

# **THE ANNUAL CLR JAMES MEMORIAL LECTURE**

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## **THE RISE OF RIGHT WING NATIONALISM AND POPULISM AND CLR JAMES' THESIS: "*AFTER HITLER OUR TURN*"**

DELIVERED BY

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Let me first thank the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union for inviting me to deliver the 2017 CLR James Memorial Lecture. I always thought that I would be the organizer, or in some way involved in the organization, of this Annual Memorial Lecture. I certainly did not envisage that I would one day be asked to actually deliver the Lecture. I suppose that is a factor of one's seniority!

The Union started this Lecture Series in 1999, the year of the tenth anniversary of CLR's death. The First Lecture was delivered by Tim Hector, Antiguan and Caribbean radical thinker and political activist who was himself a foremost Jamesian. Tim, also being deeply connected with West Indies cricket, spoke about our cricket and the state of the West Indies. It was, as usual, a tour de force. Since that time we've had a very distinguished group of speakers – Professor Anthony Bogues (at that time at the Centre for Caribbean Thought, Mona, UWI and Brown University); Professor Acklyn Lynch (then at the University of Maryland, Baltimore) who did a lecture discussion on the film "Lumumba"; Lloyd Best (the tenth anniversary of whose passing we mark this month); Dr. Pat Bishop who spoke to us about what work is and what work is not; Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine of the WPA, Guyana; cricket commentator Fazeer Mohammed; and we've interwoven the Lecture Series with film launches and showings (about CLR); book launches (Walter Rodney's – How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, which Professor Norman Girvan was instrumental in organising); and of course the very important political and academic conference – "CLR at 100" which took place in 2001. This Conference organized jointly with the UWI (Mona and St. Augustine), Brown University, The

T&T Institute of the West Indies, the George Padmore Institute and the OWTU was I believe the foremost conference on James. I trust that I can get somewhere close to the clarity of thought and analysis that has been the hallmark of this vitally important Annual Lecture Series dedicated to the memory of CLR James, one of, if not the leading, our Caribbean's truly great political thinkers.

The theme which I have chosen for the Lecture – *The Rise of Right Wing Nationalism and Populism and CLR James' Thesis: "After Hitler our Turn"* – I hope suggests itself as being relevant and topical given the developments in the world in the past year or two. I will summarise them now, but will, during the lecture, analyse this trend in some detail:

- The rise in Europe of right wing political parties and movements. These include:
  1. The Freedom Party in Austria, led by Heinz-Christian Strache. In the 2016 elections for President that Party's candidate obtained the largest number of votes in the first round held in April 2016, but came second in the run-off second round in May. The May run-off was then annulled for electoral irregularities and was held again in December 2016. Norbert Hofer the Freedom Party's candidate ran second again to the Green Party's candidate Alexander Van der Bellen. However there are two points that are significant: firstly that with a 75% voter turnout in the final round the Freedom Party got more than 46% of the votes cast; secondly that in the first round the Social Democrats and Austrian People's Party, which between them have won the Presidency for decades and which were the coalition government, saw their candidates running fourth and fifth in the first round of voting – even being beaten by an Independent Candidate – Irmgard Griss, who offered herself to the Freedom Party as a candidate
  2. The Party for Freedom of the Netherlands, led by Geert Wilders. In the elections held just two weeks ago this party got the second largest number of seats in the Dutch Parliament – 20; behind the centre right party VVD, led by incumbent Prime Minister Mark Rutte which won 33 seats. Between them the Green Left Party, the Socialist party and the Labour Party garnered just under 40 seats.
  3. The Nationalist Front Party in France, led by Marie Le Pen, is the front runner according to the latest polls for the first round of the elections for President to be held on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Le Pen has the support of 25%

of the electorate at this time but enough to take her into the second round. The likely winner who is second in the polls at the moment is a centrist Emmanuel Macron of the El Marche! Movement. Notably both the traditional winners in France – the rightist Republican Party whose candidate is Francois Fillon and the Socialist Party whose candidate is Benoit Hamon are not likely to make it to the second round, nor is Jean Luc Melenchon, who is the most left wing of the candidates, in his Unsubmissive France Party.

4. The Alternative for Germany Party led by Frauke Petry, currently has just over 10% of the electorate according to the most recent polls, down from a high of about 15% in late 2016. The front runners are the two main parties – Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union and Martin Schulz’s Social Democratic Party each polling about 30%. The Left Party and the Green Party together have about 20% support.
5. In Italy, the populist Five Star Movement led by Beppe Grillo has some 30% of the popular vote according to the polls about the same number as the centre left Democratic Party led by Matteo Ofini. Significantly, two other parties on the right of the spectrum – the Forza Italia led by controversial ex-President Silvio Berlusconi and the right wing Lega Nord led by Matteo Salvini have between them 25% support.
6. Five of these right wing parties (Lega Nord – Italy; Alternative for Germany Party; Nationalist Front – France; Party for Freedom – Netherlands; Freedom Party – Austria) met on January 21<sup>st</sup> this year, exactly one day after Donald Trump was inaugurated as the President of the United States, in Koblenz Germany in a “European Counter Summit”. At this “summit” Geert Wilders declared *“yesterday a new America... and tomorrow a new Europe!...the people of the West are awakening. They are throwing off the yoke of political correctness...2017 will be the year of the Patriotic Spring”*. The “summit” took positions against the “menace of Islam; political correctness; globalization and the European Union”.
7. The Brexit Referendum in the United Kingdom in June, 2016 resulted in 51.9% of the voters electing to leave the European Union and 48.1% voting to stay in the EU. Significantly, the vote was varied: in England it was 54.3 v 46; in Wales it was 52.5 v 47.5; in Northern Ireland it was 44.2 v 55.8 and in Scotland it was 38 v 62. One of the driving forces behind Brexit was the rise of the right wing UK Independence Party

which, although not having any seats in the UK House of Commons, is tied for the largest number of seats from the UK in the European Parliament and has some 438 councillors in local government bodies in the UK.

8. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in November 2016 on an anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti- free trade, pro-America nationalist agenda. We shall analyse this some more in a while. Suffice it to say that ideologically the avowed right wing populist and nationalist parties in Europe have seen themselves close to Trump (as in “we shall make Europe Great again”) and the fact that Heinz-Christian Strache of Austria’s Freedom Party publicly stated that he met in December 2016 with Mike Flynn who was Trump’s then nominee (later confirmed and resigned) for National Security Adviser.
- At the same time that we have seen the rise of right wing populist movements in Europe and the US, we have seen the progressive, left parties being removed from office and/or undermined by a right wing offensive in Latin America. Thus:
    1. There was a constitutional coup d’etat in Honduras in 2009 in which the President Manuel Zelaya who was elected in 2005 was removed by a combination of actions by the Supreme Court, the Congress and the military.
    2. A similar constitutional coup d’etat took place in Paraguay in June 2012 when the democratically elected President Fernando Lugo was impeached with voting taking place first in the Chamber of Deputies and then the Senate one day after the other, and a week after 17 people involved in a landless struggle were killed by the police. Lugo was impeached because he was accused of being behind the killings. Others firmly believe that it was a set up. Significantly, Lugo, a former Roman Catholic Bishop, was the first President other than from the right wing Colorado Party, to be elected in 61 years.
    3. In Argentina, in October 2015 the right wing Mauricio Macri of the Republican Party won the second round vote with 51.34% of the vote compared to Daniel Scioli of the Front for Victory party with 48.66%. It is significant that Scioli who was succeeding Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner who served two terms and her husband who served one term before her, won the first round 37.08% to 34.15%, but that support for

other conservative candidates swung behind Macri in the decisive second round. Macri lost no time in implementing neo-liberal policies and this has been met by consistent mass protests including several in the past few days.

