



The British Labour Movement and the Strikes in Hong Kong 1925/6 and Trinidad 1937: Worlds Apart and Worlds Together

Xuebing Cao & Roger Seifert

To cite this article: Xuebing Cao & Roger Seifert (24 Mar 2025): The British Labour Movement and the Strikes in Hong Kong 1925/6 and Trinidad 1937: Worlds Apart and Worlds Together, The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, DOI: [10.1080/03086534.2025.2479804](https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2479804)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2479804>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 24 Mar 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The British Labour Movement and the Strikes in Hong Kong 1925/6 and Trinidad 1937: Worlds Apart and Worlds Together

Xuebing Cao ^a and Roger Seifert ^b

^aKeele University, Staffordshire, UK; ^bUniversity of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK

ABSTRACT

This article compares the Hong Kong strike of 1925/6 with the 1937 Trinidad summer strikes and riots and brings together these events that took place in two separate, far-away British colonies. It provides a fuller understanding of the common factors in the two cases including British imperialist rule aligned with the interests of large corporations, the degradation of the workforce, and the absence of legal and civil rights. The ferocity of those involved was on view with the British resorting to killings, beatings, imprisonment, and outlawing of seditious materials. In contrast, the strikers and their political and trade union leaders sought to overturn centuries of injustice by any means including the destruction of property, attacks on the forces of law and order, sabotage, and stoppages of their own work and that of others. The differing causes and consequences of the two strikes are evaluated. Both colonies' worker struggles were given support by the British labour movement, and such backing pressurised the British government to seek some form of resolution of the disputes. However, Britain's labour movement support was limited by ideological splits that hindered a coherent defence of those workers on strike.

KEYWORDS

Strike; Hong Kong; Trinidad;
British labour movement;
colonialism

Introduction

In 1925/6 in Hong Kong and 1937 in Trinidad, there were major strikes that led to riots, general strikes, fierce repression by the British colonial authorities, and eventually to industrial and political reforms. These significant working-class uprisings have come to be regarded as touchstones of radical worker protests and symbols of the viciousness of colonialism.¹ The strikes happened in two completely different parts of the British empire, and this essay compares

CONTACT Xuebing Cao  x.cao@keele.ac.uk  Keele Business School, Keele University, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, UK

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

these disturbances by telling the story of what happened with an emphasis on the role of the British labour movement, split between Leninists and social democrats in supporting colonial workers in action. The theme of solidarity, as both a practical expression of support and an ideological outpouring of common cause, is part of the link between events in the West Indies and Asia.

The 1925/6 Hong Kong strike was selected as it uniquely illustrates the dynamic interaction of those involved: workers and their unions, various employers, local government, and the representatives of the British government through the Colonial Office. It took place in a country with a different language and culture from the British, and at the same time as Red Friday (July 31, 1925) when the British Conservative government backed down in a confrontation over wage demands from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) supported by the Trades Union Congress (TUC).² This government defeat was reversed in May 1926 when the nine-day General Strike led by the TUC's General Council was routed by the same government backing the coal owners.³ Such parallel events showed that the British government used the same arguments and tactics whether against its own working classes or to counter those in the colonies. In both cases, the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) fully supported the workers' actions while that of the Labour Party did not.

The strikes and riots in Trinidad in 1937 were part of a wider strike wave across the British Caribbean colonies. There had already been strikes in British Honduras (now Belize), British Guiana, St Kitts, St Lucia, and St Vincent.⁴ The 1937 strike in Trinidad was selected as a discrete event to make it easier to compare with the Hong Kong dispute, and because, unlike most of the other strikes including subsequent ones in Barbados and Jamaica in 1938–9, it started among organised workers in the oil fields before spreading to plantation workers and throughout the country. In Trinidad, for example, there had been a history of industrial unrest among longshoremen (dockers) as with the December 1919 strike in which 'The stevedores, led by the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, forced business to close down, secured a 25 per cent wage increase, and, more important, learned the lesson of solidarity'.⁵

The British Empire by the 1920s had spread across the globe with hundreds of millions of citizens effectively ruled from Whitehall and Westminster. The Colonial Office in London had a direct remit over both Hong Kong and Trinidad and Tobago. Labour rights, outside of the Dominions, were very limited and mirrored the lack of political and social rights for the vast majority of non-whites. By the 1920s movements for reform and revolution were spreading under the twin influences of the Russian Revolution and the aftermath of the Great War.⁶ These created cadres and ideals that appealed to the increasingly impoverished mass of workers and peasants in the colonies, and when further linked with a web of reported unrest among workers in metropolitan

homelands – strikes and uprisings in Germany, France, Great Britain, USA, and Ireland, a stream of revolt became a flood.⁷

George Padmore, for example, was a key figure in this and campaigned for clear solidarity routes from London to Harlem to the West Indies. His writings as a Trinidadian communist helped spread the word and encouraged solidarity action despite his reservations about actual British labour movement support.⁸ He helped start up the Negro Trade Union Committee of the Profintern known as the Red International Labour Union which was founded in 1921 as an offshoot of the Comintern.⁹ His influence alongside that of other West Indian leaders of the London-based diaspora, such as C.L.R. James and Eric Williams, was originally based on their links to the international communist movement, but this waned as they shifted away from a class analysis of imperialism to a more Pan-African approach.

The International African Service Bureau (IASB), although a small organisation, also played a role in linking colonial struggles of mainly black activists in Africa and the West Indies with those in metropolitan centres. One feature of the Trinidad strikes was that some were ‘stay-in’ copycats of the USA style ‘sit-ins’ and ‘sit-downs’. This symbol of the internationalism of some of the relevant leaders was further evidenced by the link of C.L.R. James with the IASB as editor of its newsletter, *Africa and the World*. The first issue in July 1937 reported on the strikes in Trinidad as follows:

It is the duty of the British working class movement to support these West Indian workers in their struggle for better economic and social conditions and to raise the voice of protest against the repressive measures of the Employers and the Government to deprive them of the right to collective bargaining and trade unionism. (*Africa and the World*, 1(1), July 1937)

According to Høgsbjerg, in order to build solidarity in Britain with the workers of Trinidad and the wider Caribbean, the IASB launched its first serious campaign, a ‘Trinidad Defence Committee’, and called a rally for Sunday 9 August 1937 in Trafalgar Square.¹⁰ Williams shows that during the interwar years, the debates among the British Left were significantly influenced by Caribbean and African activists who advocated decolonisation as a necessary condition to establish socialism.¹¹

Our concern focuses on the ways in which the British labour movement (the Labour and Communist parties, trade unions, and pressure groups such as the Fabians) reacted to reports of ‘disturbances’ among workers in the two colonies. The CPGB already had strong links with the League Against Imperialism¹² and the National Minority Movement inside British trade unions such as the MFGB and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). They had sympathisers in both the Socialist League¹³ and Independent Labour party (ILP).¹⁴ Their revolutionary class-based position to overthrow capitalism at home and

imperialism abroad was in contrast with mainstream labourism inside the Labour party, Fabians, and the TUC.

Others have written at length on most of these groups in the 1920s and 1930s, but our particular focus is on their specific commentary and support around these two disputes. The purpose of the paper is not to add to the long list of general histories and analyses of the British labour movement in these years, but to use case studies to throw light on actual support for the strikes examined. Our analysis provides evidence of the British government's failure to understand the issues due to their natural impulse to protect and defend British business interests and local governors, and how the mishandling of the disputes led to further discontent with industrial grievances being turned into social unrest and political awakenings. This appeared to apply with equal force to the minority Labour governments in 1924 and 1929–1931 as well as the Conservatives in office throughout the 1930s.¹⁵ It was this mix of incompetence, ignorance, and self-serving Imperialist interests at the heart of government that enabled the British labour movement to agitate and pressurise the Conservatives to upgrade their concerns for colonial subjects in Hong Kong and Trinidad, and to push for policy change. G.D.H. Cole famously summarised this development: 'Trade unionism ... was really born in the troublous days of the French Wars and the Industrial revolution', because earlier groups 'lacked, what is an essential element in the rise of Trade Unionism as an organised movement, a sense of class solidarity'.¹⁶ It was the impulse to form a movement that mattered, and such an impulse came with 'the miseries and disorders, the increase in class-antagonisms, the stirring of new ideas, which accompanied the revolutionary wars after 1789 ... For the first time political and industrial ideas began powerfully to interact'.¹⁷

There were splits among the labour movement in terms of political ideology, levels and forms of support, leading to varied recommendations for labour reforms in the colonies.¹⁸ These spilled over into the debates that raged among the West Indian activists living in the UK, many of whom were organised around the League of Coloured People and its journal, *The Keys*,¹⁹ and among the British left around the 'Hands off China' campaign. The essence of the difference was defined by the acceptance and rejection of Lenin's²⁰ general thesis that imperialism embodied the export of capital to exploit for profit the land and labour of the colonies, and that this could only be ended through revolution and full independence. The anti-imperialist movement had supporters across the board at every level in the labour movement, and with the Russian Revolution and widespread condemnation of colonialism came the development of key Leninist cadres spreading the word amongst activists. The extent to which the general thesis reached the grassroots is debatable, but rank-and-file activists in the main unions and parties did accept the general internationalism that all workers were oppressed by capitalist exploitation and so workers of the world did need to unite to throw off their chains. This

narrative posed a more poignant challenge in Trinidad as the centenary of the abolition of slavery was nearing.

