such thing as the abolition of Slavehood. You can only talk about the destruction of masterhood.¹⁷

Carmichael advanced the same argument in similar terms during his speech in Camden.

Now the trouble with the West is that it feels it has the right to give everybody their independence. That's totally absurd. You can never give anyone their independence. All men are born free. They are enslaved by other men. So that the only act that the men who enslaved them can do is, not give them their independence, but stop oppressing them. . . .¹⁸

¹² Interview with Darcus Howe, 30 March 2010.

¹³ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 18.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 11 September 1967, 3. Internal evidence suggests that it was written after Carmichael's ban from returning to Britain at the end of July, but before Michael X's arrest in mid-August. An important part of the manifesto's argument was that the 1965 Race Relations Act had been introduced to crush the black movement, rather than to stamp out white racism. Michael X's arrest under the provisions of the Race Relations Act clearly supported Egbuna's case. Consequently, the fact that *Black Power in Britain* does not mention the incident indicates that it was written prior to his arrests.

¹⁵ Egbuna's understanding of black power was not based on Carmichael's Roundhouse speech alone. He had travelled to the USA in 1966 and worked with SNCC and he was also aware of press reports regarding black power. Setting aside the British press reports, which were biased to say the least, he could have obtained copies of Carmichael's 'What we want', which appeared in the *New York Review of Books* in September 1966. Finally, Egbuna was present at Carmichael's Hyde Park speech, a photograph of which was printed in the June edition of *Black Power Speaks*, the magazine that Egbuna founded and edited during 1968 (Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 16).

¹⁶ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain* (London, 1967), 3.

¹⁷ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*.

¹⁸ Stokely Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 159. Carmichael had used this line of argument before. In October 1966 in an address given to the students at Berkeley he stated, '[n]o man can give anybody his freedom. A man is born free. You may enslave a man after he is born free, and that is in fact what this country does. It enslaves

Leaving parallel passages aside, there are also more general similarities between *Black Power in Britain* and Carmichael's London speech in terms of their treatment of certain themes. Both affirmed black as beautiful; both contended that while they were not advocating violence they recognized its necessity as part of the struggle for liberation; both agreed that the struggle of black people in the West was part of a larger global struggle against colonialism; and both asserted that they wanted a revolutionary change rather than the replacement of white capitalists with black ones.

At a deeper level too, the logic of Egbuna's manifesto owed a great deal to Carmichael's speech. For example, *Black Power in Britain* followed Carmichael's lead in terms of its critique of the problems faced by black people in the west. First, 'white power' was sustained by the white linguistic hegemony. Egbuna wrote, '[t]he White man's paramount burden today it would seem is to define every attitude of the Black man'.¹⁹ Carmichael's first speech regarding black power had opened with this point,²⁰ and it was a point he returned to during this conference.²¹ Egbuna also presented a critique of liberalism that followed Carmichael closely. White liberals, Egbuna claimed, believed in integration. However, the price for integration was assimilation, that is to say that black people would only be accepted in white society if they renounced their own cultures and accepted the equation 'White = Beautiful'.²² But in practice, Egbuna argued, the promise of integration was never fulfilled, due to the 'unconscious' racism of white liberals. Thus, black people in Britain were marginalized economically and socially.²³ Much of this critique of liberalism can be found in Carmichael; for example, he was highly critical of the practice of stripping 'non-western people' of their culture,²⁴ and of the fact that liberal arguments for integration were predicated on the notion that 'there was nothing of value in the black community', an attitude that he dubbed as 'subconscious racism'.²⁵ Indeed, Egbuna's summation of his attack on the archetypal western liberal, the man who 'wants chicken without slaughter, roses without gardening, rain-water without thunder

black people after they're born, so that the only acts that white people can do is to stop denying black people their freedom; that is, they must stop denying freedom. They never give it to anyone.' Carmichael, 'Black Power', in Josh Gottheimer, ed., *Ripples of Hope: Great American Civil Rights Speeches* (Michigan, 2003), 298.

¹⁹ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 5.

²⁰ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in Nick Treanor, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement* (Pennsylvania, 2002), 116.

²¹ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 152–3.

²² Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 6.

²³ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 11.

²⁴ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 157.

²⁵ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 162.

and lightning',²⁶ is reminiscent of a passage by Frederick Douglass, which Carmichael quoted during his Roundhouse address. Carmichael compared those who argued for integration to 'men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder or lightning.'²⁷

Egbuna's understanding of the position and revolutionary potential of black people also owed much to Carmichael. Both agreed that black people alone could solve the problems that they faced. This position was predicated, in part, on the critique of liberalism outlined above, but also on a critique of the white working class.²⁸ Egbuna claimed that the goal of white workers was to create an 'aristocracy of labour', rather than seeking a multi-racial alliance against capitalism. He went as far as to say that '[t]oday, the colour line has coincided with the class line'.²⁹ Carmichael's critique of the traditional workers' movement was broadly similar. Rather than fighting for emancipation, Carmichael accused 'The Labour Movement' of fighting for better pay and conditions. In this sense, workers campaigned for a better position within capitalism rather than for the overthrow of capitalism.³⁰ The capitalists colluded, and in doing so forestalled the revolution in the west. However, this was only possible by exploiting the Third World and enlisting the help of white workers in the colonial and neocolonial project. As a result, Carmichael argued, the 'proletariat has become the Third World, and the bourgeoisie is white western society'.³¹ In this sense, the black power movement was now at the cutting edge of the class struggle and constituted 'the real revolutionary proletariat'.³²

In spite of these similarities, Egbuna's understanding of black power had a number of novel elements. First, he offered a historical and psychological account of black power's genesis. Egbuna claimed that slavery had robbed black people of their culture and history. Again, this was a fairly standard position in black radical circles, particularly in the USA. But he went on to make the claim that this led black people to seek 'cultural sustenance' from white culture, the only culture that they knew. For this reason, black people sought integration. However, whites responded to demands for integration with disdain and violence. This rejection, in turn, prompted a search for an original African culture and identity that blossomed into 'cultural nationalism'.³³ This process led to a position where, at last, black people were able to see through white

²⁶ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 7.

