

The Comintern, “Negro Self-Determination” and Black Revolutions in the Caribbean

O Comintern, “Autodeterminação dos Negros” e as revoluções negras no Caribe

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Abstract: The article discusses the slogan of “Negro self-determination” adopted by the Communist International and the traces of its influence on post-Comintern political transformations in the Caribbean. Particular attention is paid to the establishment of Afro-centric regimes in Haiti and Grenada. It is argued that the events in these two countries after the Second World War bear visible traces of the influence of the pre-war Comintern propaganda. Haiti experienced a regime, which combined Afro-centric and Communist rhetorics with severe anti-communist repression. Grenada experienced a more complex transformation, which started with the “trade union revolution” of 1951 and continued with a short-lived Socialist revolution of 1979 led by the New Jewel Movement. The political transformations in Grenada, crushed as a result of internal fighting and foreign military intervention in 1983, had a significant Caribbean and Afro-centric component, probably the closest to the ideals of the Comintern.

Keywords: Comintern. Self-determination. Black movement. Haiti. Grenada.

Resumo: Neste artigo trata-se do slogan de “autodeterminação dos Negros” adotado pela Internacional Comunista e dos traços de sua influência nas transformações políticas pós-Comintern no Caribe. É dada atenção especial ao estabelecimento de regimes afrocentristas no Haiti e em Granada. Argumenta-se que os eventos nesses dois países após a Segunda Guerra Mundial trazem traços visíveis da influência da propaganda do Comintern antes da guerra. O Haiti viveu um regime que combinava retóricas afrocentristas e comunistas com uma severa repressão anticomunista. Granada experimentou uma transformação mais complexa, que começou com a “revolução sindicalista” de 1951 e continuou com uma revolução socialista de curta duração de 1979 liderada pelo Movimento New Jewel. As transformações políticas na Granada, esmagadas como resultado de combates internos e intervenções militares estrangeiras em 1983, tiveram um importante componente caribenho e afrocentrista, provavelmente o mais próximo dos ideais do Comintern.

Palavras-chave: Comintern. Autodeterminação. Movimento negro. Haiti. Grenada.

Sources and recent research

The role of the Comintern in the Caribbean has recently been tackled in a number of scholarly publications, such as Margaret Stevens's "Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939". Among other subjects, Stevens paid special attention to the role of women in the regional mobilization of the black radicals (STEVENS, 2017). A wider overview of the Comintern approach to the problems of self-determination was presented in "Left Transnationalism? The Communist International, the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions, and the Strengths and Limitations of the "Moscow Rules" Paradigm", edited by Oleksa Drachewych and Ian McKay (DRACHEWYCH and MCKAY, 2020). There were also a few political biographies of selected Caribbean Communist figures, such as Haiti's Jacques Roumain (DORESTAL, 2015).

The ongoing research on these issues, relying upon various archival collections and that of the Russian State Archive of Social-Political History (RGASPI, Moscow) in particular, is growing in depth, but it is not free of some gaps and misconceptions. For instance, Drachewych and McKay wrote in the introduction to the generally reliable work on the Communist "paradigm": "Mariátegui, very much like Gramsci, was not very interested in a Stalin-like pursuit of the ahistorical essence of "the nation." (DRACHEWYCH and MCKAY, 2020, p. 20). The criticized approach to the concept of nation certainly had a number of theoretical weaknesses, but no one who ever read Stalin's definition could see it as "ahistorical".

An emblematic Comintern figure: Genrikh Yakobson, one of the fathers of "Negro self-determination"

Genrikh Moiseevich Yakobson (Genrikh Y-n, or Genrikh Gan, 1897 or 1900–1936) played a special role in the Communist approach to the "Indean and Negro question". His major article where the black and indigenous populations were defined as "oppressed nationalities" was published in 1933 "in the order of discussion" (YAKOBSON, 1933). Several decades later, a Soviet scholar wrote about the role of Yakobson in the development of Latin American Studies in the USSR. The assessment was generally positive, but also

contained an element of criticism: "The weak spot in the works of G. Yakobson was the identification of the Indean problem with the Negro one" (KHAIRETDINOVA, 1975, p. 204–205). In fact, this very "weak spot" was the cornerstone of Yakobson's approach. The Communist theoretician argued that both groups were fundamentally similar in their relation to the dominating "White-Creole nations", and thus both of them had the right to self-determination up to secession.