The question of class, and the exercise of class power, was a central area of conflict and contrast within the labour movement. Communists and others on the left within trade unions saw class and class consciousness as the key to unlocking solidarity and progress in a united push for socialism. Class for Marxists is primarily defined in terms of one's place in the economic system – an owner of land receives rent; an owner of capital receives profits/dividends; and an owner of labour (no longer a slave or serf) sells a quantity and quality of labour time in a market to receive wages as income. This latter group constitute the working class, whose common feature is having to sell their labour power to live – be employed under a contract of employment however regulated. There are crucial social and political links between the exchange of work for wages in the labour market, the conditions under which such an exchange takes place, and the ability to afford the necessities of family life. A cut in real income either by reduced wages or reduced hours creates the conditions for strikes. The CPGB itself was founded with support from Lenin in 1920 as an explicitly Marxist party wedded to the overthrow of capitalism by revolutionary means.²¹ In contrast, the Labour Party emerged from the setbacks for liberal trade unionism before 1914, and the need for a party of the organised working class based on reforming capitalism through a parliamentary strategy. Its founding constitution did commit to state ownership but within a mixed economy and strongly embedded with the Empire.²²

Groups such as the Socialist League and ILP came and went as efforts to push the Labour Party to the left floundered, not least on the question of the Empire. The League Against Imperialism focussed on the betterment of colonial peoples through both immediate reforms and then the overthrow of the colonial rulers. The Fabians, with their ranks of influential intellectuals, played a poor hand with their mixing up of social engineering, eugenics, and civilisation stage theory.²³ In various degrees, British unions, the CPGB, the Labour Party, ILP and Fabians were involved in campaigns supporting Hong Kong and Trinidadian strikers.²⁴ The TUC itself and the main unions (MFGB, TGWU) did take a more active approach, especially through well-established links with the Trinidad Workingmen's Association and providing invites to conferences in London. Leading trade unionists such as Sir Arthur Pugh (TUC president in 1926) were part of the Forster Commission of Inquiry into the Trinidad disturbances and had written about his visit to the West Indies.²⁵ Labour MPs, such as William Lunn and Arthur Creech Jones (a former official of the TGWU) asked questions in the House of Commons concerning labour rights and standards in Trinidad. The latter also wrote of the need for full trade union recognition, collective bargaining, and dispute resolution mechanisms.²⁶

In contrast to this position taken up by the CPGB, Socialist League, League Against Imperialism, and some in the trade unions, there were the more

reformist-minded social democrats in the leadership of the Labour Party, TUC, most trade unions, and Fabians. As Rajani Palme Dutt, the foremost communist theoretician, brutally explained, ‘The Empire is the foundation of modern capitalist exploitation ... How does the Labour Party propose to attack this citadel of capitalism? The answer is that they do not propose to attack it at all.’²⁷ Gupta argues that the labour movement largely aligned with liberal imperialists, and its objections to colonialism were founded on non-conformist moralising as a reaction to the brutality of local employers.²⁸ This explains their policy push for more rights and regulations, trade union recognition, and employment reforms. In the meantime, both sides – the Leninists and the social democrats – argued for immediate labour reforms (trade union recognition and legalisation, collective bargaining, the right to strike, and the enforcement of labour standards) through the medium of fact-finding commissions. A typical proposal was submitted by Creech Jones MP, later colonial secretary himself in 1945. The proposal, based on recent labour disturbances in the colonies, demanded that they set up

an Advisory Committee to the Colonial Secretary, made up not only of civil servants, but of technical and practical experts – representative and experienced men with knowledge of what is being done and has been achieved in various parts of the Colonial Empire.²⁹

This was based on the correct view that the Colonial Office had little or no knowledge of the situation on the ground, and tended, in the absence of any coherent policy, to side with the large corporations, their spokesmen in London (such as Leonard Lyle MP of Tate & Lyle), and the local colonial administration (governors, legislators, and company senior managers) backed up by militia and marines.

Strikes themselves can be characterised by causes, conduct, and consequences for both those directly involved and the wider community.³⁰ Evidence suggests that the major cause is pay and pay-related issues. It is wage demands that are not heard and not heeded by employers that drives the majority of the workforce to take action, and when those demands are ignored or repudiated, then the strikes become something more – general stoppages of work, riots, and political demonstrations against both employers and colonial rule. Other causes come under the general heading of terms and conditions, including hours worked, holidays, health and safety, workload, and conduct of management in terms of bullying and victimisation typically involved in our case studies. An additional set of causes comes from legal and political arenas with trade union rights, worker rights, bargaining rights, picketing rights, and the treatment of strikers as part of the equation. Such demands were encouraged by British trade unionists and often aped their own demands.

The conduct comes down to the strikers’ tactics – walking off the job, sitting in the workplace, picketing, the level of violence, sabotage, and intimidation.

The role of troops in strikes³¹ is of particular relevance for the suppression of the strikes in the colonies, as is the notion of political strikes.³² The case of a general strike has strong links with syndicalism in Europe and North America, while its purpose in the Hong Kong and West Indies disputes was more pragmatic and spontaneous, and was about swift solidarity.

In the case studies here, there were strong links with housing and health provision, family life, and job security. This also fed into the powers of the employers and their links with local governors and police. So, consequences, partly linked with conduct, were felt beyond the workplace and led to greater union recognition, better pay and conditions, and a shaking of the tree of colonial authority. The costs to all those involved in terms of lost pay, lost revenues, and political and legal legitimacy mounted up as the strikes continued beyond the immediate eruption of walkouts and protests.

The thrust of mainstream labour policy at the time was to ‘improve’ the lot of colonial workers and their families based on a non-conformist morality and natural paternalism. As Bayly³³ suggests, the mainspring for this approach was a weak combination of eugenics, social Darwinism, and civilisation stage theory. Of critical importance was the view expressed by labour movement leaders that the communists must be kept at bay, and that union reforms needed to be centrally controlled by the local trade union and labour leaders to prevent the communist-inspired rank-and-file rebellion experienced in the UK.³⁴

Our account of the details of the two disturbances is based on secondary sources, including official reports in the national archives and Hansard; local newspapers, e.g. Hong Kong Telegraph and Trinidad Guardian; and national newspapers, e.g. New York Times, The Times, the New Leader, and the Daily Worker; pamphlets; and minutes of committees and conferences. Communist, ILP, and Labour Party documents were accessed at the People’s History Museum in Manchester including the Colonial Information Bulletin and minutes of the LP West Indies Committee. The British Library was used to access local and national newspapers, and Fabian and other pamphlets; and the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University was used to check on TUC and TGWU records. As far as the British labour movement is concerned, we accessed Daily Worker, Labour Monthly, Daily Herald, the Leader, Labour, and other outlets such as The Keys; but we only refer to articles that directly impinge on our two case studies.

The 1925/6 Hong Kong Strike

The mass movement allied with the 1925/6 Canton-Hong Kong strike and boycott is one of the most prominent labour struggles in Hong Kong, a British colony from 1841 to 1997. It is the longest industrial action in Chinese history and a significant anti-imperialist labour revolt. It profoundly

influenced the development of trade unionism in Hong Kong and had a lasting effect on British colonial rule.³⁵ In the aftermath of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, China's labour movement had a 'cataclysmic explosion' that represented 'a watershed in the political and institutional history of modern China, including ... redefining the relationship between China and the international order or disorder.'³⁶ There were about 2 million industrial workers in China in 1919. The colonial powers were gradually weakened by the combination of the emerging forces of national and social revolution, and the rapid growth of Chinese industrialisation.³⁷ Since the working class was still weak and labour and trade-union rights were limited, most organised struggles were mainly 'intertwined with political struggles and national movements'.³⁸ Nonetheless, workers' consciousness developed, under the influences of the Russian revolution and local Marxists, into an awareness of a class in and for itself,³⁹ with labour unrest rising dramatically and reaching a peak in 1925–1927. On 1st May 1925, the Second National Labour Congress announced the establishment of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), setting the stage for increased union organising strength.⁴⁰

It was in this context that Hong Kong emerged as the epicentre for working-class struggles, with a dramatic increase in strikes in the early 1920s that led to growing labour activism. The 1920 mechanics' pay strike was the colony's first major industrial action, involving more than 9,000 workers. The 1922 Seamen's strike was the first large-scale labour unrest, organised by the Chinese Seamen's Union (formed in 1921) involving 100,000 supporters.⁴¹ After 50 days, the union won a pay increase of up to 30 per cent, as well as having banned unions reinstated and arrested workers released.⁴²

A 1920 colonial government report stated that there were 11 employer societies, 31 trade unions (also called men's societies), and 20 guilds. 'One of the most interesting and important developments of the year has been the rapid increase in the number of working men's societies, avowedly run on western trade union lines, copying trade union methods and using trade union phraseology'.⁴³ Union organisations grew to about 70 by 1921, and their achievement of improving labour conditions through either negotiation with employers or strike action became a strong incentive for membership.⁴⁴

In June 1925, an unprecedented, large-scale general strike started in Hong Kong to echo the influential May 30th Movement. This was triggered by a serious incident in Shanghai where many Chinese were shot dead or injured by British colonial police during a mass anti-imperialism demonstration. In response, a nationwide anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism movement spread quickly, instigated by the political, racial, and socioeconomic complications of long-standing issues around foreign suppression.⁴⁵ Soon a series of strikes and student protests appeared across the country, supported by unions, the growing Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the dominant nationalist party, the Kuomintang (KMT).