²⁷ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 171.

²⁸ Dhondy argues that this critique was very much influenced by Marcuse.

²⁹ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 7.

³⁰ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 165.

³¹ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 165.

³² Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 162.

³³ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 6.

culture, recognize their own beauty, and reject white values. Cultural nationalism was an important step, but did not, in itself, fully constitute black power. For Egbuna, cultural nationalism became black power when it was wedded with the notion that black people themselves, without the help of white people, had to smash the current system in order to end their exploitation. While this argument cannot be found in Carmichael's Roundhouse speech, there are parallels with the work of Frantz Fanon, who was quoted with great approval by Carmichael and Egbuna alike. *Black Skin, White Masks*, which was published in English for the first time in 1967, discusses Fanon's experiences in the French colony of Martinique. It argued that in destroying the indigenous culture of a colonized people, colonialism created a psychological dependency on the part of the colonized, which was manifested, particularly amongst the economically aspirant sections of the colony, in a desire to appropriate and imitate the culture of the colonial masters. However, no matter how perfect the assimilation was, there came a point at which 'the educated negro suddenly discovers that he is rejected by a civilization which he has none the less assimilated'.³⁴ This 'moment of "being for others"',³⁵ in turn, led to the desire to 'assert myself as a BLACK MAN'.³⁶ Egbuna's account, then, seems to be a hybrid of Fanon's general understanding of the dynamics of decolonization, as expressed in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Carmichael's specific critique of arguments against integration in the USA. Indeed, the debt to *Black Skin, White Masks* is no surprise as it was published in 1967 and, given Egbuna's respect for Fanon, it is natural that he should have read the book in the same year as writing the UCPA's manifesto. Egbuna's manifesto also introduced a great deal of material from the immediate British context, which Carmichael did not discuss. The manifesto attacked the Labour government's immigration bill and the racism of British trades unions.³⁷ *Black Power in Britain* returned to the British context repeatedly, in an attempt to ground the ideological discussion of black power in the realities of life in Britain. In doing so, it hit out at the Home Secretary, 'fascist teddy boys hiding in police uniforms', the BBC, and tyrannical landlords.³⁸

2. James and Black Power

James took a significantly different approach, an approach that was informed by many years of writing and campaigning for human

³⁴ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, 1992), 93.

³⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 109.

³⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 115.

³⁷ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 4.

³⁸ Egbuna, *Black Power in Britain*, 11–12.

emancipation. There was a considerable degree of common ground between James and Carmichael. James first encountered Carmichael in March 1967 at Sir George Williams University in Canada.³⁹ James, in his own words, ‘was so struck by what he was saying and the way he was saying it . . . that I sat down immediately and took the unusual step of writing a letter to him . . .’⁴⁰ Carmichael responded in kind, so by the time of the Dialectics of Liberation conference the two were well acquainted. James’s ‘Black power’ speech was presented to several audiences in Britain and abroad. Its first iteration occurred in front of ‘a private audience of black and white activists of various allegiances’ at the West Indian Students’ Centre, in Earl’s Court before the end of August 1967.⁴¹ The speech, along with another piece by James, was privately published by Frank John, one of James’s friends from Trinidad who was living in London, and in this form it was circulated amongst London’s radicals.⁴²

James greeted Carmichael’s trip to London with genuine enthusiasm and defended Carmichael vigorously against press allegations that he was preaching racial hatred. Nonetheless, as Dhondy points out, James was keen to influence the direction of the emerging black power movement.⁴³ James’s response to Carmichael was quite different to that of Egbuna. First, whereas *Black Power in Britain* paraphrased Carmichael’s Roundhouse speech extensively, James used it extremely sparingly. Secondly, whereas Egbuna constructed a generic description of the forces that had led to the emergence of black power based on his reading of Fanon and Carmichael, James presented an intellectual genealogy of black power, tracing the new political movement back through Malcolm X, George Padmore, and Marcus Garvey to W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.⁴⁴ Thirdly, James offered qualifications to Carmichael’s analysis of the aims and tactics of the movement, at least in so far as they applied to Britain.

In terms of Carmichael’s text, James quoted his Roundhouse speech only once.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, James subtly echoed Carmichael’s rhetoric. Notably, James made no use of Carmichael’s argument concerning

³⁹ James, ‘Black Power’, 363.

⁴⁰ James, ‘Black Power’, 363.

⁴¹ Farrukh Dhondy, *CLR James, Cricket, the Caribbean, and World Revolution* (London, 2001), 171; James, *Black Power, Its Past, Today and the Way Ahead* (London, 1968).

⁴² We owe these details to private correspondence with James’s friend Richard Small. A copy of the private printing of the speeches is preserved in the archives of the Institute of Race Relations in London: (IRR) 01/04/04/01/04/01/20.

⁴³ Dhondy, *CLR James*, 171.

⁴⁴ James, ‘Black Power’, 365–7.