4. In Brazil in 2016 the democratically elected President, Dilma Rousseff was impeached by the Congress and replaced by the Vice President Temer who has proceeded to implement neo-liberal policies that seek to roll back the social gains of the Workers' Party governments of Lula and Dilma. Dilma's impeachment has also been identified as a constitutional coup d'état in that the right wing effected the removal of the democratically elected President through impeachment by the Congress as they couldn't succeed via elections.
5. In Ecuador, Lenin Moreno, the Presidential candidate of the progressive party PAIS Alliance (which through Rafael Correa having held two successive presidential terms) won just over 39% of the vote in the first round of elections on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2017, but fell just short of the 40% needed to win outright. There will therefore be a second round of balloting on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.
6. In Venezuela there has been a concerted effort by the traditional oligarchy to remove the left wing governments of first Hugo Chavez and now Nicolas Maduro. These efforts included an actual coup d'état which failed; sustained economic destabilization and violent demonstrations. The legal route of a referendum failed to garner enough votes to remove President Chavez and the more recent attempt to go via this route to remove President Maduro was procedurally flawed.
7. In El Salvador, the traditional oligarchy is using various judicial and legislative power to undermine the government of the FMLN

I have taken some time to describe the developments taking place all around us since it is necessary that we see the forest and not just the trees. Right wing nationalism and populism is very much a global development. I will return to its main characteristics in a while. But I need to introduce CLR, known to his friends as Nello, to this lecture. Why, you may ask have I identified his thesis: "*After Hitler our Turn*"? I must confess that perhaps in framing the theme I should have probably stated it as James' thesis critiquing "After Hitler our Turn", as this is more accurate as we shall soon see.

We all know CLR for his books - “Beyond the Boundary” and “Black Jacobins”, or perhaps “Every Cook Can Govern” and “Party Politics in the West Indies”. What is much less known is his major book “*World Revolution 1917-1936 The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*” which was written “in real time” as we say now, in 1937. Indeed this work is amazing as CLR was able to assess a huge amount of information about struggles that were taking place and write with powerful clarity. It therefore gives us a very rich description and analysis of political events in Europe as they unfolded in the months and years leading up to the rise of fascism, Hitler; Nazi control of Germany and the Second World War. Chapter 12 in CLR’s tour de force on “World Revolution” is entitled “*After Hitler, Our Turn*” and it is from the title to this Chapter 12 that I take part of my theme this evening.

That we are discussing today this issue of the rise of fascism in the context of James’ book on “World Revolution 1917-1936” is significant since in October this year we will mark the Centennial of the October 1917, Russian Revolution. That revolution took place in the midst of the First World War (1914-19). The year the war ended saw here in Trinidad and Tobago the first General Strike which was led by rank and file workers – the leaders of the Trinidad Workingmen’s Association, later to be led by Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani (after whom this College is named and a person whom James greatly admired). Most of us are not aware, however, that following the Russian Revolution and the end of World War 1 there was a period of tremendous political ferment in Europe. And significantly, this *preceded* the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed.

In Chapter 7 of “World Revolution” James describes in great detail the situation in Germany in particular. In 1920 in response to a military intervention “*the masses rose all over Germany and, by taking power in Rhineland-Westphalia and fighting the counter-revolutionary troops elsewhere, broke the Kapp counter-revolution.*” But this was just a precursor. In January 1923 the economic situation became critical partly because the post war settlement placed Germany in a very precarious position with large debts having to be paid to France, among others; the squeezing of German industry and agriculture, a blockade; the taking away of territory and colonies. In this economic crisis the traditional political parties, including the Social Democrats, could find no solution and those policies that were implemented resulted in the greater pauperisation of the working classes and even the middle classes. Big capital, however, flourished in conditions of high inflation and huge and rapid devaluation of the German currency (the mark). James reports that on July 30, 1923 the mark was five million to one pound and on August 31<sup>st</sup> it was forty-seven million to one!

In 2017 we certainly can draw parallels to the effects that an economic crisis has on workers and the middle class. Inflation, a debt crisis and devaluation of the currency are not alien to us at all.

James describes the mass movement of German workers who engaged in street protests and strikes in response to this crisis – *“on July 29, 150,000 workers assembled at the meetings of the Communist Party in Berlin, expecting the party to act...Cuno (the head of the government) declared a state of siege; the workers refused to obey. They seized motor-trucks and drove out into the country to the peasants to get supplies of food which was running short. The Communist Party seemed paralysed; Moscow gave no lead. Then in the second week of August the mass movement boiled over and a general strike brought down the Cuno Government. Had the Communist Party challenged the Government on Anti-Fascist day, a fortnight before, they could not have failed, and whatever its ultimate fate the German Revolution would have begun...”*

*Not since 1918 had there been such a revolutionary situation in any European country, and it is not likely that there will be one so favourable (at least in peace-time) for many years to come. For in addition to the hunger and the revolutionary indignation of the masses, the middle classes, deprived of every half-penny and reduced to destitution, with the treachery and dishonesty of the capitalists clear to all, had no reason to support far less fight for the existing regime.”*

Quite clearly the crisis was presenting an opportunity for the Communist Party to make a major political advance since the traditional parties were unable to point a way out of the crisis. The workers seemed to be ready, but the Party wasn't. It didn't act.

James ascribes much of the blame for this failure on Stalin and the Communist International. James quotes a letter that Stalin wrote to key comrades *“If today in Germany the power, so to speak, falls, and the Communists seize hold of it, they will fall with a crash. That is the ‘best case’. And at worst they will be smashed to pieces and thrown back...Of course, the Fascists are not asleep, but it is our interest to let them attack first: that will rally the whole working class around the Communists... Besides, according to all information the Fascists are weak in Germany. In my opinion the Germans must be curbed and not spurred on”*.

According to James, Stalin made a fundamental error of political judgment and failed to give the leaders of the German Communist Party the “blessings” of the Communist International (Comintern) for it to move towards taking power.