Public anger soon turned into a much wider movement, triggering even greater labour unrest from June 1925 to October 1926 in Canton and Hong Kong where the British had significant economic interests. Among about 100 strikes recorded in 1925 across China relating to the May 30th incident, the 1925–26 Canton-Hong Kong strike and boycott was the most notable.⁴⁶ The unions drafted strike plans in Canton and Hong Kong, backed by a politicised strategy adopted by the CCP, KMT and their allies.⁴⁷ The ACFTU, led by the CCP, sent its general secretary Deng Zhongxia to Hong Kong to mobilise local union cadres and discuss industrial action plans. A new organisation, the General Union of Chinese Workers was established⁴⁸ to mobilise local worker organisations. The General Union raised economic and political demands, including an attempt to introduce labour legislation on minimum wages, workers' insurance, and freedom of speech and association.

On 19th June, a multi-union strike erupted in Hong Kong. Within 3 days, 20,000 workers in the tram, printing and shipping sectors stopped work and most started leaving Hong Kong and heading back to their hometowns in Guangdong. This was followed by more workers and unions joining the industrial action, including the Bus Drivers' Union, the Shipmasters' Union, foreign-employed workers, the stevedores, dockyard colliers, seamen, postal workers, hygiene workers, and hospital staff.⁴⁹

Normal working in Hong Kong was paralysed by the strike and boycott, and its economy was significantly degraded. A colonial government report commented on the impact, 'This trouble has shaken our economic structure to its foundations ... The boycott has paralyzed our trade'.⁵⁰ At the climax of the general strike and boycott, more than 100,000 workers left Hong Kong for Canton.⁵¹ The unions' main strategies appeared to have evolved from the initial market-oriented pay demands to call for political reform, and their actions seriously damaged the economic interests of big businesses. Hong Kong's trade in 1925 dropped by 50 per cent and many businesses were shut down, while government income was significantly diminished.⁵² To help the struggling colonial economy, the British government provided a £3-million aid fund. Throughout the strike, Hong Kong's business community maintained a subtle, ambivalent attitude as Chinese merchants by deliberately avoiding any clarification of their position on one of the key issues that caused the strike: anti-imperialism among local Chinese. They seemed to prefer to focus on the differences between the Canton and colonial governments.⁵³

Chinese workers in the neighbouring city of Canton (now, Guangzhou) were also mobilised to hold solidarity strikes and stop working for foreign settlers and consulates. On 23rd June, a mass demonstration was held, with students, merchants, labourers, and soldiers marching around Shameen, the foreign settlement in Canton, to protest against imperialism and demand better pay and working conditions. When the demonstrators marched through the west

Shakee bridge, British and French troops opened fire and shot dead 52 people and injured more than 200.⁵⁴

The Shakee massacre shocked the entire nation and helped bring the dispute to the attention of the British public. The Canton government responded angrily by requesting an immediate apology and compensation which both French and British consulates rejected.⁵⁵ A boycott was called, led by a KMT-CCP United Front, of British and Japanese ships entering South China ports. It extended to an export embargo on food and raw materials.⁵⁶ On 6th July, a Canton-Hong Kong strike committee was set up to coordinate the strike action, with representatives from the Canton government, CCP and KMT, and unions. The committee organised 2,000 pickets to help maintain order and cordon off Hong Kong, stopping food exports and cargo imports, and preventing workers from going back to Hong Kong.⁵⁷

The colonial authority took a tough stance against the strike and boycott by heavily criticising the Canton government for funding the strikers, instigating the riot, and causing confrontations. It requested London to send the navy to block South China ports in retaliation, and to support local militias attacks on Canton. In contrast, the British government urged the Hong Kong leadership to remain calm. The colonial government's response was to invoke various suppressive laws to control the colony. One of its anti-strike tactics was to use an 1888 Ordinance Regulation of Chinese to penalise strikers with a maximum of 3-month goal with hard labour, and to ban local residents from holding, attending, and speaking at Chinese public meetings.⁵⁸ British Conservative politicians at home used the strike as proof of their anti-communist 'Red Menace' rhetoric to stigmatise the entire British labour movement.⁵⁹

In July 1925 the colonial government hardened its approach and issued a special proclamation authorising the police to deport any individual who refused to work calling them 'strikers and idlers'.⁶⁰ The police conducted random and warrantless searches, while the military marched through town to show off the might of imperial power.⁶¹ Both post and telephone communications were censored as the government shut down newspapers because their coverage of the strike was said to attack 'merchants and the ruling classes'.⁶² The authorities issued a special order to enable courts to summarily sentence those guilty to 10 years imprisonment with hard labour. The colonial government

used martial law, flogging, deportation, and censorship of those deemed antagonistic to British control. Newspapers were closed and publishers were jailed for the crime of sedition. Union headquarters were raided and shut down, labor leaders arrested and imprisoned. When protests occurred, steel-helmeted police responded with tear gas and baton.⁶³

In November 1925, the tough and uncompromising Hong Kong governor Reginald Stubbs ended his term and was succeeded by Cecil Clementi. The new

governor took a more flexible approach in dealing with the strikers and agreed to send officials to negotiate a settlement with the Canton government. Clementi changed the administrative structure to include more local Chinese, notably merchants and rural gentry, into the governance system and therefore to mitigate conflicts through improved local support.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the Canton government changed its attitudes towards labour after a political split between the CCP and the KMT. This weakened the strike's unity in action, and this in turn reduced striker pressure on the Hong Kong administration, thereby allowing local Chinese businesses to switch sides and give more support to the colonial government. By the end of 1925, strikers gradually returned to Hong Kong where the economy started to recover. Union funds dried up and the strike was weakened as the Canton government withdrew support, and in March 1926, the Canton government deprived the strike committee of the capacity to organise further strikes.⁶⁵ On 10th October 1926, the strike committee was officially dismissed, signalling the end of this lengthy struggle.⁶⁶

The British Labour Movement's Response to the 1925–6 Canton-Hong Kong Strike

In the context of the 1926 General Strike in Britain, Hong Kong workers' strength and mobility were regarded as impressive and extraordinary.⁶⁷ Although at the time the Hong Kong strike drew much attention to international relations, rather than labour unrest, the CPGB, the Labour Party, trade unions and pressure groups all made efforts to take part in campaigns to support Chinese workers.

Of particular significance was the 'Hands off China' campaign organised by sections of labour to support China's labour uprising. As a broad political, anti-war and anti-imperialist mobilisation, it consisted of a wide range of left forces, and at its peak, about 80 local committees were set up across Britain.⁶⁸ Calling for stronger support for the Chinese trade union movement to improve labour conditions, 'Hands off China' was initially aimed at protesting against the use of British forces to suppress workers and students in China and focusing on harsh industrial conditions in the light of the May 30th movement.⁶⁹

The early phase of 'Hands off China' started in June 1925 with scattered protests by the Chinese diaspora including students.⁷⁰ Initially, it was led by the CPGB and the ILP, mainly demanding the withdrawal of British military intervention from China, recognition of the Nationalist government, and the end of extra-territorial privileges.⁷¹ During the campaign, those involved believed that what was happening in China would have profound implications for 'the white domination of the coloured races in all parts of the world'.⁷² The Chinese were regarded now as potentially powerful actors in world politics, and the growth of a 'modern consciousness of nationality in China' should be recognised.⁷³ Leonard Woolf, a key intellectual figure in the socialist group and husband

of writer, Virginia, linked China to a 'world revolt' against Europe encompassing other modernising regimes in Turkey and Persia.⁷⁴ Despite all the constraints of an early-stage social movement, the 'Hands off China' campaign did offer significant support to Chinese workers' struggles against labour exploitation and poor working conditions.