⁴⁵ James, ‘Black Power’, 374. James quotes Carmichael twice. The second occasion, however, was a reference to Carmichael’s speech at the OLAS conference of 1967: James, ‘Black Power’, 374.

innate human freedom, the argument which Egbuna would use as the starting point of his manifesto. Rather, James quoted Rousseau:

You remember about the middle of the eighteenth century Rousseau's statement with which he began his famous book *The Social Contract*? 'Man was born free and is everywhere in chains.' Listen to it again: 'Man born free and is everywhere in chains.' . . . The point is that the phrase has been a banner under which men have struggled for liberty and freedom, a phrase under which the struggle goes on today. Without Rousseau's 'Man was born free and is everywhere in chains', the world would be a poorer place.⁴⁶

This remarkable passage discreetly signalled a point of disagreement between Carmichael and James. Carmichael had, in uttering the statement, '[a]ll men are born free. They are enslaved by other men',⁴⁷ alluded to Rousseau's famous couplet. In spite of this, in a later part of his speech he had distanced himself from the western tradition of political thought in general and Rousseau in particular. Carmichael argued:

We are indeed fighting to save the humanity of the world, which the West has failed miserably in being able to preserve. And the fight will be waged in the Third World. There will be new speakers. They will be Che, they will be Mao, they will be Fanon. You [the First World] can have Rousseau, you can have Marx, you can even have the great libertarian John Stuart Mill.⁴⁸

James's use of Rousseau seems to have been intended to undercut Carmichael's rejection of the western tradition. At the very least, it reminded his audience of Carmichael's dependence on Rousseau for an important aspect of his argument. More significantly, James claimed that Rousseau's phrase was of enduring relevance and in doing so suggested that Carmichael himself, like it or not, was fighting under a banner that had been fashioned, in part, by the western tradition. This is not to say, of course, that James underplayed the contribution of black intellectuals, for he did not. Indeed, his discussion of Du Bois, Garvey, and Fanon was much more extended than his discussion of Rousseau. Even so, James implied that black power owed a debt to a universal human tradition and was the latest stage in the struggle for universal liberation.

The universality of James's vision was also apparent from his comments on the working class. Carmichael and Egbuna explicitly

⁴⁶ James, 'Black Power', 365.

⁴⁷ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 159.

⁴⁸ Carmichael, 'Black Power', in *Dialectics of Liberation*, 168.

rejected the notion of collaboration with the white working class. James undermined this argument in three ways: first, he emphasized Carmichael's statement that white people could play a part in the struggle for emancipation as long as they worked within their own communities.⁴⁹ Significantly, Egbuna made no mention of this line of argument, and in this sense he wrote off the white radicals far more comprehensively than Carmichael was prepared to do. His second strategy was to encourage his audience to recognize the revolutionary potential of social groups who were far from class conscious in any traditional sense. Citing Lenin, he argued that the petty bourgeoisie had played an important part in revolutionary outbursts in Europe in the early part of the century.⁵⁰ In doing so he was able to accept Carmichael's characterization of the working class as often reactionary in their outlook, and hold out the hope that they retained the potential to transform themselves through struggle into an agency for revolutionary change. This argument reflects James's rejection of the 'Leninist' vanguard party, which in turn stemmed from his 1948 work on Hegel's dialectic and from his political experience as an activist and theoretician within the US Trotskyist movement. By 1950 James had broken with the notion of the revolutionary party in favour of a praxis that championed spontaneous self-correcting movements of the working class, such as that which he witnessed in the wildcat strikes of Detroit auto workers in the 1940s and would later hail in the full-scale Hungarian revolt of 1956 and in the emergence of *Solidarnosc* during the Polish Spring of 1980. Finally, in stating that Carmichael's position on collaboration with white groups was appropriate to the historical conditions in the USA, he opened the door for collaboration between black radicals and white groups in Britain where circumstances were different.

James's position on the working class in his 'Black Power' speech was consistent with the thrust of his work since *The Black Jacobins*. James's history of the Haitian revolution clearly credited the Parisian working class with a role in the abolition of slavery, an institution which the French masses regarded with 'virulent hatred' and dubbed 'the aristocracy of the skin'.⁵¹ The Haitian slaves abolished slavery in fact, but James argued that the Parisian working class and their political wing in the Convention were a crucial ally, who in the face of protests from the French ruling class, ended the legal basis of slavery in February 1794. *The Black Jacobins* was written in 1938 in the stillness of an English seaside suburb that was insistently disturbed by what James called 'the booming of Franco's heavy artillery, the rattle of Stalin's firing squads and the fierce shrill turmoil of the revolutionary

⁴⁹ James, 'Black Power', 369.

⁵⁰ James, 'Black Power', 373.

⁵¹ James, *The Black Jacobins* (London, 2001), 114.

movement striving for clarity and influence'.⁵² In a key passage James sets out his thinking on the relationship between racial oppression and class struggle, while also acknowledging the example of the brigades of volunteers from across Europe who were at that time fighting alongside the Spanish Republican Army against fascism:

The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental. There were Jacobin workmen in Paris who would have fought for the blacks against Bonaparte troops. But the international movement was not then what it is today and there were none in San Domingo.⁵³

James was clear: black power was a new stage, indeed the most advanced stage, in the fight for black freedom and an indispensable part of the broader movement towards socialism and Carmichael was a revolutionary of great stature and even greater potential. Nonetheless, the British movement, while retaining the principle of black self-direction, need not cut itself off completely from the white working class, nor write off the working class's potential to act as an agent of progress.