James then goes on to state that *“a revolutionary situation does not stand still. If the Left does not act the Right will. The weeks passed, the revolutionary party did nothing, and reaction, gaining courage took the offensive...The revolution, says Marx, needs sometimes the whip of the counter-revolution. Here was a heaven sent opportunity for the Communist Party. The preparation for revolution could be made under the legitimate slogan of the defense of the rights of the workers”*.

So again a revolutionary situation presented itself. The German Communist party had not one, but three bites of the cherry! But, yet again little or nothing was done. And then the moment was gone. Three months passed by and then in desperation some members of the CP attempted an armed insurrection. It failed terribly – James called it *“no more than a criminal adventure”*. It was in this period *“that Hitler tried his first coup in Bavaria and failed, but the right wing in Bavaria remained in power and Hitler ...escaped almost scot free”*. And the offensive against the Communist Party and workers was unleashed. In the face of the failure to bring about revolutionary change, fascism was on the rise! And the cost would be enormous.

As James describes it *“The failure of the German revolution clinched the victory of Stalin in Russia. ...The world revolution does not come on a plate. It has to be fought for. But the consequences of failure are almost automatic. It is impossible to minimize the importance of the German defeat. ...the finest of post war revolutionary situations was missed in 1923..a defeat might have been the result. But a defeat in 1923 would have been the surest preparation for the new upsurge a decade or so later. The inaction of 1923 hung heavily over pre-Hitlerite Germany. There are accidents in history. Cleopatra's nose might have been shorter, and a stray bullet might have killed General Bonaparte. The broad outlines of history would have remained unchanged. But we who live to-day in a period where a revolutionary defeat or victory affects in the most literal sense the lives of half the world's inhabitants, cannot afford to be too philosophical about the reasons which made for success or failure. Leninism is the only solution to the problems of the modern world. It might have saved us another world-war on the scale of the one which approaches.”*



Remember that CLR was writing this in 1937 – a full two years before the Second World War, but his clarity of analysis of political developments led him to conclude the inevitability of a major war.

James then makes another major criticism of the Comintern: *“here appeared for the first time in the International a feature which has ever since distinguished it, and has cost the international proletariat thousands of valuable lives—the Stalinist congenital incapacity to understand not only when a revolutionary situation has come but also when it has gone. The revolution was dead in Germany. It would be years before it rose again. The new orientation therefore was to recognise this openly, fall back on the defensive and do years of patient spade-work in preparation for the new upsurge. But by an obvious compensatory requirement for his propaganda... Stalin, now that the opportunity had passed, was vociferous in his call for the revolution... On January 21 the International issued a manifesto: “The work of arming the workers and of technically preparing for the decisive struggle must be carried on with tenacity.” On March 26, 1924.,. the Executive Committee of the International wrote to the German party: “The mistake in the evaluation of the tempo of events made in October, 1923, caused the party great difficulties. Nevertheless, it is only an episode. The fundamental estimate remains the same as before.”*

In Chapter 12 – “*After Hitler Our Turn*” - James then goes on to elaborate how, given this wrong assessment of the situation – that the mass movement was in an ebb, led to further errors. For one, it led to attacks against the Parties and Organisations of Social Democracy, instead of pointing to the real dangers of the Fascists.

*“The Congress laid down that the world revolution was imminent, that the masses were becoming “radicalised,” that they had lost faith in Social Democracy, and the Communists should prepare to lead the masses to victory... The crisis was undoubtedly coming, and the masses would ultimately seek a revolutionary solution to their difficulties. But the first stage would most certainly be a growth of the Social Democracy. As a crisis deepens after a period of comparative prosperity the first move of the masses is towards the Trade Unions and so under the political leadership of the Social Democracy. The recent rise in France of the Unions from less than two millions to five million is an inevitable phenomenon, predictable and predicted... Except possibly after the tortures of a Fascist regime, and then not with*

*any certainty, the masses never move straight to a Communist Party but rally to the mass organisations. The Communist Party knows this and fights for its place in the mass movement, warning the workers of the inevitable treachery of the reformist leaders, laying bare the realities of each development, and guiding the growing disillusionment of the masses towards itself. Instead of foretelling this process Stalin... proclaimed the loss of faith of the masses all over the world in Social Democracy (the MacDonald Government in Britain was still to come; millions stuck to the German Social Democracy to the end), the steady swing of the masses to Communism, and the imminent revolution. It is in this way that Lenin's successor, wielding more than Lenin's power without Lenin's brains, step by step, both in broad orientation and day to day direction, wrecked every opportunity of successful revolution. A correct orientation does not mean victory. Incorrect orientations so glaringly false lead to certain defeat. ..the Stalinists announced that a new period in post-war history--the third period--had begun. The first period was the period which had ended in 1924, the second period had ended with the defeat in China, now had begun the third and final period. The Social Democracy, who had been the chief friends in the second period, were now the chief enemy in the third" ...*

*Page after page of the report spoke of the radicalisation of the masses, "the coming revolutionary battles," "the upward swing of the labour movement," etc., etc., while under their eyes Social Democracy was in full control of its millions of voters and the millions in the Trade Unions. The Trade Union leadership was described as the "Social Fascist trade union bureaucracy" nearly a dozen times in as many pages; all were warned against the ever-growing "Fascization" of the Trade Unions. The Plenum characterised Social Democracy as "evolving through Social Imperialism to Social Fascism," and dismissing the Trade Union leaders as "sufficiently disgraced," demanded the United Front from below. The leaders were not even to be spoken to.*

*All over the world the obedient fools rushed to ruin themselves. Thus it was that the British Communist Party, already functioning in an atmosphere traditionally unreceptive, disgraced itself in the eyes of the British workers by reckless talk of insurrection... Ruinous as it was everywhere, in Germany it reached its highest scope and led the great German proletariat to its doom."*

The result was that the Communist Party attacked the Social Democrats and the trade union movement with venom and left the real Fascists – Hitler – unscathed. Hitler made his first attempt to seize power in 1923 but that failed. However, he never relented and according to James *“Only an economic crisis would give him his opportunity--and it came in 1929. The world economic crisis seized Germany first in Europe, because of all the great countries of Europe Germany was the most vulnerable. Since 1924 Germany had existed and been able to pay reparations chiefly by loans from America. In addition, trustification, monopoly Capitalism, which had gone further in Germany than anywhere else, the consequent domination of the Government by finance capital, rationalisation, with its consequent increase of unemployment and loss of purchasing power by the masses, the whole historical development of Germany between 1914 and 1929, all these meant that in Germany terrific class-battles would be fought with fateful consequences for Europe and the world. The clash had been avoided in 1924. Now nothing could stave it off.”*

*...During 1931 the crisis steadily intensified. The Communists could not see and the Social Democrats would not see that parliamentary government was doomed in Germany, and that this political crisis would end in a dictatorship either of the Right or of the Left. This had long been obvious to the shrewdest capitalists inside and outside Germany. Germany's creditors began to call in loans, bank crisis followed bank crisis. The downward trend of production and trade was intensified, and Germany, instead of sliding, began to plunge. More and more groups of German capitalists began to see their way out in Hitler. The Social Democrats prated of democracy, the Communist Party redoubled their attacks upon the Social Fascists. The violence of the Fascists grew daily with their increasing financial and popular support, and in the face of this the bewildered Social Democratic worker was told a dozen times a day that the Social Democratic Party, Social Fascism, and not Fascism, was the main enemy...for the Communists Hitler was the lesser evil. Destroy the Social Democracy, the dirty Social Fascists”*

We must remember this. It is the economic crisis that gives fascism its popular strength. The stakes were extremely high – out of the crisis was an opportunity – but who would seize it? It is a moment of dangerous opportunity. Would there be a progressive or even revolutionary social settlement or a reactionary or even fascist one?