The Leninists, embodied in the CPGB and its front organisations played a pivotal role in mobilising the public and collaborating with the wider left base; however, the party's relative isolation weakened its stance, and its proximity to the Soviet Union and Comintern made it difficult to develop wider unity.⁷⁵ The CPGB was the major force behind this movement, and the ILP and the Labour Party also took part in several simultaneous, and sometimes overlapping, activities since their anti-imperialism and anti-war targets were broadly the same. Individual members of these groups helped provide crucial reports through the China Information Bureau for the wider labour movement in Britain, and these were picked up by sympathetic outlets such as the Daily Herald, and some trade union journals. Such information links, despite limitations, were a vital source and contrasted with the official stories emanating from the government. The CPGB had limited success in disrupting actual British military preparations for the proposed China mission. This was due to the lack of a practical mobilisation focus, the weak connection with the broader labour movement, and the objections of the right-wing National Union of Seamen.⁷⁶

The Labour Party was generally sympathetic to Chinese workers and was involved in the 'Hands off China' campaign. Its moderate social democratic leadership was not as dedicated to the cause as those in the CPGB, and its split with the left wing ILP weakened its political influence on this matter. Overall, the Party supported broad anti-imperialist goals, China's national independence, and closer cooperation between the British and Chinese trade union and labour movements.⁷⁷ However, the formation of the 'Hands off China Committee' was officially opposed by the Labour Party Executive, and workers in struggle were enjoined to follow 'a more pacific attitude'.⁷⁸ This approach towards the intense struggle of the Chinese workers was said to be 'one of the ugliest chapters in the history of Social Democracy'.⁷⁹

During and after the 1925–26 labour unrest in China, Labour MPs, some being ILP members, continued pressing the Government to resolve the industrial action in Hong Kong. Labour MP Samuel Viant was among those who frequently tabled Parliamentary questions on this matter, as he quizzed the Secretary of State for the Colonies about the progress of resolving the Canton and Hong Kong strikes and how the British government dealt with the relationships with the nationalist Canton government.⁸⁰ On 22 March 1926, pressing the Secretary of State, he asked that 'what action, given the consequences of a continuation of the strike and boycott, is the Government prepared to take with a view to the resumption of negotiations?'⁸¹

Left-leaning intellectuals were among the group of activists taking part in China-related campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s. Many were inspired by China's nationalist uprising as 'a legitimizing source of resistance to ... challenge Western conventions, introspection and complacency'.⁸² The fast-growing nationalist movement in China made some British intellectuals, including writers Somerset Maugham and Robert Swallow, to reconsider the legitimacy of Britain having settlements there.⁸³

The best known of these was the mathematician, philosopher, Fabianite and pacifist Bertrand Russell who wrote widely about China, including the well-known *The Problem of China* which stated that the West 'must cease to regard ourselves as missionaries of a superior civilisation, or, worse still, as men who have a right to exploit, oppress, and swindle the Chinese because they are an "inferior" race'.⁸⁴ He claimed that 'the Chinese are not children and it is not practice ... to shoot children in the back with rifle bullets. Our rich men must learn to treat the Chinese justly and as equals'.⁸⁵

Russell was a founding member of both 'The Union for Democratic Control' and the 'British Labour Council for Chinese Freedom', which promoted peace by pressuring the British government to engage with China's nationalists.⁸⁶ While supporting China's labour movement and growing national consciousness, Russell was mindful of 'distinguishing between self-respect and hyper-nationalism'.⁸⁷ He was also active in helping the pro-KMT organisation, the China Information Bureau, founded in London in early 1925, with the left-wing politician Reginald Bridgeman as secretary. The Bureau distributed pro-China information in English, including the pamphlet entitled 'China's Case', which was widely circulated and used by opposition MPs to raise China-related questions and spread information about China to the British press, public, and Parliament.⁸⁸

British labour movement activists took part in anti-imperialist protests against the killings of unarmed Chinese demonstrators by British forces. One of the most prominent organisations at the time was the British Labour Council for Chinese Freedom, which was sponsored by the London Trades Council and chaired by George Hicks who was also the chair of the TUC General Council.⁸⁹ The Council had a wide impact in uniting leaders from both the Labour Party and unions through a peace movement and mobilising grassroots trade unions and political lobby groups.⁹⁰

Some trade union leaders were deeply involved in the 'Hands off China' campaign. In the aftermath of the May 30th incident, Alonzo Swales (TUC president 1925) and Walter Citrine (TUC assistant general secretary 1924–26 and general secretary 1926–44) sent a robust letter to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin on behalf of the TUC General Council to oppose the use of force against the Chinese strikers.⁹¹ In 1925, the TUC leader George Hicks called at a meeting for the start of a 'Hands off China' movement to back Chinese workers and students.⁹² The idea received wide support and was quickly followed by actions, with the campaign rallies regularly occurring throughout Britain until 1927.

On the other hand, despite an overall sympathy towards the suffering of the vast majority of Chinese people, the British labour movement consistently prioritised national interests. Trade unionists were often suspicious about the credentials of the various worker organisations in Canton and Hong Kong, treating their appeal for support as ‘going straight into the wastepaper basket’.⁹³ The unions’ initial responses were mainly focused on labour exploitation in China in the aftermath of the May 30th incident, and their attention was almost entirely distracted by the emerging industrial conflict in the British coal-mining industry.⁹⁴ It was only after the defeat of the General Strike in Britain and the start of the Chinese nationalists’ Northern Expedition in 1926 that unions took more notice of events unfolding in China.

The Canton-Hong Kong strike was the apex of a series of labour uprisings in early twentieth century China that ‘severely undermined British authority and prestige’ by engaging with nationalist sentiment.⁹⁵ It was a stark reminder of the vulnerability of the port city’s business and trade to workers’ collective struggles, and how the city’s close ties with mainland China could pose a threat to colonial rule. After the strike, in 1927, the colonial government enacted new legislation, the ‘Illegal Strike and Lockout Ordinance’. The new law proscribed all forms of industrial action hostile to the government deemed to be political in nature and imposed stricter controls over trade unions’ actions, external links, and use of financial resources.⁹⁶ Together with other offensive measures against organised labour, the colonial government clearly attempted to curb labour militancy and outlaw political strikes that were perceived as ‘designed or calculated to coerce the Government or by inflicting hardship upon the community’.⁹⁷

In mainland China, the nationalist government began an even more hostile suppression of the labour movement by closing down many union organisations and officially criminalising the CCP in 1927. During the 10-year period after the 1925–26 general strike, Hong Kong unions remained much quieter, and no sizeable strikes were recorded.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the 1925–26 legacy had a lasting effect on local workers’ social movement memories, and shaped their continuous struggles throughout the twentieth century. Meanwhile, the labour movement activities in the 1920s boosted Chinese unions’ development through organising, mobilisation, collective bargaining, strikes and membership growth. The ACFTU, which was at the centre of the 1925–26 strike and boycott, continued to develop and eventually became the only union federation with a legal mandate in China after the 1949 revolution.

The 1937 Trinidad Strike

The strikes and riots in Trinidad in the summer of 1937 were the culmination of years of worker unrest, mobilisation, and minor skirmishes. It was part of a wider range of labour disputes in the English-speaking West Indies from

1934 to 1939.⁹⁹ The special features of this strike were its roots in the oil fields rather than in plantation worker uprisings.¹⁰⁰ It had a major impact both in Trinidad where it triggered significant labour and political reforms and in the UK where a commission of inquiry was launched, with significant support from the labour movement.¹⁰¹

The strike, commonly referred to as the ‘Butler Riots’ (after its leader), was ‘one of those watershed’ movements in a country and region’s history.¹⁰² Starting among the oil workers and soon spreading throughout Trinidad, this ‘spontaneous general strike ... gave birth to the modern trade union movement in the island’.¹⁰³ These events ushered in a period of socio-political change that culminated in the attainment of independence in August 1962. The 1937 disturbances, leading to numerous deaths as strikes descended into riots, were of greater magnitude than the 1934–35 ones, which had been more localised.¹⁰⁴ But something was stirring among Trinidadian workers throughout 1937 – in January railwaymen formally presented their grievances to the employers¹⁰⁵ and by April *The Trinidad Guardian* reported that the ‘cost of living was soaring’ with food and clothes particularly vulnerable to rapid inflation.¹⁰⁶

The Trinidad economy in the 1930s was badly hit by the onslaught of the Great Depression, which led to ‘a rapid increase in unemployment, while already miserable living conditions of the urban poor and the sugar workers were made even more miserable. These circumstances brought a substantial popular reaction’.¹⁰⁷ One such a reaction came from the CPGB after the 1934–5 Trinidad labour disturbances, that ‘for many years unemployment ... low wages and shocking housing conditions have been the causes of many spontaneous demonstrations of labour unrest throughout the West Indies’.¹⁰⁸ This was followed by the retreat of Captain Cipriani as a moderate Fabian labour leader, and the rise of Uriah (Buzz) Butler under the umbrella of the National Unemployed Movement (later the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Association, NWCSA), side by side with the new left-leaning leaders of the Trinidad Workingman’s Association. Butler came to the forefront through the oil workers’ struggles and the 1935 Apex strike. By the spring of 1937, the *Trinidad Guardian* was regularly reporting labour unrest across the nation.¹⁰⁹

The spark came when the workers’ leader Butler planned a strike on 19th June, but, with advance knowledge of the action, the police moved in to arrest him. The fight that followed saw Butler going into hiding and the police with two dead. This moment led to a spiral of violence as the police and military attacked strikers who fought back and spread their action.