3. Egbuna, the UPCA, and the Panthers

By 1968 there were several British groups that were associated with black power. These included the British Black Panthers, the first Panther organization to form outside the USA;⁵⁴ the UCPA, who were an important force with branches in several major cities which helped to circulate the manifesto and who reconstituted themselves as the Black Unity and Freedom Party in 1970;⁵⁵ Sawh's United Coloured People and Arab Association, which split from the UCPA in September 1967, and the Black People's Alliance.⁵⁶ Michael X was also still associated, to some extent, with black power, and from time to time claimed, mendaciously, to be the head of the British Panthers. The variety of

⁵² James, *The Black Jacobins*, xx.

⁵³ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 230.

⁵⁴ Anne-Marie Angelo, 'The Black Panthers in London, 1967–1972: A Diasporic Struggle Navigates the Black Atlantic', *Radical History Review*, 103 (2009), 18.

⁵⁵ The UCPA's manifesto had sold out within eight months and was reprinted in May 1968 (*Black Power Speaks*, Issue 1, 1968, 9). In addition to these two editions, a photocopied or 'bootlegged' edition seems to have been available. The bootlegged edition was a photocopied version of the 1967 edition, and differs only in that the text is reproduced on recto only. A copy is preserved at the Institute of Race Relations in London, see: IRR 01/04/04/01/04/01/17.

⁵⁶ A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London, 1982), 25.

groups is, in part, a testament to the variety of interpretations of black power that sprang up at the time. However, it would be wrong to assume that each group was ideologically homogeneous. The UCPA, for example, was riven with splits over issues such as the merits of collaborating with progressive whites, the extent to which the organization should be a tightly knit vanguard, and the methods through which they should transform British politics and society.⁵⁷ Moreover, membership was fairly fluid and members of one group were often members of others.⁵⁸ This growth of different black power organizations led to an explosion of publications dealing with black politics. Egbuna edited *Black Power Speaks*; Howe was involved with *The Black Eagle* and later *Black Dimension*; the Panthers published the *Black Peoples' News Service*—which became the *Freedom News* in 1972, after intervention by James; and the Black People's Information Centre brought out the *National and International News Bulletin*. In addition to these regular publications, there were also special pamphlets and one-off issues such as Nkrumah's *Message to the Black People of Britain*, and *Black Life: Brixton* both of which were published by the Black Panthers; not to mention numerous flyers and handbills that served a variety of purposes. With such a wealth of activity it is difficult to generalize about the ideological positions the publications present. In order to avoid misleading generalizations, this article focuses on the publications of the UCPA and the Black Panthers in the period between Carmichael's visit and the acquittal of the 'Mangrove Nine' at the end of 1971.

The zenith of Egbuna's influence can be seen in the three editions of *Black Power Speaks* that appeared between May and July 1968. Egbuna edited all three issues and was in the process of editing a fourth when, following a dawn raid, he was imprisoned, refused bail, and held on remand for six months on charges of 'conspiracy to incite murder'.⁵⁹ The period May to July 1968 was of great significance as it witnessed Egbuna's split with the UCPA and his foundation of the Black Panthers. Egbuna discussed the break in *Destroy this Temple*, arguing that internal divisions had made the UCPA unworkable. Consequently, he resigned as Chairman, refused re-election, and founded the Panthers.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 19.

⁵⁸ Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger*, 21.

⁵⁹ NA, MEPO 2/11409.

⁶⁰ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 22. *Destroy this Temple* presents the shift as a clean break. *Black Power Speaks*, however, suggests a more drawn-out transition. The first edition of the magazine clearly identifies the magazine with the UCPA; the front page of the second edition claims that it was produced by the 'P.P.P.', which seems to be a misprint of BPP (Black Panther Party); however, the front inside cover still states that the publication was 'Produced by [the] UCPA Editorial Board'. To confuse matters further the second edition advertises membership of the Panthers on pages 5 and 16, while also advertising membership of the UCPA on page 19. The third edition is clearly the work of the BPP

Black Power Speaks did not present a wholly consistent ideological position. Moreover, it did not consistently support the position outlined in *Black Power in Britain*. In spite of the lack of ideological coherence, *Black Power Speaks* does reflect a generally consistent set of ideological preoccupations. That is to say, it returns to the same set of questions, even if the answers that it presents are not always consistent with one another. The nature and definition of black power was a major preoccupation of *Black Power Speaks*. The first issue, for example, discusses this in the editorial, in 'Lets Face it, Baby', in 'Black Power or Death!' in T. R. Adam's untitled article, and in Lester Springer's 'Conversation in Defence of Black Power'. In this sense, it takes up over ten pages of the nineteen-page magazine. The extent to which the definition of black power dominated the first issue of *Black Power Speaks* is no surprise given the factional fighting that was reaching its head within the UCPA at the time. In this sense, the ongoing attempts to define black power were not merely an academic exercise, they were a bid for power and influence within the radical black movement.

A second recurrent theme is the notion that many black people were betraying themselves and the movement. *Black Power in Britain* had established that black people were the only people who could bring about liberation. *Black Power Speaks*, however, further delimited the range of people who could act as agents of liberation. 'Let's Face it, Baby' explicitly argued that many black people, even black power activists, were dominated by a 'white ego' and therefore were of no use to the revolution. Even more far-reaching was Beatrice Williams's 'The Role of Black Women in Black Revolution'. Here, Williams extended the notion of a labour aristocracy into the black community. She argued that 'on a general social level, the Black woman has more social contacts with the White dominated society and, with this virtual assimilation, she has come to constitute a sort of upper-class sex bourgeoisie and the relationship between her and her husband is a curious psychological one akin to the relationship between the bourgeois [sic] and the worker'.⁶¹ Williams's message was that women must choose between integration with white society and solidarity with black male revolutionaries.