James describes the options thus:

*“It would be as well here to point out at once the issues at stake. If the German proletariat were victorious, it meant the almost immediate victory of the Austrian proletariat. Fascism in Italy would receive a most serious blow. In Spain the revolution which had broken out in 1931 would receive an enormous impetus and an enthusiastic ally. Most important of all, the bogey of German invasion, which is the main threat that French Capitalism uses to the French workers, would disappear at a stroke, and the French bourgeoisie would be jammed between the German workingclass movement and its own. The difficulties of economic construction in the Soviet Union would have been solved by the combination of Soviet natural resources and Germany's marvellous industrial organisation--that alliance which Lenin had so hoped for... If the Communist International functioned as it could on the basis of the world-crisis, every development in Germany would be followed by the world working-class movement and their responsibility to a Soviet Germany put clearly before them. ..*

*On the other hand the defeat of the German proletariat would be a catastrophe for Europe. The greatest anti-war force under Capitalism was the German proletariat. As long as it was powerful the war against the Soviet Union would have to begin in Berlin. But the victory of Fascism in Germany would mean (we see it to-day) the victory of reaction all over Central and Eastern Europe. It would weaken the Spanish Revolution and the French. It would mean inevitably war against the Soviet Union, it would mean all the things that face us to-day. This is not wisdom after the event. In the very first stages of the struggle they were clearly set down by the expelled Left Opposition, the existing state of parties in Germany estimated, the course of action to be followed outlined”.*

Let me return to the present before getting back to James and “*After Hitler our Turn*”. We are well aware of the features of fascism in terms of its repression of dissent; its appeal to emotions of its base support by the use of narrow nationalism, race and xenophobia. In this regard it attacks “the other” as being the enemy, as being the persons or social or ethnic groups who are “responsible” for the difficult circumstances that working people among others are experiencing. Thus Hitler’s attacks on Jews, Communists, trade unionists. And we know he was also anti-black as evidenced by the events of the 1936 Olympics when Jesse Owens did a “Bolt” and won numerous gold medals.

In Donald Trump and in the right wing parties in Europe that have been gaining in strength and even pose the threat of taking power, we have seen clear evidence of

this appeal to emotions: nationalism (Make America Great Again); racism and xenophobia (anti-immigration – build the wall! Deportation – they are criminals raping and killing our people; and Le Pen – the EU would destroy “*the particularities of nations*” ...*it would force countries to accept so many migrants that local culture would be eradicated...the solution was patriotism*”) and of course religious intolerance and the creation of fear (Islam and of all Muslims) and misogyny (attacks on women, person with disabilities etc).

It is also now clear to us that these appeals to emotion are to the white sections of western societies as it is the whites, including working class whites, who fear that the “others” (immigrants, Latinos, blacks, Muslims, the GLBT’s) are somehow either responsible for the economic crisis in which they are suffering or will cause them sometime in the immediate future to lose whatever position of security they may now enjoy. In the same way, Trump has demonized certain countries, for example China; while UKIP (and some of the other European Right wing parties) demonised the European Union (a position that Trump supported). This was an attack on aspects of the neo-liberal agenda and on trade liberalization in particular in an appeal to workers’ emotions re: their jobs and job security. It is to be noted that it was not an attack on neo-liberal globalization itself, just one aspect – that which could be used to mobilise support from workers who faced an uncertain future. This is right wing populism.

Let me share some of the analyses of this phenomenon of Trump and xenophobia, which have been made by a good friend and comrade – Bill Fletcher Jr. - who is a long standing radical political activist involved in the labor, African American and left movements in the US for the past four decades and whom I’ve known since 1988.

*“Trump’s speech (to a Joint Session of Congress) was the most xenophobic speech by a US President that I can remember. If you took him seriously, barbarians are approaching the gates and it is everyone for themselves. I actually wish that we could afford to make fun of him and his rhetoric, but there was a deadly seriousness to what was offered.*

*It was not just that Trump went after immigrants from the global South as the alleged sources of crime. Nor was it that he reiterated the misinformation that terrorism in the USA is mainly perpetrated by people coming from outside of the USA. It was the cynical manipulation of the relationship of African Americans and immigrants from the global South that really caught my attention...*

*Now, however, let's get to the cynicism. Trump nuanced the xenophobia through playing up the alleged threat that immigrants from the global South constitute for African Americans. It was no accident that Trump used examples of alleged criminal activities by immigrants against African Americans.*

*Just as the Trump administration is working overtime to split up organized labor, last night evidence was displayed of an effort to create a wedge between African Americans and immigrants from the global South, suggesting that such immigrants are our competitors as well as being a threat to our very existence. This was smooth and well-choreographed, but clearly something that flies in the face of facts and, as such, was quite demagogic."*

In another interview Fletcher perceptively analyses right wing populism.

*"Right-wing populism is the "herpes of capitalism." It is a political movement that "revolts against the future." It is "counter-progressive." It attempts to reverse the gains of progressive political and social movements. It emerges in a moment when the system is under stress, frequently for economic reasons, and when there is a legitimacy crisis for the State. Right-wing populism focuses on creating an "Other" who is opposed to the interests of the "people." This is frequently cast in racial, ethnic and/or religious overtones.*

*... it is not an ideology that is rooted in a particular political party or organization. It is a phenomenon that emerges in reaction to stress but it is rooted, at least in the case of the USA, in a particular racial interpretation of the "American Dream." As Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons note in their must-read book 'Right Wing Populism in America', you need to understand the phenomenon in the context of the construction of the USA as a racial settler state where a specific population identified itself as the legitimate population, i.e., "the people."*

*In order to defeat right-wing populism one must confront matters of race and capitalism. In other words, the grievances that masses of people have with capitalism have to be identified as not the result of a particular religious, racial or ethnic group, but must be linked to the system itself. It is also critical that the gender aspect of right-wing populism be identified. Right-wing populism, in all of its manifestations, is highly misogynist and seeks the return to a world that never existed, except in myth. Central to that world is the subordination of women to the authoritarian domination of men. This is one of the reasons that the misogynist attacks by Trump on Clinton needed an active response. The issue was not Clinton; the issue was that she was a woman and Trump was, in effect, asserting that a woman*