Oil workers were the main strike force. In 1937 Trinidad’s oil ‘was one of the most important sources of fuel for the British Empire, and British economic interests were heavily involved in the local oil industry’.¹¹⁰ The entire population was mobilised during the strikes, and

The actions of women on June 19, 1937, and the weeks thereafter were not only the result of spontaneous action, but, importantly, the result of the mobilizing efforts of Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler and his British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party... The NWCSA had also been mobilizing workers and the unemployed in north Trinidad as well as in the south. These efforts had succeeded in attracting large numbers of working-class women.¹¹¹

A Women's Committee was formed originally to support the sit-down strike in the early morning of 19th June. The police moved in but at the same time, oil wells at the Apex Company were set alight. This created chaos in which the police sought to arrest the strike leader, Buzz Butler, and this triggered a mass meeting of nearly 300 in the yard of Bhola's shop followed by island-wide riots.

When the police moved forward and attempted to arrest Butler, one police officer Corporal Charlie King 'was chased and eventually burnt to death ... [and] these events marked the beginning of three weeks of national unrest'.¹¹² In the following days, the riots spread quickly. As reported,

bands of women and men moved through the streets of the south by foot and in lorries and buses. They travelled from Point Fortin to San Fernando closing stores, interrupting traffic and threatening individuals. At ... Madeleine Sugar Factory, workers and servants were called out and white residential staff harassed and chased. By the night of June 21, the crowd numbered up to 400. In San Fernando telephone wires were cut and the power station attacked.¹¹³

The latter half of June saw an intensification of struggle:

tension increased in Trinidad's oil fields tonight as sit-down strikes spread to embrace workers in almost every oil area. Heavily armed police and deputized volunteers patrolled Fyzabad, where an English police inspector and a native corporal were killed last night. The deaths occurred during a seven-hour clash between police and oil workers attempting to stage this colony's first sit-down strike. Scores were injured. Governor Sir AGM Fletcher summoned warships of the West Indies Squadron of the British navy.¹¹⁴

The communist *Daily Worker*¹¹⁵ covered the same story:

Many islanders have been injured in struggles between police and oilfield strikers at Trinidad, provoked by attacks made by specially mobilised police on the strikers. It has been reported that, to intimidate the workers a British cruiser, the Ajax, has been sent from Nassau, Bahamas, to Trinidad ... Four hundred strikers faced the police attack with stones, bottles, hoes, sticks and shot guns.

The situation deteriorated the next day:

... six persons were dead and thirty-four known wounded tonight as authorities pushed the largest mobilization of police and volunteers on this island in thirty-four years to cope with a wave of sit-down strikes in Trinidad oil fields. One man was killed and eight were wounded tonight when deputized volunteers fired on a

mob of strikers who had raided the San Fernando telephone exchange in an attempt to cut off that town from communication with the rest of the strike-torn island. Two workmen and a boy were killed today when police fired on a crowd of striking United British Oil Company employees. Twenty persons were wounded. The shootings came after workmen paraded through San Fernando streets, disrupting all work. Trinidad's entire oil industry is paralyzed. The American operation at Pitch Lake was forced to shut down. Strikes spread to sugar estates and to docks and transport workers. A thousand employees of the Trinidad Leaseholds Refinery stopped work this morning after rejecting a compromise offer for wage increases. The Saint Madeline plant, the largest sugar factory within the British Empire, was forced to shut down. Strikers in the town of San Fernando paraded the streets, closed every business and stopped all work.¹¹⁶

Such reports in the British and American newspapers were derived in part from the extensive coverage of events in the Trinidad Guardian. Its front-page headlines on 22nd June reported that 'oilfield strikes under control' with a growing toll of dead and wounded including the killing of a fourteen-year-old boy, Emmanuel St Clair, in Point Fortin, with further deaths in San Fernando. The pro-government accounts continued on page 2 with references to 'mobs' and that strike breakers were receiving double pay. The struggle became more deadly:

four oil workers were killed and four others wounded in a clash between strikers and the police today as British sailors and marines were landed in an attempt to bring peace to the strike-torn island. The new casualties brought to twelve the list of dead in four days of disorders. At least thirty-two have been wounded. One violent clash occurred in Rio Clara, in central Trinidad, where a mob burned down the railway station, tore up the tracks and cut all telephone and telegraph lines, isolating the region. Four platoons of marines from the British cruiser Ajax ... landed at Pointe-a-Pierre and began setting up machine guns to protect the oil fields ... All business in Port of Spain was suspended because of the oil-field disturbances, where it is estimated, 5,000 workers are on strike. The entire oil industry was crippled, however, and much other business was suspended.¹¹⁷

The strike continued with the workers from sugar plantations joining up with others from factories, docks, and town-based employees in shops and government employment. The New York Times reported:

the toll of the Trinidad's strike riots mounted to fourteen dead and forty-four injured today as additional reports came from the interior of the island ... Workers demanded increased wages on the basis that living costs have risen, but a government statement declared "advantage of the situation has been taken by agitators ... The walkout spread to sugar plantations but appeared to make no further progress in Port of Spain, where stores reopened for business this morning". Both oil companies and sugar plantation managers sought to by-pass the strikes through the use of strike-breakers, security guards at all strategic points, and enlisting the direct support of the government and its military.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, the communists kept up their pro-striker commentary:

While the Governor of Trinidad, Sir A. G. Murchison Fletcher, was yesterday saying in a proclamation that he recognised that the cost of living had increased and promised the oil fields' strikers there that the Government would try to get a 'fair' agreement on the wages issue, if they would return, three platoons of marines landed from the second British war ship, to be rushed up. Two platoons of these marines, from H.M.S. Exeter, were stationed in the city and the third was drafted to the sugar fields, where the workers are also on strike. ... On Wednesday there was a lightning strike of the street scavengers in the Port of Spain, and the streets were left littered.¹¹⁹

The British authorities decided to drop propaganda leaflets with a plea from the Governor

to workers to end the strikes that had disrupted island business ... fruitless attempts at finding common ground for mediation between employers and strikers as a whole developed into plans for bargaining between single employers and their striking laborers. Government officials will not bargain with Uriah Butler, Negro organizer whose activities are said to have precipitated the strikes.¹²⁰

This tactic of cutting off the head of the protest movement was a well-worn stratagem by the British when faced with mass popular opposition. The British communists were clearer as to the realities on the ground: 'For years labour conditions have been abominable in Trinidad. Rising prices have now produced a wave of struggle for wage increase that has paralysed the island.'¹²¹

But while the local politicians and their corporate associates sought to defeat the strikers, the British government, despite its tendency to support such local elites, were back peddling with exhortations for industrial peace through negotiations.¹²² This was in part due to incessant pressure from the British labour movement and increasing calls for public oversight of the behaviour of the planters and oil company executives.

By the end of June, it was over. The aftermath was painful as both sides regrouped, but the issue of police brutality was raised by the media. The *Daily Worker* reported¹²³:

POLICE terrorism in Trinidad during the strikes ... has been so merciless that even the Government have been forced to turn their attention to it. Sir Murchison Fletcher, Governor of the Island, has ordered an inquiry into police-action ... Twenty-three persons were arrested, five women and four men for the murder of Charlie King, the rest for unlawful assembly. The following week, seven more arrests were made ... All were eventually acquitted. These strikes and disturbances continued throughout the country until July 6, 1937. In the end 14 people had died, 59 wounded and hundreds arrested. Two thousand four hundred and ten armed men had been used to crush the disturbances.

For both the colonial government and the future of the Trinidad labour movement, the implications of the 1937 general strike were far-reaching. Soon after

the end of the strike, the governor and the colonial secretary were dismissed for being too sympathetic to the strikers' grievances, 'while for the first time a substantial number of workers' organizations sought and were granted recognition as trade unions'.¹²⁴ The government was forced into some concessions – government employees were given a pay rise and their daily hours reduced from nine to eight. However, even though the oil workers received a 25 per cent pay rise, the 'hunt for Butler continued as the Governor sought to uncouple the industrial and political struggles'.¹²⁵

British Labour Movement Response to the Trinidad Strike

In Britain, the CPGB led the way in reporting these events and calling for solidarity action. The communists were the main force for change in the colonies taking an essentially Leninist line on imperialism, while some sections of the social democratic labour and trade union movement were also moved to support the cause of West Indian labour.¹²⁶ The communists were quick to report the uprising linking industrial, social, and political issues. As the Colonial Information Bulletin (CIB) reported,

a strike wave on an unprecedented scale has broken out in Trinidad ... when Negro oilfield workers demanded an increase in wages from 31/2d to 6d per hour to meet the rising cost of living. The managers of the oil companies refused to negotiate with the workers' representatives and the strike soon spread to other oilfields, asphalt lakes and the sugar factories, bringing the whole industrial life of the southern part of the island to a standstill.¹²⁷

They linked up with leading West Indian activists based in London through the League of Coloured People and its influential journal, *The Keys*.¹²⁸

The CIB¹²⁹ report continues with further details of the strike:

the strike involved thousands of Negro and Indian workers. In Trinidad, native labourers live in barracks owned by the oil companies and plantations, so that whenever they attempt to strike, they are immediately threatened with eviction. It was while the police were attempting to carry out these measures at the behest of the employers that fighting began.