A final theme that recurred in *Black Power Speaks* was the international fight against colonialism. All three issues had articles on the anti-colonial struggle in the developing world. Moreover, the

Editorial board, many of whom had previously been part of the UCPA Editorial Board. Bizarrely, the advert for membership of the BPP ends with the phrase 'Join the U.C.P.A. "soul brothers" NOW and make BLACK POWER a way of life' and gives the UCPA address for membership enquiries rather than the address of the Panthers. See: *Black Power Speaks*, Issue 3 (1968), 19.

⁶¹ Beatrice Williams, 'Women's Corner: The Role of Women in the Black Revolution', *Black Power Speaks*, Issue 1 (1968), 10.

magazine also printed excerpts from the work of heroes of the struggle, such as Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, and Nkrumah. The emphasis on the fight against imperialism was so strong that it eclipsed any discussion of British politics or grass-roots struggles by the British movement.⁶² In general terms, *Black Power Speaks* reflects a shift from the ideological position set out in *Black Power in Britain*. Indeed, it shows an obsession with the UCPA's internal struggles and the revolutionary glamour of the anti-imperial fight overseas, rather than a sustained attack on the British government, or an attempt to engage in grass-roots politics. In this sense it suggests that Egbuna's political activity was almost entirely restricted to factional fighting within the movement rather than organizing grass-roots campaigns.

The magazine remained silent on the organization of the movement. In spite of this, Egbuna had clear ideas about the institutional structures appropriate to black power. Fundamentally, Egbuna believed that black power should be organized as a secretive, quasi-guerrilla, vanguard party that deliberately cut itself off from the community at large. *Destroy this Temple* stated that the Panthers were founded on the principle of tiered membership. Probationary members were only admitted to full membership after a period of six months during which they would have 'to fulfil certain set tasks' such as regular attendance at meetings in order to prove their loyalty.⁶³ Additionally, prior to admission to the core members had to take an oath to the movement.⁶⁴ While *Destroy this Temple* makes the principles clear, it leaves the details vague. Remarkably, a handwritten copy of the rules for membership and the Panther's oath have been preserved in the police files held at Britain's National Archive. These documents, which have only recently been made public, have never been published, therefore we quote them in their entirety. The rules of membership were set out thus:

Member. There must be 2 categories of members.

- (1) A) CORE – MEMBER'S PAID UP Members + 90 DAYS [BASIC] training.
- (2) B) Members who Subscribe in Some way or other

Owing to the increased expenditure of the whole movement

⁶² The first issue, for example, contains no discussion of the fight between the British movement and the British authorities, with the exception of two photographs. One featured protestors holding placards which read 'MICHAEL X JAILED WHAT ABOUT ENOCH POWELL', *Black Power Speaks*, Issue 1 (1968), 9; the other is a full page with two photographs, one of Carmichael, the other of Powell. They are labelled respectively 'BEAUTY...AND THE BEAST' (*Black Power Speaks*, Issue 1, 1968, 19). These pictures, neither of which was accompanied by any editorial comment, represent the sum total of the discussion of British politics that occurs in the first issue.

⁶³ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 22.

⁶⁴ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 23

Membership is Suggested at £2/0/0 Per calendar year.
on training Sessions BASEd on 8 weeks.

- (1) BASIC KARATE Practice + Principle.
- (2) PRActice KARATE, + Judo BASIC, Break Falls ETC:
- (3) Judo – PRACTICE
- (4) Judo – KARATE continued more ADVANCED.
- (5) intelligence work
- (6) Survival Hunt P.S. code of Discipline Do's + Dont's*
- (7) Weaponry
- (8) Military training.⁶⁵

Ideological unity was further entrenched by the taking of the oath, which Egbuna insisted was an essential prerequisite for admission to the core.⁶⁶ The oath, which, again, has never been published, reads thus:

We Members of the Black Panther Movement, acknowledge it to be a militant movement, the Vanguard, (spear head) of the Black power Revolution,

It is our duty to acquaint ourselves with the skills that will bring true independence, Justice + Freedom to our people.

Since the opponents of our Struggle is ruthless and Violent, we therefore must accept the fact that only by violence can we neutralize violence.

It is our duty to be prepared always, so when we are Called upon By our people, whether at home or abroad—when ever our people may need us.

I.....therefore have taken this oath to be true and honest with our fellow Brothers, with the Difficult task that lays before them. Should I knowingly fail the—movement and all that it stands for, I must forfeit my life in order to preserve the movement.⁶⁷

There is a clear link between the ideological positions set out in *Black Power Speaks* and the institutional arrangements that Egbuna introduced for the Panthers. Egbuna believed that black power was the preserve of the few. White people, even the working class, could not be trusted; nor could he count on the majority of black people. In such a hostile environment, black power must of necessity be a minority organization

⁶⁵ NA CRIM 1 4962/1, part 1, Exhibit 25. The orthography has been preserved in the transcription and the tabulation approximated.

⁶⁶ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 23.

⁶⁷ NA CRIM 1 4962/1, part 1, Exhibit 25. The orthography has been preserved in the transcription and the tabulation approximated. Neither document is in Egbuna's hand. The oath is signed by G. Maynard, one of the 'BPP Editorial Board' (*Black Power Speaks*, May 1968, 1) and a contributor to the Panther's magazine *Black Power Speaks*. Indeed, both documents seem to be in his hand.

that acted on behalf of others rather than a community-based organization. Moreover, the beleaguered nature of the movement meant that guerrilla tactics were the only possible means of success, although, it should be stressed that Egbuna's commitment to such methods remains wholly rhetorical. Hence, under Egbuna the Panthers were a strictly centralized, secretive, vanguardist organization. However, following his arrest, Egbuna lost control of the Panthers and the organization changed radically.