*could not and should not lead. But you cannot stop there, which is why both anti-racism and anti-sexism are insufficient in order to stop right-wing populism. One must have a critique of capitalism and be prepared to offer radical solutions that resonate with masses of people. Simply suggesting that the status quo is better than the dystopia envisioned by the right-wing populists is insufficient.”*

According to Daniel Serwer, a former US State Department official and now a Professor at the School of Advanced International Studies at the John Hopkins University *“I think we are seeing an effort to build an international coalition of like-minded anti-Muslim, anti-immigration ethnic nationalists who can be depended upon to undermine the liberal democratic order of the West, in particular international norms regarding peace and security, its trade and investment rules, and its human rights standards”.*

We can thus see in Trump and these “alt-right parties” some of the key elements that make them neo-fascists. But there is more. There is the systematic telling of lies. Hitler and his propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels were very clear in what they were doing. As Hitler boldly stated:

*“...in the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods.*

*It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation. For the grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it, even after it has been nailed down, a fact which is known to all expert liars in this world and to all who conspire together in the art of lying.” Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, vol. I, ch. X*

While Goebbels said:

*“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to*

*believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.”*

I think that we can all draw the parallels to Trump: lying about immigrants being responsible for crime; lying about President Obama’s place of birth; lying about wire-tapping; lying about the size of the crowd on inauguration day etc. Repeatedly saying that Hillary lied – when really he was the biggest liar of them all. The whole “false news” approach is that of lying.

It got so bad that someone actually went with a gun to attack a business-place in Washington DC where it was said that Hillary Clinton ran a child trafficking ring. According to the New York Times of December 5<sup>th</sup> last year: *“Edgar M. Welch, a 28-year-old father of two from Salisbury, N.C., recently read online that Comet Ping Pong, a pizza restaurant in northwest Washington, was harboring young children as sex slaves as part of a child-abuse ring led by Hillary Clinton. The articles making those allegations were widespread across the web, appearing on sites including Facebook and Twitter. Apparently concerned, Mr. Welch drove about six hours on Sunday from his home to Comet Ping Pong to see the situation for himself, according to court documents. Not long after arriving at the pizzeria, the police said, he fired from an assault-like AR-15 rifle. The police arrested him. They found a rifle and a handgun in the restaurant. No one was hurt.”*

In today’s world of social media, the lie can be propagated many millions of times over and many millions of times faster than in the 1930’s of Hitler and Goebbels. How many of us have been “taken in” by Facebook posts that somebody died or that there was an accident that never happened? The dangers are therefore immense! There was also the use of the lie in the UK by those who falsely propagated the reasons for Brexit as being about immigration to play on the racist and xenophobic fears of the population.

Then there is the populist appeal. Let’s go back to James in describing the rise of Mussolini and fascism in Italy: *“It was at this period that Mussolini and his Fascists, hitherto negligible, gained their opportunity. He had formed his society in March, 1919. And much as Hitler was to disguise his reaction by calling himself a National Socialist (a significant testimony of the future social organisation of mankind), Mussolini's programme had the workers and the middle classes in mind--women's suffrage, abolition of the senate, constitutional reform, eight-hour day ratified by*



*parliament, minimum wage, sickness and old-age insurances, workers' control of production, progressive income tax reaching to confiscation in some cases, confiscation of war profits to eighty-five per cent, confiscation of the wealth of the clergy, abolition of the standing army and its replacement by a people's militia, etc., etc. But the big agrarians and industrialists who supported him knew quite well what this programme meant. It is quite true that the Bolsheviks, for reasons which we have explained, were not able to carry out much of their programme, have not been able to do so to this day. But the difference between them and Mussolini is the difference between a political movement that is hindered by economic and historical circumstances on the one hand, and on the other the crudest deception. And it is in this difference that lies the inevitable success of the one and the inevitable collapse of the other”*

The crudest deception! Lies and the appeal to emotions. Hitler did the same. According to James: *“Then came the crisis (of 1929). Hitler had at last persuaded important sections of German Capitalism that he could be depended upon to smash the German working-class movement. Backed not only by German but by international capital, he and his party drew to it the threatened middle classes by promising them to destroy the big chain-stores, etc., the lumpen proletariat by bribery, and every unattached voter by playing on nationalist sentiment and promising everything to everybody”*.

So promise salvation to workers who are suffering from retrenchment; pay cuts; rising prices and inflation, currency devaluations; promise salvation to the middle classes and small business-people who are suffering from rising bank interest rates and all the other problems that the workers are facing. Of course, promises are a comfort to a fool, but in their desperation increasing numbers of people will buy the lie, not see through the deception and be won over by the populist appeals to their fears and prejudices.

Is this not what Trump did? He talked about jobs, about the loss of jobs as a result of free trade agreements negotiated by the interest of big capital who supported the Clintons and Obama (in this he was right). He attacked Wall Street and said he was for the small man who lost everything due to Washington. He said that Hillary was a stooge of Goldman Sachs. We all know the story line so I need not elaborate. But then let's look at the reality of the interests that Trump is defending. Firstly there are his own interests – Trump's business empire must benefit from his election – even to the point of some 18 visits to his resorts – at taxpayers great expense – since taking

office less than 100 days ago and having his son-in-law and daughter working in the White House while maintaining private business interests.

However if you examine his Cabinet you will get a clear idea of whose interests Trump is seeking:

- Secretary of State – Rex Tillerson: former CEO of Exxon/Mobil
- Secretary of the Treasury – Steve Mnuchin: son of a former Goldman Sachs exec and himself a former Goldman Sachs exec; Former exec of Soros Fund Management; founder of Dune Capital Management LP (Dune Entertainment) and a huge (multi-billion \$ money manager and involved in the mortgage crisis of 2009)
- Secretary of Commerce – Wilbur Ross: billionaire known as “the king of bankruptcy” because of his closure/restructuring of companies and responsible for “offshoring” 2,700 jobs since 2004
- Director of the National Economic Council and Chief Economic Adviser to President Trump - Gary Cohn: Former President and Chief Operating Officer of the Wall St. Investment Company Goldman Sachs. His severance package at Goldman Sachs amounted to US\$285 million when he joined Trump’s administration (and we thought Larry Howai’s golden handshake when he left First Citizens’ Bank to become Minister of Finance was unique!)
- Secretary of Education- Betsy DeVos – billionaire
- Attorney General – Jeff Sessions – who years ago was exposed by Coretta Scott-King for being racist
- Head of the EPA – Scott Prost – who doesn’t believe in global warming
- Secretary of Health – Tom Price – who is anti-Obamacare
- US Trade Representative – Robert Lighthizer – who is very protectionist especially re US steel

All of these people are big capitalists or represent the interests of big capital and especially of the very Wall St. that represents finance capital and therefore the financialisation of capitalism (or casino capitalism – capitalism in the era of neo-liberalism) which is responsible for the huge and growing inequality and the persistent levels of mass poverty that characterizes our societies.