The CPGB called for British workers to 'support the Trinidad strikers'.¹³⁰ It demanded that

every assistance must be given to them in their struggle for better economic and social conditions and vigorous protests made against the repressive measures of the employers and the authorities of the Trinidad Government to deprive them of the right to collective bargaining and trade unionism.¹³¹

The CPGB urged trade unionists and political activists:

resolutions should be adopted and sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies as well as to the Governor of Trinidad, protesting against the threat to charge workers' leaders with murder, rioting and rebellion. Demands should also be strongly

voiced for the setting up of an impartial commission to inquire into the grievances of the Trinidad workers and the institution of reforms making for the general social and economic progress of the toiling masses of the island. Insistence should be made upon the inclusion of representatives of working-class organisations on this Commission.¹³²

After the Trinidad disturbances Labour MPs 'took a keen interest in West Indian affairs' by communicating with several labour leaders in West Indians through the Party's International Department.¹³³ The British parliament again debated the circumstances of these events with a key demand from all sections of the British labour movement for a commission of inquiry. This was seen as forcing the government to recognise the seriousness of the situation, the threat to stability, an admission of the terrible plight of the workers, and the chronic failure of the local regimes. The debates in the House of Commons reflected this urgency.

One such debate¹³⁴ started when David Adams asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies Ormsby-Gore

whether he has received a full report of the recent debate in the Trinidad Legislature, when the Governor declared that the sugar industry might well consider paying no dividend till labour conditions are better and the Colonial Secretary described the workers' conditions on the sugar estates as economic slavery; and whether, in view of these statements, he will expedite the setting up of a Royal Commission?

Ormsby-Gore replied: 'No, Sir. I have not yet received a report of that debate. I am proceeding as rapidly as possible with the appointment of a commission of inquiry'. Two days later the debate continued¹³⁵ with the ubiquitous William Lunn MP asking the Secretary of State for the Colonies for 'the names of the Commission to inquire into the recent labour dispute in Trinidad and the terms of reference.' Ormsby-Gore replied:

I have invited certain gentlemen to serve on this Commission, ... Its terms of reference will be: To inquire into and report upon the origin and character of the recent disturbances in the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago and all matters relating thereto, to consider the adequacy of the steps taken to deal with those disturbances, and to make recommendations.

Labour MPs were concerned that the Commission would exonerate both the British Government and the government of Trinidad. To that end, they pushed on the limits of terms of reference and were especially concerned that matters of wages and dispute resolution should be dealt with. The pressure from the wider labour movement meant that these key issues remained on the table when the government intervened, and was apparent when the parliamentary debate continued.¹³⁶ David Adams asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies 'whether the commission ... will make a survey of industrial legislation and of questions affecting the regulation of industrial disputes?' The acting secretary of state, Sir A. Lambert Ward, replied that 'It will be for the

commission to decide what inquiries they will make in order that they may be able to report upon the matters covered by their terms of reference'. This matter of wages and strikes continued to exercise the MPs as they sought assurances, from both sides, as to the impartial nature of the inquiry. After further prompting, the names of the Commissioners were released with seven members, all white men and with one trade union representative, Sir Arthur Pugh. The UK members of the Commission left London on the 21st of August.

The report of the 'Forster' commission of inquiry largely dismissed the employers' familiar refrain that the strikes and riots were caused by outside agitators (mainly unnamed communists) and focussed on the substantive issues: 'housing and insanitary conditions, lack of contact between employers and workers, failure to operate existing social legislation, low wages, rise in the cost of living without a corresponding increase in pay.'¹³⁷ Much of the blame was put at the door of the 'oil-minded' Trinidad government, which had neglected the majority concerns of the agricultural realm and had rowed back on land reform. Indeed, the report further expressed surprise that sugar estate managers and government officers declared themselves unaware of the shocking housing and health situation.

The roles of wage setting, trade union rights, and collective bargaining were high on the committee agenda partly set by Sir Arthur Pugh after pressure from the TUC and some Labour MPs. However, the sugar plantation managers acting on behalf of the absentee owners opposed all forms of trade unions. Pugh proposed, as the only way forward to prevent further strikes, trade union recognition and collective bargaining as in the UK. Such solutions suited the oil companies more than the sugar plantation owners. It also gave impetus to the wider labour movement especially when Pugh himself addressed two meetings supporting workers' rights and their demands. The TUC, as usual slow to act, added its voice to an inquiry:

the disturbances which have taken place in the British West Indies are not without cause. A public survey of labour standards and conditions is absolutely imperative. I am certain that the citizens of this country do not want to be a party to the exploitation of dependent coloured people.¹³⁸

Indeed, Basdeo¹³⁹ attributes the Trinidad strikes and their aftermath in introducing Walter Citrine, the powerful TUC General Secretary, to the struggles in the West Indies. This resulted in the setting up the TUC Special Colonial Advisory Committee 'to see how far the TUC committee contributes towards raising' the standard of life.¹⁴⁰ Citrine later played a major part in the Moyne Commission,¹⁴¹ which was the watershed moment in the reform of labour standards in the West Indies, and the start along the road to trade union rights and full independence. In his talk in London in March 1939 in response to the lack of action by European governments over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Arthur Lewis made a similar point on the growth of working-class

consciousness and the rise of trade unions, one main example being the rapid expansion of the Trinidad oil workers' union during the 1937 strike.¹⁴²

When the commission report¹⁴³ was published with its vivid account of the appalling conditions of the workforce and their families, the reaction set in. While at both the British and Trinidadian government levels there was official commitment to trade union recognition and collective bargaining, both sought to limit the meaning of such by decoupling this from political reforms and by branding the union leaders as political beings with a political agenda. By late October more troops arrived from Bermuda on the cruiser HMS York 'to prevent disturbances after the publication of the report'.¹⁴⁴ A further consignment from the Sherwood Foresters Regiment arrived as the Governor argued that: 'there is a recalcitrant element of mischief-makers trying to destroy confidence and stir up strife, and the government will use all the means in its power to crush lawlessness and disorder'. This theme continued for the rest of the year with troops stationed in the oil fields, with the Governor arguing that he would support normal bargaining between workers and their employers but would stamp out 'ill-disposed persons' causing disorder. According to the New York Times, the main such person, Butler,

was found guilty of sedition ... the trial lasted twelve days and caused the greatest excitement in Trinidad as hundreds surrounded the court house daily. Butler was charged with telling workers that "he would shed blood" to gain his ends and defied the authority of the King and ridiculed justice in Trinidad.¹⁴⁵

The importance of these Trinidad strikes lay in the oil industry. Most of the rest of the British West Indies were overwhelmingly agricultural, and according to communist analysts, they were less likely to develop a working-class consciousness. This feature was captured by a CPGB report: 'the unrest in Trinidad has as its foundation the chronic poverty of the inhabitants who, like most of the people in the West Indian islands, are agricultural labourers. Trinidad, with its pitch lake, of all the islands, offers a possibility of developing an industry apart from agriculture. The oil industry centring on the pitch lake, is in the hands of several British and American companies ... The workers employed in this industry are the highest paid in the island, but no machinery existed for bargaining between employers and labour which was victimised and unable to secure its demands for increased wages, overtime, proper housing conditions and holidays'.¹⁴⁶

Arthur Lewis commented upon the strikes in the oil fields in the summer of 1937. He provided a useful counter to official reports and laid out both the profitability of the largest companies and the falling living standards of the workforce as the main causes of the strike.¹⁴⁷ Lewis gave a report to the Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions (private and confidential memo 192, February 1938). In it he pointed out that five major oil companies accounted for 88 per cent of production and all belonged to the

Petroleum Association, a *de facto* cartel, and ‘we are glad that the recent strikes in Trinidad have drawn attention forcibly to the depressing labour conditions’.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the Trinidad Governor had already spoken of the need for reforms to reduce ‘exploitation’ through a minimum wage, suggesting that his change of heart had been forced by the strike waves. Elsewhere, similar ‘disturbances’ were experienced in St Kitts, Barbados, St Lucia, British Honduras, St Vincent, Jamaica, and British Guiana.¹⁴⁹ The disturbances were due to the ‘oppressive living and labour conditions’, while the blame rested directly with the Colonial Office in London and ‘indirectly with every British voter’, rather than so-called agitators.¹⁵⁰

How best to respond to the situation in Trinidad and how to heighten awareness in Britain of the plight of West Indian workers in struggle became part of the intense in-fighting among fracturing left groups. West Indian activists based in London took part in the influential debates inside the various Marxist groups that linked up with both the Leninists in the CPGB and some leftwingers in the Socialist League, ILP, and trade unions. For example, CLR James later described how

among the oilfield workers in Trinidad, the largest proletarian grouping in the West Indies, a strike began. Like a fire along a tinder track, it spread to the entire island, ending in an upheaval at the other end of the curve, in Jamaica, thousands of miles away.¹⁵¹