4. A New Direction

From the time of Egbuna's arrest, the Panthers took a new path, focusing primarily on grass-roots struggles between the movement and the agents of the state. The Panthers remained a highly secretive organization, and therefore, the exact course of their evolution is difficult to trace. Egbuna recalls that on his release from prison they had abandoned much that he held dear.⁶⁸ Initially, the leadership of the Panthers seems to have passed to David UDAH, who later became an Anglican priest. By 1970, Althea Jones-Lecointe, a Trinidad-born doctoral student researching biochemistry at the University of London, was the *de facto* leader of the Panthers, and in her hands the Panthers' rejected Egbuna's cultural nationalism, his political separatism, and his understanding of the Panthers as a vanguard party. As a result, Howe began collaborating with the movement and through him James too became involved.

Farrukh Dhondy, who joined the Panthers in 1970, recalls that the division between candidate members and full members remained. Apparently, transition to full membership was achieved by 'attending meetings, going to the classes and speaking up'. The Panthers' classes focused on reading the work of American Panthers, such as George Jackson's *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (1970); Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968); and the writings of Angela Davis and other political prisoners, *If They Come in the Morning* (1971). At the top of the Panthers was the 'central core', a committee of seven or eight people that Dhondy likens to the Soviet Politburo.⁶⁹ By this time Egbuna had been 'discarded as a nuisance and a counter revolutionary'. Dhondy's assertion is supported by an open letter from the new leadership denouncing Egbuna as he 'had never participated in the community activities of the movement, and has never identified himself

⁶⁸ Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 23.

⁶⁹ The interview with Farrukh Dhondy was conducted by the authors on 3 March 2010.

with our people at grass-roots level'.⁷⁰ The leadership also rejected Egbuna's militarist rhetoric. Dhondy sums up his position thus, 'I knew that walking about in berets and black gloves was not the point of the exercise, the point of the exercise was to get immigrant rights. A little bit of Marxist analysis told one that you didn't wear uniforms. Civilians are the best democrats and it was about democracy rather than about militancy, and Althea understood that.' Moreover, collaboration with the white working class became central to the Panther's strategy. Dhondy argues that under Jones-Lecointe, the Panthers realized that they could not precipitate a revolution in Britain, but black workers could 'affect policies of the unions, policies outside the unions and begin to demand that you have an integrated society in Britain... but you can never bring about a socialist revolution unless the white working class moved... and the Black Panthers absorbed this idea'.⁷¹

Around 1970, the Panthers relocated the centre of their organization from Portobello Road in Notting Hill to Brixton and established separate branches in Acton and Finsbury Park as part of their push to establish roots in the poorest black communities. In doing so, the new leadership, in contrast to the old, focused on community outreach. In addition to holding weekly discussions on black history and politics, Panthers were expected to participate in street stalls, assist in the legal defence of black people, visit black prisoners, work with children, establish book groups and library services, and organize cultural activities. Thus, a mass rally to 'Demand Justice for the Mangrove Nine' held on 3 October 1971 included the performance of two 'lively plays' satirizing 'The Black Experience in Britain'; the screening of a film entitled 'Legacy of Empire, and the recital of moving poetry to the sounds of drums and reggae'.⁷²

The change in direction was also marked by a change of intellectual focus. Dhondy and Jones-Lecointe were both instrumental in introducing new literature to the Panthers. Dhondy introduced Marxist works such as *The Communist Manifesto* and *State and Revolution*; Jones-Lecointe introduced E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) and other material on the history of the British labour movement. The commitment to multiracial class struggle was reflected in the Panther's willingness to work with and accept support from radical white organizations and public campaigns in support of striking British miners, Irish republicans and against the Labour government's

⁷⁰ 'Black Panther Movement statement on Obi Egbuna', held at Indian Workers' Association Archive at Birmingham Central Library cited in Wild, 'Black was the Colour of our Fight', 143.

⁷¹ Interview with Farrukh Dhondy, 3 March 2010.

⁷² George Padmore Institute, London (GPI) JLR 3 1 5/12.

proposal to outlaw unofficial strikes.⁷³ A concrete example of this orientation was the Black Defence Committees set up in December 1970 outside London following a speaking tour by London Panthers. These committees sought to raise support from white sympathizers, trade unions, and political groups who wished to show solidarity with the black struggle.⁷⁴ Similarly, during the Mangrove campaign Jones-Lecointe and other Panthers addressed a demonstration of mainly white people in London that had been called by the Black Defence Committee in order to express solidarity between radical whites and the defendants in the Mangrove trial.⁷⁵ This change in direction was signalled by change in the organization's title. *Black Power Speaks* routinely refers to the Panthers as the 'Black Panther Party.' The *Black Peoples' News Service*, *Black Life*, and the agitational material from 1970 to 1972 refers to the organization, without exception, as the 'Black Panther Movement'. Evidently, under Jones-Lecointe, the Panthers retained their internal discipline and their centralized structure, but rejected Egbuna's vision of the Panthers as a vanguard party, in favour of a movement dedicated to leading the community in its fight against injustice.