So Trump, like Mussolini and Hitler, will promise one thing to the masses (populism) to get votes and then serve not their interests but that of big capital. And all of this right wing nationalism and populism emerges out of the crisis. James was clear: *“Only an economic crisis would give him the opportunity”*. It came in 1929

in Germany after the collapse of Wall Street. In 2008/9 there was another economic crisis. It was also on Wall Street. But it has its manifestations in the crisis of neo-liberal capitalism, of global capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Its roots are:

- The revolution in technology which has resulted in jobs being destroyed; the rapid increase in productive capacity of consumer goods and services; the driving down of wages and incomes; which together result in over-production and under-consumption;
- The financialisation of capital
- Rates of economic growth being less than the rates of growth of capital
- Growing and huge inequalities of wealth and incomes

The neo-liberal policies which have been implemented to advance the interest of capital have included:

- Privatisation
- Trade liberalization
- De-regulation
- Removing the elements of the welfare state developed as part of the post world war 2 social settlement of social democracy (strong unions; decent jobs; progressive tax regimes; national ownership of key industries; water, electricity, education, housing, transport, health care being public goods and services to which all citizens could have access).

I do not have the time nor is this lecture the appropriate moment to detail this neo-liberal paradigm. Suffice it to state that the result of all this has been an ongoing economic and social crisis. We know about the state of our social crisis: 25% of our population lives below the poverty line; 50% of our children fail Maths and English at CSEC (CXC); more than 30% fail the SEA exam; crime and violence is out of control and gangs are becoming “states within a state”. But what we are less familiar with is the picture of the crisis in Europe, the UK and the US. This is key to understanding the rise of right wing nationalism and populism in those countries.

According to the latest published study (December 2016) on poverty in the United Kingdom done by the Roundtree Foundation:

*One in every eight workers in the UK - 3.8 million people - is now living in poverty. A total of 7.4 million people, including 2.6 million children, are in poverty despite*

*being in a working family. This means that a record high of 55 per cent of people in poverty are in working households.*

*Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2016, has found that 13.5 million people, 21% of the UK's population, are living in poverty.*

*The economic recovery has helped to stop poverty rates from rising higher, with overall poverty levels remaining flat compared to 2010. But the new report finds that there is growing insecurity underneath positive economic headlines. Since 2010/11, when the economic recovery began, in-work poverty has increased by 1.1 million people. The rise is being driven by the UK's housing crisis, particularly high costs and insecurity in the private rented sector (PRS). The report finds that:*

- The number of people in living in poverty in the PRS has doubled in a decade, from 2.2 million people in 2004/5 to 4.5 million people today.*
- Almost three quarters (73%) of people in the bottom fifth of the income distribution and living in the PRS pay more than a third of their income in rent. This is compared to 28% of owner occupiers and 50% of social renters with similar income levels.*
- Half of children living in rented homes (46% in the PRS and 52% in the social rented sector) live in poverty.*
- There are 3.8 million workers living in poverty in the UK today, one million more than a decade ago. This is equivalent to 12% of all workers in 2014-15.*

**In the European Union the 2016 Study by Caritas arrived at the following:**

*“Long-term unemployed are among the groups at highest risk of poverty and social exclusion in their respective countries. As the International Labour Organisation (ILO)’s flagship publication “World Employment & Social Outlook Trends 2015” recently reported, the persistence of weak economic and labour market conditions has caused an unprecedented increase in the duration of unemployment. This is particularly evident in Europe. Most recent figures show that in the second quarter of 2015, long-term unemployment as a percentage of total unemployment in the EU-28 was at 49.4%, up from 38.7% in the same quarter of 2008. This means that almost every second unemployed person has been in this situation for more than 12 months.*

*...the organisation is further alarmed about the increase in the average duration of long-term unemployment spells, which has led to the fact that a large share of the*

*long-term unemployed is no longer covered by any kind of income support or social protection. This has contributed in recent years to the observed rise in poverty and vulnerability across Europe. In a number of countries undergoing strict fiscal consolidation, this has been exacerbated by significant cuts to social spending, which has constrained the social protection system coverage. As a result, 24.4% of the EU Member States' population was at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2014. Figures are even more dramatic among the unemployed people: the risk of poverty was 47.4% among this group.*

*...In- work poverty is one of the most worrying problems related to poverty and social exclusion in their respective countries. This trend is also documented in official statistics such as Eurostat, which show increases in the in-work poverty rate since 2008 in 14 EU Member States. This reached a new EU average of 9.5% in 2014, an increase of 0.9 percentage points compared to 2008. ”*

What about in the United States? According to Nobel Winner in Economics Joseph Stiglitz in his acclaimed book “The Price of Inequality”:

*“ Not just in the United States but around the world as well, there is mounting concern about the increase in inequality and about the lack of opportunity, and how these twin trends are changing our economies, our democratic politics, and our societies...As the ‘free-market’ oriented Economist observed ‘In America the share of national income going to the top .015 (some 16,000 families) has risen from just over 15 in 1980 to almost 5% now – an even bigger slice than the top .01% got in the Gilded Age’. Warren Buffet, himself a member of the superrich who has recognised the harm of America’s egregious inequality took to the pages of the New York Times in the fall of 2012 to underline the divergence by a different measure: the 400 wealthiest Americans took home an ‘hourly wage’ of \$97,000 in 2009 a rate that has more than doubled since 1992...Before the crisis (of 2008/9), the average wealth of the bottom fifth was a negative \$2,300. After the crisis, it had fallen sixfold, to a negative \$12,800”.*

According to the latest Oxfam report published in January 2017:

*“Eight men own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity, according to a new report published in Oxfam’s report, ‘**An economy for the 99 percent**’, The gap between rich and poor is far greater than had been feared. It details how big business and the super-rich are fuelling the inequality crisis by dodging taxes, driving down wages and using their power to influence politics. New and better data on the distribution of global wealth – particularly in*

*India and China – indicates that the poorest half of the world has less wealth than had been previously thought. Had this new data been available last year, it would have shown that nine billionaires owned the same wealth as the poorest half of the planet, and not 62, as Oxfam calculated at the time.*

*Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International, said: “It is obscene for so much wealth to be held in the hands of so few when 1 in 10 people survive on less than \$2 a day. Inequality is trapping hundreds of millions in poverty; it is fracturing our societies and undermining democracy.*

*“Across the world, people are being left behind. Their wages are stagnating yet corporate bosses take home million dollar bonuses; their health and education services are cut while corporations and the super-rich dodge their taxes; their voices are ignored as governments sing to the tune of big business and a wealthy elite.”*

*Oxfam’s report shows how our broken economies are funnelling wealth to a rich elite at the expense of the poorest in society, the majority of whom are women. The richest are accumulating wealth at such an astonishing rate that the world could see its first trillionaire in just 25 years. To put this figure in perspective – you would need to spend \$1 million every day for 2738 years to spend \$1 trillion.*