The British authorities, blind as ever to the realities on the ground, sought to impose their political authority through ever more draconian measures, as in October 1937, when ‘A state of emergency’ was declared, and the Port of Spain Gazette felt the general strike had created a situation ‘which assumed a proportion previously unknown in the history of labour agitation’ in Trinidad.¹⁵²

But the labour movement continued to be divided on its response to the aftermath of the Trinidad strikes. Campbell¹⁵³ amongst others is highly critical of the Fabians, the majority position of the Labour Party, and that shared with British TUC and main constituent unions. She argues that the links between key players in the Trinidadian labour movement and the communist international, including CPGB cadres, meant that the non-communist and anti-communist labour movement sections in the UK were alarmed by the threat of communist influence and sought, through institutional and political links, to push for reforms over trade union and worker rights, rather than support independence and political change. As Gupta argues,

The Trinidad riots had built up a considerable sense of class-solidarity in British Labour circles with fellow workers in the colony, [and] ... The “watchful” care of the British TUC consisted in a preference for institutions which while quite radical by any standards would discourage spontaneous action at the grass-roots.¹⁵⁴

Discussion

The significance of these two important labour struggles lies largely in the collective strength demonstrated by workers, unions, and their allies. They both illustrate, in their own ways, a living basis for ‘workers of the world unite’ backed up in the ways in which the British labour movement was involved. This strength signalled the growing consciousness of colonial workers in the inter-war years and their struggles eventually threatened imperial interests. Support from the British labour movement forced the hand of indifferent governments and awakened some desire for reform inside the Colonial Office. Old certainties were quickly replaced by new assessments of the need for speedy, if limited, reforms. The two separate strikes, though occurring on opposite sides of the globe, share some remarkable similarities in aspects of the conduct and consequences of each struggle. The workers in Hong Kong were mainly Han Chinese with no overt religion, while those in Trinidad came from both the descendants of black African slaves with strong Christian beliefs laced with some residual African traditions, and the descendants of indentured Indian labourers who were mainly Hindus. Furthermore, while the Trinidadians lived on a small island off the coast of Venezuela, the people of Hong Kong were part of the immense landmass of China.

Both Hong Kong and Trinidad workers showed great courage in their struggles against powerful opponents and demonstrated that they were capable of impressive and effective organisation – a factor that surprised and worried the Colonial Office mandarins. As a result, British rule was significantly challenged and weakened by the strikes, which nurtured workers’ awareness of the necessity to overthrow the imperial authority. The central role of trade unionism in both its industrial forms of strikes against employers and political struggles against imperial authority alarmed the authorities in Whitehall as they faced their own trade union revolt at home. These events resonated with, and were supported by, the British labour movement, including political and union activists, and such backing put pressure on the British government to eventually settle the strikes. In both cases, the British and colonial governments took a hard-line approach to strikers by using political, legal, and lethal force to suppress the strikes and protect the colonies’ business interests.

The causes and consequences of the two labour struggles are quite unlike in several ways. The Hong Kong case was largely a political and sympathetic revolt against imperialists in China, whereas the Trinidad strike mainly hinged on market relations through demands for better pay and working and living conditions. There was a strong presence of the West Indian diaspora in Britain providing information and more pronounced support to Trinidad strikers, but the British Chinese community was quite small in the 1920s and their support was insignificant. The labour unrest in Trinidad had a substantial, lasting effect on its independent movement after WWII; but this did not occur in Hong Kong

after the 1925/6 strike due to weak working-class development, strong British rule, and the opposition of an influential Chinese business community.

The responses from the British labour movement varied between different left-wing groups, owing to their ideological positions on colonial workers' struggles. The CPGB was a major force in developing class consciousness, advocating socialism, and fighting for colonial independence. It used its clear Leninist position to inform the wider movement of events in Hong Kong and Trinidad and was able to show common interests with those colonial workers in struggle. As such it could draw on like-minded sympathisers in the wider movement, including Labour MPs and trade union activists. The broader social-democratic labour movement was slower to act and to recognise the serious plight of their fellow workers and trade unionists in the colonies. Their position was more reactive and energised by stories of police brutality, armed forces killings, and local political and industrial suppression. The social democrats did not like the exploitation, the violence, and the denial of rights. They set about pushing the government for reform through commissions of inquiry, and with the establishment of labour standards, trade unionism, and collective bargaining rights. This was more apparent in the West Indies than in China, partly as a result of the pressure from London-based West Indian activists, and partly due to self-interest as another European war loomed. As Malmsten pointed out, despite the Labour Party's advocacy on publicising Trinidad's labour problems through Parliament and various policy commissions and meetings in the aftermath of the 1937 disturbance, the Party 'showed a marked reluctance to provide economic answers to colonial problems.'¹⁵⁵

These two disputes were rooted in the nature of British colonial rule. The interdependence of local governors and executives with large corporations created the conditions for the degradation of the workforce mainly to guarantee cheap and compliant labour but always with racist aspects of white superiority. The absence of rights, legal and political for the workers and their wider community meant there was no democratic and peaceful means by which the two sides could communicate and come to terms. As a result, when disturbances arose, the British authorities resorted to killings, beatings, imprisonment, and the outlawing of seditious materials. Hand in hand with such tactics was the tendency to lump all strikers as communists and arrest their leaders – just like cutting off the head of the Hydra. This made it harder to resolve the disputes.

Despite the Colonial Office's complacent ignorance of events on the ground, they, nonetheless, under the political leadership of both Labour and Conservative governments, managed to allow a free hand to local politicians and their industrialist backers. The pattern of response was therefore independent of the realities faced: no concessions leading to strikes and riots, the violent suppression of the disturbances, and when that failed some efforts at limited

reform. But there was no easy ride at home. The labour movement managed, through various routes, to harry and hassle the government into faster and more wide-ranging reforms. Through persistent questions in Parliament, motions at union and political conferences, pamphlets and newspaper stories, and appeals to the community, collectively the shove from labour was sufficient to change government policy.

By evaluating the causes, conduct and consequences of the two strike cases, this article brings together the intriguing crosscurrent of labour struggles in two separate, far-away British colonies, one in the West Indies and another in the Far East. The analysis highlights some of the significant common factors shared by the two movements, uncovering the relevance of support among the British labour movement for reform overseas as part of fighting for reform at home against a common enemy. The comparison allows us to gain insight, from different spatial perspectives¹⁵⁶ into the responses from the British labour movement to the two labour struggles. In both cases, the British political elite including the Conservative government and representatives of large corporations knew of the situation and responded as they always did with indifference, casual violence, and then some feeble offers of reform. Yet in both events, the British labour movement could only offer limited support to the colonies' workers due to ideological splits.

Then, as now, British workers' responses to the fate of workers overseas were mixed up with racism, pride in the Empire – a reminder of Kipling's 'white man's burden'¹⁵⁷, and self-interested trade and job issues, alongside sentiments of solidarity and fraternity. This reflects the 'historical traditions' of the British labour movement in supporting colonies' trade union development and worker organising that might stabilise colonial rule.¹⁵⁸ It shows how, in the 1920s and 1930s, the Labour Party was perplexed by 'a gulf between the party and colonial workers on the one hand, and left-wing trade unionists on the other while it had to embrace the cause of the British Empire and anti-communism'.¹⁵⁹ With the unsettling divide between the Leninists and the rest of the labour movement represented by the Labour Party, continuous heterogeneity and disunity prevented them from offering a coherent defence of those colonial workers on strike, and resulted in their mixed response towards workers' struggles in the two colonies. It took the more politically aware sections of the British labour movement to point to the common cause, to issue the call for solidarity, and to suggest realistic labour reforms.

Notes

1. Levin and Chiu, "Trade Union Growth Waves in Hong Kong"; Hart, *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s*.
2. Seifert, "'Red Friday', 31 July 1925: Unity Constructed and Deconstructed".
3. Murray, *The General Strike of 1926*.