A minority of Panthers were not happy with this new direction. Tony Soares, who left the Panthers in 1970 to help form the separatist Black Liberation Front, recalls that the movement was 'increasingly controlled by the Marxist elements: black Trotskyites, Socialist Labour League, the International Marxist Group...'.⁷⁶ In this sense, the Panthers were not Jamesian, but in dropping their initial cultural nationalism and Egbuna's elitist conception of vanguardism, in favour of a more 'libertarian Leninism', they were in a position where collaboration with James was possible.⁷⁷

For those disaffected Panthers unwilling to embrace the orthodox Marxism of the Jones-Lecointe leadership, the breakaway Black Liberation Front, formed in early 1970 by dissident members of North and West London branches of the Black Panther Movement offered a political home.⁷⁸ The new organization represented a political return to Egbuna's vision of black power in the role it attributed to African

⁷³ The Panthers claimed that wildcat strikes were 'the only means workers have today of opposing exploitation, since the unions have become a tool of big business, with the support of the Labour Government'. *Black Panther News Service*, July 1970 (NA CRIM 1 5522/3).

⁷⁴ See, e.g. the leaflets of the Black Defence Committee, IRR 01/04/04/01/04/01/02, IRR 01/04/04/01/10/07/014, and IRR 01/04/04/01/10/07/018.

⁷⁵ NA HO 325 143.

⁷⁶ Wild, 'Black was the Colour of our Fight', 104.

⁷⁷ The term 'Libertarian Leninism' is taken from Marcel Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin* (London, 1973).

⁷⁸ Wild, 'Black was the Colour of our Fight', 146.

culture and history within its 'revolutionary black nationalism' and in its political separatism and refusal to work with radical whites.

Dhondy recalls that James became involved with the Black Panther Movement through his great nephew Darcus Howe, who 'brought C. L. R. James to speak to the group [the Panthers] in a house in Islington's then unfashionable Barnsbury'.⁷⁹ James's association with the Panthers deepened as Howe himself became more involved with the organization. Howe was at the forefront of the grass-roots campaign to defend the Mangrove Restaurant from police harassment. The Mangrove, owned and run by Frank Critchlow, was the informal centre for Notting Hill's black community, and was repeatedly raided by the police ostensibly in connection with drugs although the police consistently failed to produce any evidence of narcotics on the premises. Howe responded by organizing a protest march, in collaboration with the Panthers.

Police intervention during the march sparked violence and following the protest Howe, Jones-Lecointe, Critchlow, and six others were tried for a variety of offences including incitement to riot. The Panthers rallied to the cause, and along with Howe turned the trial of the 'Mangrove Nine' into a national media event and the focus for a grass-roots campaign against police racism. Howe, who was not a member of the Panthers at the time, went to James for advice and help during the campaign. James, for example, counselled Howe to organize a press conference following an early legal victory when the Magistrate dismissed the most serious charges of incitement to riot at the committal stage of the trial. The celebration was to prove short lived, however, as by the time the case got to the Old Bailey, the Director of Public Prosecutions had taken the unusual step of reinstating the incitement to riot charges against the nine defendants via a voluntary bill of indictment, an act which in the words of Defence Counsel Ian MacDonald was 'seen by many as persecutory'.⁸⁰

James also spoke to the Panthers following the arrest of the Mangrove Nine in order to galvanize them into action in support of their comrades.⁸¹ Flyers preserved at the George Padmore Institute in London also indicate James spoke to the Panthers on other occasions. For example, a flyer for the 'FREEDOM MEETING' to support radicals in Trinidad and Tobago organized by the Panthers in Finsbury Park in November 1971 was advertised thus: 'COME AND GET INVOLVED

⁷⁹ Dhondy, *CLR James*, xiii.

⁸⁰ Interview with Ian MacDonald, 1 March 2010. Special Branch documents held at the National Archives show that the Panthers were subject to extensive surveillance and that intelligence reports were requested and provided on the Panther's leadership and black power groups more generally by the Home Secretary following the Mangrove demonstration on 9 August 1970. See NA HO 325 143.

⁸¹ Dhondy, *CLR James*, xiii. See also Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, 280–1.

AND INFORMED BY OLD WEST INDIAN FIGHTERS LIKE CLR JAMES THE WELL KNOWN REVOLUTIONARY HISTORIAN, BLIND MAN MAC AND JOHN LA ROSE.⁸²

Dhondy recalls that one of James's addresses was particularly influential. Speaking to the Mangrove defendants, the Panthers and their supporters, James congratulated them on the campaign, and advised them to go further by bringing out a new type of paper. Dhondy recalls that James said,

... 'I'll tell you what to write in the Newspaper. Don't write all this Leninist rhetoric, you don't need it.' And he pointed to people in the audience and said 'What is it you do?', and he said 'I'm a bus conductor.' 'Then write about bus conducting; write about what happens at your garage ... write about what you want, and what you don't want'⁸³

The resulting publication was the *Freedom News* edited by the Panthers' Eddie Leconte, Jones-Leconte's husband and a member of the Panthers' central core. As a regular contributor to the paper, Dhondy wrote about the school in which he taught; the other teachers and staff with whom he worked, and the kids, both black and white, who attended his classes. The end result was a newspaper that was absorbed in the everyday lives of its readers.

James's conception of a radical paper which opened its pages to the experiences of the Panther rank and file, its supporters, and the black community more generally was consistent with his view of the role of such publications and of the small groups of activists that produce them. From his time writing for and selling *Correspondence*, the socialist paper of the Johnson Forrest Tendency, to the period he spent as editor of *The Nation*, the People's National Movement of Trinidad's newspaper, James eschewed the theorizing of intellectuals in favour of an approach that sought to connect with popular struggles and consciousness. The role of small groups of activists and the publications they produced was not to formulate a programme on behalf of the oppressed or working class, but to support and guide the broader movement by describing the revolutionary potential of what the people themselves did, and so to 'concertize propaganda and agitation'.⁸⁴

James described this approach in vivid terms in the preface to a pamphlet written in 1941 to publicize a strike by some 8,000 mainly black sharecroppers and agricultural workers in Missouri.⁸⁵ He called

⁸² GPI JLR 3/1/5.