It is worth mentioning that Yakobson did not only criticize the so-called "Rasoviki", those scholars and Communist activists who favoured a racial interpretation of the "Indean and Negro question", from the theoretical point of view. He also participated in the Third Conference of the Communist Parties of South and Caribbean America (October 1934) and in the work of a commission which prepared the materials about the region for the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (July-August 1935).²

In the early days of his political biography, Yakobson was a member of the Socialist Youth Group, which was founded in the Russian city of Orel in March 1917. The group included young Russian radicals (not yet Communists) as well as some refugees from areas occupied by German troops (in modern Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus). The years of revolution and civil war at home undoubtedly prepared Yakobson and other members of the "Orel Group" for the later work in the Comintern. In Orel, they grew up in a permanent interaction with so called "Internationalists", the foreigners who fought for the victory of the Socialist revolution in Russia and later played a significant role in the activities of the Comintern.

In 1919, Yakobson and his comrades, already members of the Comsomol (Communist Youth), decided to take arms themselves and went to Kherson, in Ukraine. There they found the fresh traces of foreign occupation by French and Greek forces, including the brutal extermination of civilian population. Thus, it was easy for the young revolutionaries to understand the idea of the proletariat's struggle with imperialism on a global scale. After Kherson, Yakobson went to Perm, where he organized and chaired the local "Soviet and Party School". He was then sent to Moscow in 1922 to study at the Institute of Red Professors. Upon graduation from the Philosophy Faculty of this educational institution, aimed at the future Communist theoreticians, in 1925, Yakobson

worked at the International Agrarian Institute (Agrintern) and Trade Union International (Profintern), both of them affiliated with the Comintern. Several other members of the “Orel Group”, such as the brothers Valery Kirpotin (Simeon Israelevich Rabinovich, 1898-1997) and Serguey Dalin (Osof Israelevich Rabinovich, 1902-1985) also took part in the work of the Comintern.

Before concentrating on Latin America, Yakobson's theoretical capacities became visible during the discussion about the pre-capitalist social and economic formation in China. From today's perspective, it may seem strange why the Soviet scholars and Comintern administrators were engaged in a fierce public debate about the history of China prior to the growth of capitalism. Indeed, this discussion was not just a scholarly exercise, as it was directly related to the internal struggle in the Soviet communist leadership, first of all between the supporters of Trotsky and Stalin. On the other hand, the tactics of the Comintern in China, which at that time was considered an important or even the central battlefield for the international Communist movement, depended directly on the results of this debate. It was after this discussion that the Chinese Soviet Republic (1931-1937) was founded. This political entity was seen by the Comintern as the second base of the world worker's movement after the USSR.

Shifting to Latin America, Yakobson preferred to define this region as "South and Caribbean America", stressing the importance of “oppressed Indian and Negro nationalities”, who were sometimes rather far from any “Latin” heritage in their history and culture. A talented theorist with a dose of dogmatism, Yakobson was also able to exert influence on the practical work of the Comintern in the early 1930s. For the Communist parties in the region, his interpretation of self-determination might have been a far cry from their practical work. However, instructions were coming from Moscow, and the communists of "South and Caribbean America" had to follow them. Most of the Comintern's member parties did not deviate from the general line in this matter. Only few leaders, such as Mariátegui or Prestes, could “fight back” or practically sweep these directives under the carpet. In Ecuador, Luis Gerardo Gallegos, quoting the circular of the Organizing Committee of the Socialist Party of Ecuador of the same year, wrote:

[...] Lenin and the entire Bolshevik General Staff fought the tendency of black and Indian workers to constitute a nationality independent of whites. This tendency, known as the "return to Africa", that is, the organization of autonomous republics of blacks or Indians – in his case, was opposed by Lenin, because it was in violation of the postulate of racial equality that proclaims the need to start the fight all, without making differences between whites, Indians, blacks or mulattoes. But the directives [of the Comintern – N. D.] going against Marxism and Leninism, proclaim the foundation of the Indian Republic [...]. Referring to this point, the Circular says "to divide Blacks in one part, whites in another and Indians in another, is to uphold the reactionary principle of racial inferiority (GALLEGOS, 1931, p. 132).

Early 1930s: Comintern's project of "Indean and Negro Republics"

According to A. Buonikori, the slogan of self-determination for black and indigenous populations, ultimately aimed at their segregation, was first brought in "an annex of the directive of the Third International, approved at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, held in 1928" and remained a *modus operandi* approximately until the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. Then this slogan was retained by the Trotskyists (BUONICORE, 2005). This view is not confirmed by the documents of the Comintern. In fact, in only a general resolution with a reference to "the Negro question" was adopted in 1928, apparently without direct instructions for the Latin American communists.