*Public anger with inequality is already creating political shockwaves across the globe. Inequality has been cited as a significant factor in the election of Donald Trump in the US, the election of President Duterte in the Philippines, and Brexit in the*  
*UK.*

*Seven out of 10 people live in a country that has seen a rise in inequality in the last 30 years. Between 1988 and 2011 the incomes of the poorest 10 percent increased by just \$65 per person, while the incomes of the richest 1 percent grew by \$11,800 per person – 182 times as much.”*

**We must never lose sight of the economic crisis.**

Permit me to make an interesting observation with respect to Stalin’s position and that of Putin today. It has to do with the interests of a state versus the interests of working people who may live within another state. Putin and the Russian state, from all the information coming out these past weeks, seems to have done all in its power to ensure the electoral victory of the right wing nationalist and populist Donald Trump. I have no doubt that mutual economic interests are also driving this apparently unusual relationship as Trump himself has business interests in Russia

while Exxon Mobil – the former CEO of which just happens to be Trump’s Secretary of State – has huge oil interests in Russia. At the same time however, it was reported that in December 2016 Heinz-Christian Strache, leader of the right wing Freedom Party of Austria, signed a co-operation agreement with Russia’s ruling party.

And what of Stalin and the perceived interests of the Soviet state in the 20’s and 30’s? According to CLR in “After Hitler our Turn”: *“behind all this verbiage one solid reality existed--the determination of the bureaucracy to use the International for the defence of the U.S.S.R. That was openly stated to be the first aim. The Conference took this to mean, by means of the revolution. Stalin and the bureaucracy, however, meant, in place of the revolution.”* James elaborates this point later in the Chapter thus:

*“Before Hitler came into power Walter Duranty, Russian correspondent, had written in the New York Times of November 20, 1932, that "the Bolshevik Kremlin to-day regards the growth of the revolutionary movement in Europe with real anxiety." He was seeing only a fraction of the whole truth--that the Kremlin was prepared to sacrifice the workers' movement thinking thereby to save itself....The Soviet bureaucracy feared the German Social Democratic Party for its support of Locarno. In 1922 Germany, rebuffed by Britain and France, had signed the Treaty of Rapallo with the Soviet Union. The division between France and Germany was naturally a very good thing for Russian foreign policy. But the Treaty of Locarno in 1925 seemed to Stalin and to the world at that time the beginning of a friendship, and the German Social Democracy, which pressed hard for this burying of the hatchet between France and Germany, became the special enemy of the Soviet bureaucracy. ..Social Fascism was directed with special ferocity against German Social Democracy...Hitler proclaimed his hostility to Marxism in general, but also to France, and for Stalin, therefore, concerned with Socialism in a single country and not with revolution, Social Democracy in Germany, with its Western orientation, was the main enemy. This ruined the German revolution. Social Fascism in July, 1929, when a year before Hitler had lost a million votes, was merely another Stalinist folly preventing the Communist Party of Germany from exercising the influence it should. But after the elections of September, 1930, it was criminal. For the responsibility of leading the masses against Fascism rested and will always rest with the revolutionary party. ..the Communist Party, under Moscow's firm guidance, professed itself quite untroubled at the results of the September elections and prophesied Hitler's early doom. On September 15, 1930, the Rote Fahne told the German proletariat: "Last night was Herr Hitler's greatest day, but the so-called*



*election victory of the Nazis is the beginning of the end," and on the following day; "The 14th of September was the high point of the National Socialist movement in Germany. What comes after this can only be decline and fall."*

James then quotes a speech given by a leading member of the German CP in the Parliament:

*"On October 14, 1931, Remmele, one of the three official leaders of the Communist Party, with Stalinist effrontery announced the policy in the Reichstag. "Herr Bruening has put it very plainly; once they (the Fascists) are in power, then the united front of the proletariat will be established and it will make a clean sweep of everything. (Violent applause from the Communists)....We are the victors of the coming day; and the question is no longer one of who shall vanquish whom. This question is already answered. (Applause from the Communists). The question now reads only, 'At what moment shall we overthrow the bourgeoisie?'...We are not afraid of the Fascist gentlemen. They will shoot their bolt quicker than any other Government. (Right you are! from the Communists) ..." The Fascists, so ran the argument, would introduce inflation, there would be financial chaos, and then the proletarian victory would follow. The speech was printed with a form asking for membership of the party attached and distributed in great numbers all over Germany"*

James then concludes: *"from that moment it was certain that the Communist Party leadership would never fight, and the "After Hitler, our turn" was the line on which they led the party"*.

So, where are we going? Certainly, we must learn the lessons from CLR's analysis of the disastrous position by the revolutionary forces that "After Hitler, it's Our Turn". We are undoubtedly in a crisis today: neo-liberal capitalism is in crisis and this will not end soon. The conditions for right wing nationalism and populism to grow even stronger will therefore continue to exist for some time. Complacency cannot be our position. And we must be able to engage in very frank assessments of the situation: we must be objective and not allow our subjective interest to over-ride the actual reality; we must be able to make the right strategic and tactical decisions; and above all we must build the movements that can not only turn back this dangerous tide of right wing nationalism and populism – neo-fascist movements but which can usher in new, progressive social settlements.



Remember James told us that *“In May, 1924, the Nazis polled 1,918,310 votes, in May, 1928, 809,541 votes. Then came the crisis...in September, 1930, after one year of the crisis, he (Hitler) gained 6,406,397 votes, an increase of over five million”*.

So, we cannot take comfort in the fact that in Austria the Freedom Party was defeated and that in the Netherlands the Party for Freedom did not win a majority of seats or that in France it is unlikely that Le Pen will win the second round. The fact is that they have significant support and that support has grown in the last 2-3 years. The crisis can see it getting larger still.

Secondly, we must learn that it is wrong to believe that the working people will automatically rise up in successful revolt against fascism and bring into being a more progressive social settlement. It didn't happen in Germany. It didn't happen in the UK when then Prime Minister Thatcher attacked the trade union movement ferociously and introduced neo-liberal policies in that country. Reversals can take a very long time to recover from and the damage inflicted on social movements and the well-being of the people during periods of repression and reaction can be very serious indeed.

At the same time, however, that we have seen the rise of right wing nationalism and populism we have also seen very important movements emerging and growing in strength. I refer, for example to:

- The Black Lives Matter movement in the US
- The Anti-Austerity Movements globally (starting with the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the “we are the 99%”) and in Spain (Podemos) and Greece (Syriza), these anti-austerity movements morphed into political parties that challenged for political office, the latter successfully.
- The movement of Immigrants and Anti-Racist; Anti-xenophobia Movements; the LGBT Movement
- Renewed movements of women (as for example in the global protests when Trump was inaugurated)
- Environmental movements
- New workers' movements – e.g. the movements for the \$15 minimum wage and to organize the unorganized workers (Walmart; McDonalds etc)

Many of these movements have become international in their networking and most are comprised of young people and among the leadership are very serious people, both young and older, who have clearly developed ideological positions on the left.