⁸³ Interview with Farrukh Dhondy, 3 March 2010.

⁸⁴ James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (London, 1980), 224.

⁸⁵ Kent Worcester, *CLR James: A Political Biography* (New York, 1996), 71.

a meeting with the local activist leadership of the strike and said 'We have to publish something, for everyone to read about it'. They agreed:

So I sat down with my pen and notebook and said 'Well, what should we say?' So (I used to call myself Williams) they said, 'Well, brother Williams, you know.' I said, 'I know nothing. This is your strike,' ... and I went to each of them, five or six of them; each said his piece and I joined them together.⁸⁶

The final pamphlet, *Down with Starvation Wages in Southeast Missouri*, was written in the idiom of the sharecroppers themselves, sold for a penny and at 6 inches in length was designed to fit into a back pocket. The pamphlet was distributed to hundreds of sharecroppers, and as James's biographer, Kent Worcester, has noted 'of great symbolic significance was that James had written down the sharecroppers words, rather than formulating their demands'.⁸⁷

James's influence also had a profound effect on the British Panthers' Youth League. The renowned dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed in 2005, recalls his experiences in the Panthers in the following terms: 'I came into contact with the work of C. L. R. James when I was a young Black Panther, a member of the Black Panther Youth League and the Black Panther Movement in England in the late 60s, early 70s. We studied his book, *The Black Jacobins* chapter by chapter. It was the beginning of my political education.'⁸⁸

James was important for the British Panthers in a final sense. In June 1973, Howe, Dhondy, and Barbara Beese, one of the Mangrove defendants, forced the dissolution of the Panthers. According to Dhondy, the Jones-Lecointe leadership had begun to enforce strict internal discipline, and a puritanical moral code on members of the movement. Following James, Howe, Dhondy, and Beese felt the centralized internal structure had allowed the Panthers to degenerate and become, what Howe loosely describes, 'Stalinist'.⁸⁹ A rump of the Black Panther Movement, organized under the new name of the Black Workers' Movement, to reflect the emphasis its leadership now placed on class in defining its political identity, continued to exist for some time but it was a spent force compared with the movement that had regularly mobilized hundreds of black youth and workers at its political and cultural events a few years before. Howe and Leila Hassan wrested control of *Race Today* from the Institute of Race Relations, founding the

⁸⁶ Worcester, *CLR James*, 71.

⁸⁷ Worcester, *CLR James*, 72.

⁸⁸ Paul Austin, *Ideas: The Black Jacobin* [Radio documentary] CBC, 30 August, 21.05. Also see 'lkj at the black panthers' <<http://www.classical-reggae-interviews.org/index.htm>> accessed 26 August 2009.

⁸⁹ GPI CAM 16/30, 4.

Race Today Collective, which unlike the Panthers, was an activist group deliberately established along Jamesian lines. Dhondy and Beese later became *de facto* members.

5. Conclusion

The black power movement that emerged following Carmichael's visit to Britain in 1967 was never unified. From the first, there were disagreements regarding the nature of black power and how the radical new movement would tackle the British context. For Egbuna, black power was the preserve of a small ideologically pure vanguard party. James, on the other hand, argued that black power should play a leading role in a more universal struggle. Egbuna, then, believed that ideological wisdom was a prerequisite for action, whereas James believed that the experience of action would lead campaigners to revolutionary understanding. The Panthers followed their own path, becoming a community-based organization, which took on police violence, institutional discrimination, and racist legislation. In this sense, it became a much bigger and more dynamic organization than the party Egbuna had envisaged; for while Egbuna wrote of revolutionary action, he was, in the words of Darcus Howe a 'Hyde Park revolutionary', his own activities were largely restricted to addressing small gatherings at Speakers Corner.⁹⁰ The irony of his position was that because he believed that the system and white people in general were totally irredeemable, he also believed that any action to combat racism, short of total revolution, was ultimately doomed to failure. Thus, the logic of his position forced him into a position of relative passivity.

Disillusioned, Egbuna left Britain in November 1971. In an interview with *The Times* he claimed that he was 'bitter that black people in Britain have not responded to his call for revolution, and even more so by the fact that the Black Power movement has not made any meaningful impact in Britain'.⁹¹ But this claim is remarkable, given that it was made during the trial of the 'Mangrove Nine', at the very point when the defendants and their supporters had turned black power into a *cause célèbre*. Manifestly, Egbuna's comments should not be taken at face value. No doubt his bitterness was genuine enough, but it was rooted in his own eclipse and not in any failure on the part of the black power movement. In contrast to Egbuna's relative passivity, Howe, Jones-Lecointe, Dhondy, and the other Panthers who collaborated with James believed that it was only through engaging with, and mobilizing,

⁹⁰ Interview with Darcus Howe on 21 August 2009.

⁹¹ *The Times*, 22 November 1971, 6.

the whole black community in political action that people oppressed and exploited by capitalism would create the institutions of a new revolutionary society. In this sense, the Panthers' collaboration with James coincided with what Sivanandan justly describes as 'the high watermark of the black power movement' in Britain.⁹² By adopting a role of militant opposition to the daily racism and discrimination experienced by black people, the Panthers sought to reach out to the community, catch them up in political action, and in doing so transform Britain.

⁹² Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger*, 33.