39. In connexion with the colonial question, the sixth congress draws the special attention of the communist parties to the Negro question. The position of the Negroes varies in different countries, and accordingly requires concrete investigation and analysis. The territories in which compact Negro masses are to be found can be divided into the following groups: (1) the United States and some South American countries, in which the compact Negro masses constitute a minority in relation to the white population; (2) the Union of South Africa, where the Negroes are the majority in relation to the white colonists; (3) the Negro States which are actually colonies or semi-colonies of imperialism (Liberia, Haiti, Santo Domingo); the whole of Central Africa, divided into the colonies and mandated territories of various imperialist powers (Great Britain, France, Portugal, etc.). The tasks of the communist parties have to be defined according to the concrete situation. (DEGRAS, 1959, v. 2, p. 546).

The visible growth of Comintern's attention to national self-determination up to the separation and creation of "Indean and Negro Republics" cannot be understood in isolation from the global context. Until the early 1930s these questions were seen by the left in both Latin America and Moscow primarily as racial issues, connected with agrarian problems. However, with the strengthening of various forms of fascism in Europe, and especially after the victory of Hitler in Germany in 1933, all references to "race" and "racial problems" became too closely associated with the archenemies of the world's left movements and the Comintern itself.

The exact date of the transition from the "racial" to "national" approach remains unclear, somewhere between October 1930 and May 1931. For instance, on 10 October 1930, at the Second Conference of the Communist Parties of South and Caribbean America, Dmitry.S. Manuilsky (1883-1959, then the Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, later Minister of Foreign Affairs of Soviet Ukraine) named the "racial problem (Indean and Negro questions)" among the main problems of the movement. He proposed that the participants should prepare a document for discussion and definition of the "party line". This proposal was unanimously accepted (KALMYKOV, 1998, p. 168). However, within a few months, the racial approach disappeared from the Comintern documents.

The new slogan of national self-determination and the formation of "Indean and Negro Republics" was by no means easy to understand. The Communist parties were not intended to be closed intellectuals' clubs, like some of the earlier political organizations in the region. What could be clear to Genrikh Yakobson as a theorist was very far from the mental maps and everyday preoccupations of the workers. For instance, Otavio Brandan later recalled how in 1925 he spoke with the black Brazilian workers in Niteroi:

I say, "Here I came to explain to you what is imperialism. Imperialism is the domination of financial and monopolistic capital. What does that mean? Capital is a monopoly. Monopoly is like "Light" (Light).³ "Light" monopolizes this and that ..." I spoke for fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes later I stopped and said, "Did you get it?" One of these negroes stands up and says, "Comrade Otavio, I didn't understand anything. There was the Empire, then came the Republic. The Republicans expelled Don Pedro II. Don Pedro II left with his family. And now the comrade comes, attacks imperialism, says that the enemy is imperialism. Why would we fight Don Pedro

II? There is no reason any more." I say, "I didn't talk about Dom Pedro II, I didn't talk about the Empire." (loughing) He says, "But didn't you talk about imperialism, it's not the same as the Empire?" I say, "No! There is a gulf between the Empire and imperialism." (REGO 1993).

Compared to this relatively simple case of misunderstanding, the slogan of self-determination up to secession was probably much more complicated. Also in Brazil, the first national conference of the Communist Party in 1934 adopted a manifesto, which addressed the “enslaved nationalities” (*nacionalidades escravizadas*):

Enslaved Blacks and Indians! - fighting for the right to create your own governments separately from federal and state governments, so you can develop as a nationality with your own territory, government, customs, religion, language and culture (*direito de constituirdes vossos próprios governos, separados dos governo federal e estaduais, caminho pelo qual vos podereis desenvolver como nacionalidades com território, governo, costumes, religião, língua e cultura próprios*). (Manifesto da primeira conferencia nacional do Partido Comunista do Brasil, 1934)

Even today, it looks like not every politician confronted with this call could be ready to implement it. In the 1930s, the “enslaved nationalities” were hardly enslaved in the pre-abolition sense, and the word “nationality” was also problematic.⁴