How these movements grow and develop will be critical to the struggle against neo-fascism.

Significantly too we have seen:

- The development of a movement around the candidacy of Bernie Sanders in the US, who openly identified himself as “socialist”
- The emergence of Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition in the UK, also on a “socialist” platform and supported by a grass roots movement within the Labour Party – Momentum.
- The significant numbers of people who give electoral support to social democratic or left wing parties both in Europe and Latin America enabling some of these to win government office and /or to form the opposition.

Of concern to those of us in the progressive trade union movement, however, must be the fact that the labour movement has not featured in these struggles. Indeed, as Fletcher and others have identified, in the US, there are Unions for Trump, as they fell captive to his rhetoric of saving jobs and fighting against free trade and immigration. One perceptive analysis of the weakness of the labour movement in the earlier struggles and movements that brought about change in Latin America made this point about the labour movement:

*“Missing in much of the Latin American political scene, was the traditional workers’ movement. This was due in great measure to the implementation of neoliberal economic measures such as precarious labour conditions and subcontracting and its strategy of social fragmentation that divided the working class internally. Nevertheless we cannot deny that ideological differences and the personalism of their leadership also contributed.*

*Another form of weakening the working class has been the promotion of consumerism. In making the superfluous a necessity (something intrinsic to capitalist development, as Marx points out in Capital) and in promoting credit loan, a new “mechanism of domestication” was created.*

*As Tomas Moulián, a Chilean sociologist, says, “indebtedness” worsens the panic of losing employment and is therefore an important “factor of social demobilization.”*

The same I think can be said about much of the labour movement here in Trinidad and Tobago. Although we do not now face neo-fascism we too cannot be complacent. The economic crisis can precipitate a right wing response to our mass

movements. In 1970 and '71 and before that in 1965, the PNM government of Dr. Eric Williams declared States of Emergency. In '65 and '71 it was to deal explicitly with the labour movement. In '70 and '71 labour leaders were held as political detainees. The headquarters of the OWTU was raided by the police and documents seized; it was shot at; and officers of the Union were routinely harassed and in some cases had their passports seized thus denying them the right to travel for many years. In 2011 we also had a State of Emergency during a period of mobilization by the movement.

We are in a period of economic crisis, the bottom of which has not yet been hit. We have a multi-ethnic society; we have very large inequality, some of which is correlated by class and race. We have immigrants – some traditional, others are not and these latter seem to be able to establish businesses very easily and amass capital. The seeds of populism and nationalism exist. So we cannot be complacent.

One of the theoretical issues that we need to address as we mobilise progressive social movements and build a progressive political party that represents the interests of the broad mass of working people and poor is this: what are we fighting for? What is the social settlement that must be won? In the context of this global rise of right wing nationalism and populism, of neo-fascism; in the context of neo-liberal globalization and the power of international capital (including the power of its ideas and culture) are we fighting to establish socialism or are we fighting to preserve and extend social democracy?

That has to be the subject of another lecture or better still of a debate. Clearly, it depends on our analysis of the historical moment, of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the progressive forces and those of reaction. It depends on the international dynamic as well. Does a revolutionary situation exist as it did, according to CLR, in Germany in 1923? Or is it a first stage to defend social democracy as James described existed in Germany (and elsewhere in Europe) in 1931-33/4) in order to stave off the neo-fascists leading later to the possibility of more revolutionary change?

While errors of political judgement/analysis may not necessarily lead to humungous loss of lives as it did in the Second World War (though we cannot rule out wars on an even larger scale than those ongoing in the Middle East); errors can have fatal implications for progressive movements and the possibilities of change. It can postpone progressive change for a generation or more. For those who doubt me do not forget that massive errors in Grenada in 1983 set back the entire movement in

the English speaking Caribbean. And that was 34 years ago! Two generations have been lost in that time.

We must not be daunted by what is before us in terms of this rise of the right. We must always have faith in the human spirit and the capacity of people to struggle to create a better future for themselves and their families. We in Trinidad and Tobago have historically struggled “out of slavery, through indenture and up to freedom”. In the Caribbean that process of struggle by ordinary working people has resulted in our humanizing their space fashioning a Caribbean civilization.

For us in Trinidad and Tobago what is needed is to recognize that our “struggle up to freedom: is not over. We attained formal political independence but the relations of economic, social and political power have remained significantly the same from colonial days to now; and the institutions of state buttress those relations. That is why we need to transform those institutions as they have failed to deliver upon the objects set out in the Preamble to the Constitution. This is why we in the MSJ have said that “the First Republic (of 1976) is finished and that it’s time for the Second Republic”.

However, for this to become a reality we need a “revolution of the mind” so that we can overcome the old consciousness of the politics of race, religion, geography, party affiliation and the other factors that keep the working people captive to voting for one or the other of the traditional parties, who then use the political power that the people have given them to implement policies and programmes that work against the interest of the very people who voted for them.

It is to this work of developing political consciousness – to facilitate the revolution of the mind; and to build both the mass movements and the progressive political party that we must rededicate ourselves at this critical time.

I will end with the wise words of CLR. In a lecture entitled “The Making of the Caribbean People” delivered in Montreal in late ‘66/early ’67 published in the book “You Don’t Play with Revolution” James states “They (West Indians) wanted not only their freedom but to remove their masters and make themselves masters of the island. That is what happened essentially in San Domingo (the Haitian Revolution) ...and that is what happened in Cuba in 1958. They got rid of the masters and made themselves masters of the island...I believe the above to be characteristic of the West Indies and our history. When West Indians reach a certain stage, they wish to make a complete change and that is because all of us come from abroad. Liberty means something to us that is very unusual...in the history of the West Indies, there is one

dominant fact, and that is the desire – sometimes expressed, sometimes unexpressed, but always there – the desire for liberty; the ridding oneself of the particular burden which is the special inheritance of the black skin. *If you don't know that about West Indian people, you know nothing.* They have been the most rebellious people in history”

In the Preface to the First Edition of the Black Jacobins, James states “*In a revolution, when the ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries bursts into volcanic eruption, the meteoric flares and flights above are a meaningless chaos and lend themselves to infinite caprice and romanticism unless the observer sees them always as projections of the sub-soil from which they came*”. In other words, revolutionary moments will come but to recognize them we need to understand and “*analyse ...the economic forces of the age; their moulding of society and politics, of men in the mass and individual men; the powerful reaction of these on their environment at one of those rare moments when society is at boiling point and therefore fluid*”

And, finally, in the Lecture entitled “Walter Rodney and the Question of Power” CLR admonishes that – “*the taking of power has to become the common discussion among the Caribbean people...a revolution is made by the revolutionary spirit of the great mass of the population. And you have to wait for that. You do not know. There is no calculation. (Revolution) comes like a thief in the night. So you had better be ready*”.

We had better be ready – or when the moment comes it will be the neo-fascists in power. Thank you!