On 20 October 1934, at the Third Conference of the Communist Parties of South and Caribbean America in Moscow, “Montero” (Eudocio Ravines Pérez, 1897-1979, Peruvian Communist and then anti-communist) criticized the “abstract slogans” of Brazilian comrades who tended to mix national and racial problems.:

Other comrades speak this way: Where the bourgeoisie says "race," we say "nationality." It's wrong. It's not about changing the name, it's about the substance of the problem. If we say that where the bourgeoisie says "race," we say "nationality" - it will be like that monk who is forbidden to eat meat, and he doesn't want to eat fish; then he takes a rooster, blesses the knife, kills the rooster and says that God turned it into a fish. We are talking in the same way. Where there is a racial problem, we take a knife blessed by the Comintern and say it's not a racial problem, it's a national problem.⁵

Yakobson, as a theorist, immediately objected in a rather dogmatic way. He argued that the issue had already been solved in favor of a “national” interpretation:

We see racial oppression as some variant of national-colonial oppression. It certainly can have its own specific features which are not generally identified with national oppression. If we do not achieve, if we do not reach complete clarity here, we will face the danger of falling into a mistake that may lead us logically to what is the knowledge of fascism (sic), militant imperialism in Europe. We know that this may be the same as the tactics of German fascism, that of Hitler, as well as the fascists of our South American countries.

It is a mistake, when our comrades talk about two problems, racial and national. I cannot go into detail on this issue. This issue is explained in a special article. I believe that comrades know this article, and I find it superfluous here to elaborate on this issue.⁶

As a result of this discussion, the slogan of self-determination up to secession for black and indigenous populations, and perhaps for the people of the Brazilian North-East, who were also mentioned as an oppressed Nordeste nation, was accepted as one of the long-term objectives of the Brazilian section of the Comintern.

Around the Caribbean, the central debate revolved about the self-determination the so called “Black Belt” on the southern territories of the United States. Sen Katayama was probably the major advocate of this slogan inside the Comintern (McCLELLAN, 2020). The idea of the Black Belt was widely discussed in both Communist and anti-Communist propaganda, including the famous booklet “Negroes in a soviet (sic) America” (FORD and ALLEN, [1935]). Between 1930 and 1932 the Communist Party of Cuba also adopted the slogan of “negro self-determination”, apparently through its contacts with the comrades in USA. (SERVIAT, 1986, p. 116; CARR, 1998, p. 98–99). On the Cuban soil, this slogan became known as that of the “Black Belt of Oriente” (“Cinturón negro de Oriente”). This “Black Belt” was expected to include the areas of Baracoa, Guantanamo, Santiago de Cuba, La Maya, Alto Songo, El Caney, El Cobre, San Luis and Palma Soriano, where blacks accounted for more than 50% of the population. The Cuban East was undoubtedly a specific part of the island. The Sierra Maestra mountains, the future cradle of the Cuban revolution of 1959, contained some isolated areas with an ancient tradition of “palenques” (settlements of escaped slaves and rebels, comparable to Brazilian quilombos). On the other hand, in the early decades of the 20th century this area became a hub of attraction for many Antillean and nearby Haitian immigrants. The

Haitian immigrants had a much stronger tradition of black isolationism than the Afro-descendant population of Cuba.

Despite all geographical and demographic factors, the idea of creating a Cuban "Black Belt" was not welcomed even among the Communists. A furious reaction came from the Cuban Trotskyists: "It is a Stalinist provocation that all workers will pay dearly. The main duty of the Leninist Bolsheviks is to unmask in a relentless way, and condemn to the proletarian shame all that miserable and treacherous opportunism, which only tries to speculate with the most fundamental and precise questions of the revolution". (*Programa del partido bolchevique leninista*, 1934). In 1934, at the Third Conference of the Communist Parties of South and Caribbean America in Moscow, "Bueno" (Blas Roca, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Cuba), argued that the situation on the island was in fact different from that of the hypothetical North American "Black Belt" entity: "They [Blacks] had a rebellion in 1912, when their ears were cut off, when they were discriminated against, etc. all this led to their dropping of national conscience. And therefore many Negroes did not understand our slogan about the right of nations to self-determination". On 21 - 22 October 1935, after the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, the Sixth plenary of the Communist Party of Cuba adopted a new resolution on the Negro question, which stated: "We have to worry, more than propagating abstract slogans, to really organize the struggle for those demands that open the ways to realize these slogans" (SERVIAT. 1986, p.122-123)

Late 1930s: dying Comintern and no "Negro self-determination"

In the early 1930s, Comintern's support for the self-determination of black and indigenous populations did not yield any immediate results like new "national governments" on separate territories anywhere in Latin America. By 1935, in a few countries this issue was no more seen as important. The Communist parties were now preparing to take power, following the models which had been used in Russia (military action in the cities) and China ("forest-village-city", later apparently successful in Cuba and Nicaragua). Genrikh Yakobson was "lucky" in January 1936, so he did not live to see Stalinist purges and the dissolution of the Comintern which practically lost its global importance in the process.

It is worth mentioning that around this time, the very idea of Negro self-determination looked more like a phantasy, far from the international realities. Haiti, the only “Negro Republic” in the Caribbean, was occupied by the US forces in 1915-1934 and, like Cuba, Dominican Republic and the African “independent” state of Liberia, was practically a dependent territory. According to a contemporary North American scholar, “in the case of Haiti and other countries similarly situated, the motives underlying the arrangements are the domestic security, economic development and national prosperity of the Caribbean countries and the self-defense of the United States (FINCH, 1916, p.864–865). In 1936 Ethiopia, occupied by Italy, also lost its independence. For the black populations of the Caribbean, the occupation of Ethiopia was an “optimistic tragedy” with Biblical connotations: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Psalms 68:31).

Analysing this “race-marked sovereignty in a recent article, Musab Younis recently made an important conclusion:

Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia were unavoidably modern states between 1914 and 1945. But their juridical sovereignties were rebuffed by a language that connected ‘race’ with diverse – and always unfavourable – forms of political time: regression, parody, extinction, failure. This experience can, I think, shed light on the evolution of race as a regime of global classification. [...] The interwar struggles of these three states reveal the persistence of race in international society not as a flaw in an otherwise progressive evolution, to be ironed out through the passage of time, but as a keystone around which the ‘liberal order’ was able to span its most recent and most expansive structure after the dissolution of the colonial empires (YOUNIS, 2018, p. 369-370).

Lev Trotsky and the Fourth International also discussed the issue of “Negro self-determination”. In 1933, Trotsky met with Swabeck, a representative of the Communist League of America, who said: "How should we see the position of the black American: as a national minority or as a racial minority?:".(TROTSKY, 1933). The discussion continued after the death of Trotsky in 1940 and the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943.

Since the late 1930s, black intellectuals in the Caribbean often oscillated between liberal and radical Pan-Africanism. North America retained its role as a pole of attraction, alongside with London and Paris. The concepts which were popular among African

American intellectuals in the United States used to spread to the "Black Caribbean" in a short span of time. Since 1950s, Havana became a new, and next-door, Mecca for the Caribbean left. Moscow was only of relative importance, nothing comparable to the role it played in the best times of the Comintern.

Mixing the colours: "Black-and-red" revolutions in Haiti and Grenada

A visible raced-centred transformation of the visibly Communist rhetorics took place in Haiti. The reaction to the news from Haiti of the Duvalier dynasty as "barbarity" was not surprising. The public opinion in the West was still far from tolerance to any state-building forms like "Negro states", whether monarchies or republics. The European view of such states was definitely negative, with the direct association with Haiti as the unique and sad example of such experiments, immortalized in Graham Greene's "Comedians" Haiti was indeed a "Black republic", so expectedly awful. Nothing good was to be expected from such states.

The real situation was in fact more complex. As one illustration, one could think of the religious conflict in Haiti since the 1940s. When President Lescot (1941-1946) and the Catholic (Breton) clergy launched an "anti-superstitious campaign", aimed at the destruction of the Vodou and its worship centres, the Haitian left was with the oppressed working masses, Jaques Roumain (1906-1944), the leader of the Communists, personally took part in the defense of the Vodou (NÉRESTANT, 1994, p.12, 156). After 1957, the Duvalier regime aptly used the terminology of class struggle, even though it had no problem fighting against those who brought this language to the country (LORIMER and DUVALIER, 2012). Following the tradition of the Haitian left, Duvalier strengthened the Vodou practices to the extent that it could not be tolerated by the Catholic Church. Duvalier was excommunicated in 1960, in 1966 the concordate was restored under radically renewed conditions, including Duvalier's right to appoint bishops.

In 1959, in an interview with Radio Canada, he said: "You are speaking about a social revolution, it already for 25 years that I am talking about the social revolution". Duvalier criticized the "small minority" which had ruled the country and spoke with pride about the revolution of 1946 in which he took part. According to the Haiti leader,

“unemployment is communism, illiteracy is communism” (DUVALIER, 1959). Rather ironically, such claims looked rather similar in form to the Communist views about the capitalism as a cause of unemployment and illiteracy among the workers, just changing the culprit.

The pan-African nationalists did tolerate Communists as allies in the 1930s. However, with the growth of their own political strength, they were more and more concentrated on themselves and their own understanding of who was and who was not an oppressed people. In the other words, the politicians like Francois Duvalier could tolerate Communists or Socialists as long as the latter were of the same ethnoracial origin. A black Communist could survive and be tolerated by the regime, a mulato would risk his life. Actually this is what happened in Haiti in the times of dictatorship. For several years it was difficult for the outsiders to grasp why the Communist movement on the island was so consistently divided into two currents, like. Communist Workers Party of Haiti (since 1966) and the Unified party of Haitian Communists (since 1968). They were not necessarily different from the ideological point of view, but their activities developed in a strikingly different atmosphere. If there were any significant white minority, there would probably be a third Communist Party of Haiti as well, The colour issue was too strong even for those who saw the class as more important than the race.

In 1969 Duvalier announced that Haiti recognized the secessionist West African Republic of Biafra, with a strong anti-Communist message:

My political philosophy and the struggle which I am firmly carrying on in Haiti, in the basin of the Antilles and on the large international stage against Marxism-Leninism cause me to consider with apprehension the ever-increasing influence of communism in Nigeria. The planes, weapons and experts of Soviet Russia are playing a paramount role in the conflict. In fact, that great European power is eager to transform Nigeria into a satellite country and make sure of an operational base in the very heart of Africa, a new stage of its dream of world domination- a dream that dates back to Peter the Great and Catherine II.I think it is my duty to express the fervent wish that this disinterested act bearing the imprint of wisdom accomplished by the first independent Negro Republic in the world, summit of the black world, be a symbol, an example, a source of inspiration for the governments and peoples of Africa. (DUVALIER. 1969)

The change of the Haitian flag may be seen as the symbol of the Duvalier “black-and-red revolution”. Formerly (and later) blue-and-red, the flag became more adapted to the regime’s ideology in the 1960s. In Haiti, it did not matter that the black-and-red banner was for many years a flag of anarchists; in some parts of Eastern Europe, strangely enough, it also happened to symbolize nationalism, as in Ukraine. In the Haitian (and Pan-African) context, these two colours meant the combination of blood spilled for liberation with the primary (black) African and African-American skin pigmentation. For the Caribbean left, there was no contradiction between this symbolism and their own political aspirations.

Despite the decades of repression, the Communist trend survived in Haiti. To the surprise of a Russian journalist, at the time immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Haitian political elites were ready to see the Communist leader as a Prime-Minister of the impoverished state: “To the surprise of many, the negotiators agreed on the candidature of ... the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the United Party of Haitian Communists René Théodore” (SEREDA, 1992). This decision was short-lived, as Théodore (1940-2003) leader never got the needed support from the parliament, but still emblematic.

The decade-long rhetorics of “Black Republic”, with some borrowings from the Communist political discourse, did not help Haiti to prosper, even though strengthened the “black-only” character of the country. Not only light-skin, but all Haitians were fleeing en masse to any place which seemed to give them more peace and opportunities, primarily to USA (including the nearby Puerto Rico) and Canada. Haitian Creole became one of the “official” languages of North American taxation and New York subway.

In Grenada, the Comintern heritage seemed to be reinterpreted in the same way as in Haiti, especially during the long regime of Prime Minister Eric Gairy (1967-1979), a former trade union leader and the leader of the successful workers’ “revolution” of 1951. Then the British colonial administration saw Gairy as a Communist, which was sort of a general Western fear in the context of the Cold War (BAPTISTE, 2002). The subsequent solidification of Gairy’s regime led Grenada to independence in 1974, but this meant few changes to the majority of the citizens:

Similar to other post-colonial societies, Grenada's political development evolved through waves of struggle in the search for freedom. In 1951 Eric Gairy led a social revolution against the plantocracy. Referred to generally as 'Sky Red', the 1951 uprising was intended to open spaces for working people to break the shackles that lingered since Emancipation. Gairy resisted the authoritarian, racist colonial [British] state and provided some measure of hope for the majority poor, black, and marginalised Grenadian masses. However, once he gained state power, with time, Gairy became repressive. This repression was heightened in the 1973–74 period as the newly-formed NJM resisted Gairy's rule. The cycle of authoritarianism, resistance, and state-sanctioned violence mirrored the 1951 period and indeed earlier periods, such as Fédon's Rebellion of 1795–96. Against that background, Grenada gained independence from Britain on 7 February 1974 in a whirlwind of political chaos. Grenada was bitterly divided in a Gairyanti-Gairy struggle. While the majority working-class Grenadians remained loyal to Gairy, particularly the elderly, the emerging intellectual elite and the children of those who benefited from Gairy's 1951 social revolution challenged a meaningless 'in-dependence' that was not intended to bring about a just society. The sons and daughters of plantation workers, influenced by Black Power, the US Civil Rights movement, and other liberation struggles, marched throughout Grenada echoing a chant, reminiscent of Gairy's earlier defiance against the colonial establishment. This time it was "Go, go, Gairy must go". (Wendy C. Grenade's, interview, quoted in BURTENSHAW, 2019)

In 1979, the contradictory influences from Cuba, and the "black power" in North America resulted in another radical transformation, which brought to power another charismatic figure, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop (1979-1983). The growth of the new revolutionary forces has been thoroughly studied and well documented. Canada was among the countries which played a specific role in the formation of the new Caribbean left:

The presence of Afro-Canadians has a long history in Canada. After immigration restrictions were enacted in Great Britain, at the same time there were new Canadian immigration policies during the 1960s and 1970s which resulted in the large influx of Caribbean nationals; primarily in Montreal, secondarily in Toronto and in other Canadian cities.

The precursor of the Caribbean Conference Committee (CCC) was the Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs formed in Montreal in 1965. The CCC group, comprised primarily of West Indians, included Grenadian Franklyn Harvey, Dominican Rosie Douglas, Barbadian Anne Cools, Celia Daniel, Alfie Roberts from Saint Vincent, Jamaican Robert Hill, his

cousin Anthony Hill, Jamaican Hugh O'Neile, and Jamaican Alvin Johnson

Later Antiguan Tim Hector, studying in Canada, joined the committee. Others associated with the CCC were Arnhim Eustace of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as Kerwyn Morris; then Raymond Watts and Wally Look-Lai. C.L.R. James gave a keynote address in Montreal in October of 1966 on his first trip to the Quebec City.

[...] original stimulus to the February [1970] Revolution [in Trinidad] came from the arbitrary jailing in 1969 of a number of black West Indian students following a computer-smashing incident at the Sir George Williams University in Canada. This in turn was the climax of disturbances there that had accompanied the students' accusations of racial discrimination which they leveled at a white member of the University staff. (WILDER, 2012).

The Grenadan revolution was crushed by US-Caribbean coalition in 1984, using the pretext of the Cuban threat and the internal fighting in the leadership, in which Maurice Bishop was killed. However, it can be argued that this short-lived socialist revolution was probably the closest to the ideals of the Comintern, a really example of a "Black-and-Red" revolution..

Conclusion

In the glory days of the Comintern, the slogan of "Negro self-determination" did not yield immediate results, nor did it lead to the creation of any Black political entity in the Caribbean. However, the influence of this slogan did not vanish long after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. After the Second World War, Black radicals in the Caribbean retained the Communist rhetorics, mixing it with a distinctly Afro-centric flavor and, like Papa Doc, even with a strong doze of ad hoc anti-Communism.

In the long run, Genrikh Yakobson was probably right. However, it was only by the end of the 20gth century that the concept of Afro-descendent and indigenous self-determinatuion was no longer a purely theoretical construct of Moscow (and even personal) origin, with the modern Latin American concept of "plurinacionality"new., but it was only in recent years that researchers turned to Comintern's heritage because of the modern Latin American "multinationality".

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Notes

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² On the biography of Genrikh Yakobson, see e.g. JEIFETS and JEIFETS, 2015, p. 657–658;

³ Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company Limited (The Light), Canadian-Brazilian electric corporation and monopoly.

⁴ The Brazilian perception of the Comintern slogan of “Negro self-determination” is tackled in more detail in another article (DOBONRAVIN, 2020).

⁵ RGASPI. f. 495, inv. 101, doc. 23. fol. 113–114.

⁶ RGASPI. f. 495, inv. 101, doc. 23. fol. 208.

⁷ RGASPI, f 495, inv. 101, doc. 23, fol 234.