4. Bolland, *On the March*; Seifert, "The British Labour Movement Responses to Strikes and Riots in the English-speaking West Indies 1934–1939".
5. Elkins, "Black Power in the British West Indies".
6. Buchanan, *East Wind*; Westmaas, "Firebrands, Trade Unionists and Marxists".
7. Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 31–41.
8. Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*.
9. Swain, "Was the Profintern Really Necessary?".
10. Høgsbjerg, "'A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain'".
11. William, *Making the Revolution Global*.
12. Louro et al., *The League against Imperialism*.
13. Pimlott, "The Socialist League".
14. Cohen, "The Independent Labour Party 1932–1939"; Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*.
15. Gupta, "The Second Labour Government"; Taylor, *English History 1914–1945*.
16. Cole, *Organised Labour*.
17. Ibid., 1–2.
18. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*; Adi, "Caribbean Anti-colonial Activists in Britain before World War Two".
19. Killingray, "'To Do Something for the Race'".
20. Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Form of Capitalism*.
21. Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Formation and Early Years, 1919–1924*.
22. Thorpe, *A history of the British Labour Party*.
23. Schneider, "Fabians and the Utilitarian Idea of Empire".
24. Buchanan, *East Wind*.
25. Pugh, "Some Impressions of a Tropical Island"; Forster, *Commission of Inquiry*.
26. Jones, "Labour Problems in the Colonies".
27. Palme Dutt, "Labour and the Empire, CPGB Pamphlet," 65.
28. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*.
29. Jones, "Labour Problems in the Colonies," 5.
30. Blackmur, *Strikes*.
31. Peak, *Troops in Strikes*.
32. Hain, *Political Strikes*.
33. Bayly, "Forward".
34. Seifert, *The Transport and General Workers' Union*.
35. England and Rear, *Chinese Labour under British Rule*.
36. Buchanan, "China and the British Left in the Twentieth Century," 70.
37. Selden, "Labor Unrest in China, 1831–1990," 73.
38. Buchannan, "China and the British Left," 71.
39. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*.
40. Ng and Ip, "Dialectics of Capitalism".
41. Levin and Chiu, "Trade Union Growth Waves in Hong Kong".
42. So, "Changing Patterns of Class and Status-Group Struggles in Hong Kong".
43. Administrative Report for the Year 1920, Noronha, Hong Kong, 1921, C14.
44. Chan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society*, 41.
45. Chen, "The Labour Movement in China," 357.
46. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*.
47. Levin and Chiu, "Trade Union Growth Waves in Hong Kong," 43.
48. Kwan, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Chinese Labor Movement*.
49. Motz, "Great Britain, Hong Kong, and Canton".
50. The Kotewall Report. REPORT to the Hong Kong Governor 5, October 1925.

51. Ng and Ip, "Dialectics of Capitalism".
52. Hon and Chan, "A Voice from the Margins".
53. Ibid., 49.
54. Bickers, *Britain in China*.
55. So, "Changing Patterns of Class".
56. Chen, "The Labour Movement in China".
57. Selden, "Labor Unrest in China".
58. See Ordinance No.3 of 1888, pt. VII, 51 (H,K.), in Klein, "The Empire Strikes Back".
59. Knüsel, "British Conservatives, the Red Menace and Antiforeign Agitation in China, 1924–1927," 62.
60. *New York Times*, "Hong Kong Exiles Idlers", July 7th (1925): 6.
61. Klein, "The Empire Strikes Back," 7.
62. The Kotewall Report, 1925.
63. Klein, "The Empire Strikes Back," 79.
64. Hon and Chan, "A Voice from the Margins," 42–43).
65. Ibid.
66. Horrocks, "The Guangzhou-Hongkong Strike, 1925–1926".
67. Ng and Ip, "Dialectics of Capitalism".
68. Buchannan, "China and the British Left," 542.
69. Buchanan, *East Wind*, 30.
70. Ibid., 31.
71. Knusel, "British Conservatives, the Red Menace and Antiforeign Agitation in China, 1924–1927".
72. Buchanan, *East Wind*, 12.
73. *Daily Herald*, February 8, 1927.
74. *Daily Herald*, October 12, 1927.
75. Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1925–1926*, 305–312.
76. Buchannan, *East Wind*, 33.
77. SACU, 2023.
78. *The Times*, September 25, 1926.
79. IPC, January 28, 1927.
80. Hansard source, various dates.
81. Hansard source: Citation: HC Deb, March 22, 1926, c847.
82. See C.G. MacAndrew in Hansard Commons Debates, 5th ser., vol. 202, col. 17: 08 Feb 1927, cited by Chow, "British Opinion and Policy Towards China, 1922–1927," 84.
83. Sun, "Geography of a "Foreign" China," 8.
84. Russell, *The Problem of China*, 11.
85. "China Asserts Herself: Imperialism in a Quandary", *New Leader*, August 28, 1925.
86. Paisley, Bertrand Russell and China During and After His Visit in 1920, 185. Note the Union of Democratic Control was founded in 1914, and British Labour Council for Chinese Freedom was founded in 1926.
87. Ibid., 182.
88. Ibid., 179.
89. SACU, 2023.
90. Ibid.
91. Buchanan, *East Wind*, 31.
92. FO 371/11669 F 4821/58/10 Report from Scotland Yard.
93. Buchanan, *East Wind*, 30.
94. Ibid., 32.

95. Wan, "The Guangdong-Hong Kong Nexus in Grassroots Collective Actions Amid Sino-Anglo Interface," 254.
96. Levin and Chiu, "Trade Union Growth Waves in Hong Kong," 44.
97. Hong Kong Hansard, 1927, 36.
98. Ng and Ip, "Dialectics of Capitalism".
99. See Knowles, *Trade Union Development*; Bolland, *On the March*; Hart, *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean Region Colonies*; Seifert, "The British Labour Movement Responses to Strikes and Riots in the English-speaking West Indies 1934–1939".
100. Johnson, "Oil, Imperial Policy and the Trinidad Disturbances, 1937".
101. Forster, *Commission of Inquiry*.
102. Walonen, "Resistance, Oil, and Awakening," 59.
103. Alexander and Parker, *A History of Organized Labor in the English-speaking West Indies*, 291.
104. Basdeo, "The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Development of Labour Organisation in Trinidad 1929–1938," 40–73; Jacobs, "The Politics of Protest in Trinidad," 5–54.
105. *Trinidad Guardian*, January 5, 1937, 1.
106. *Ibid.*, April 13, 1937, 1.
107. Alexander and Parker, *A History of Organized Labor in the English-speaking West Indies*, 289.
108. Colonial Information Bulletin, July 15, 1937, no.11 (7), 2.
109. *Trinidad Guardian*, May 20, 1937, 1.
110. Reddock, "Women Workers' Struggles in the British Colonial Caribbean," 29.
111. *Ibid.*
112. *Ibid.*, 30–32.
113. *Ibid.*
114. *New York Times*, June 21, 1937, 4.
115. *Daily Worker*, June 22, 1937, 2.
116. *New York Times*, June 22, 1937, 18.
117. *Ibid.*, June 23, 1937, 16.
118. *Ibid.*, June 24, 1937, 12.
119. *Daily Worker*, June 25, 1937, 5.
120. *New York Times*, June 26, 1937, 6.
121. *Daily Worker*, June 26, 1937, 4.
122. *Trinidad Guardian*, June 24, 1937.
123. *Ibid.*, July 1, 1937, 2.
124. Alexander and Parker, *A History of Organized Labor in the English-speaking West Indies*, 292.
125. *New York Times*, July 6, 1937, 7.
126. Gupta, "The Second Labour Government"; Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*.
127. Colonial Information Bulletin, July 15, 1937, vol 1 (7), 2.
128. Morris, "Moody—the Forgotten Visionary 1972"; Rush, "Imperial Identity in Colonial Minds: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples, 1931–50"; Killingray, "To Do Something for the Race".
129. CIB, July 15, 1937, vol 1 (7), 2.
130. *Ibid.*, vol 1 (7), 3.
131. *Ibid.*
132. *Ibid.*

133. Malmsten, "The British Labour Party," 191.
134. HC Deb, July 19, 1937, vol 326 c1795W1795W.
135. HC Deb, July 21, 1937, vol 326 cc2190-32190.
136. HC Deb, July 28, 1937, vol 326 cc3083-63083.
137. CIB, November 15, 1937, vol 1 (15), 8.
138. President's address by Ernest Bevin, TUC Congress in Norwich, Annual Report, 74.
139. Basdeo, "The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Development of Labour Organisation in Trinidad 1929–1938".
140. TUC Colonial Advisory Committee memo, December 22, 1937.
141. Basdeo, "Walter Citrine and the British Caribbean Workers' Movement"; Moyne, *Royal Commission*.
142. *Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1939, 6.
143. Forster, Cmd. 5641, 1937.
144. *New York Times* October 31, 1937, 26.
145. *Ibid.*, December 17, 1937, 5.
146. CIB, December 15, 1937, vol 1 (17), 10.
147. *The Keys*, volume V No. 4, April–June 1938, 81.
148. *Ibid.*, No. 2, October–December 1937, 45.
149. Seifert, "The British Labour Movement Responses to Strikes and Riots in the English-speaking West Indies 1934–1939".
150. *The Keys*, No. 2, October–December 1937, 45.
151. Høgsbjerg, "'A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain'," 8.
152. *Port of Spain Gazette*, June 23, 1937.
153. Campbell, "En'less Pressure".
154. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*, 253.
155. Malmsten, "The British Labour Party and the West Indies, 1918–39," 198.
156. Berger and Patmore, "Comparative Labour History in Britain and Australia," 10.
157. Kipling, "The White Man's Burden".
158. Kelemen, "Modernising Colonialism," 223.
159. Avril and Béliard, "The British Labour Movement Between Unity and Division".

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Xuebing Cao  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9392-2554>

Roger Seifert  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4091-0784>

References

- Adi, H. "Caribbean Anti-colonial Activists in Britain Before World War Two." *BL blog* (2018).
- Alexander, R. J., and E. M. Parker. *A History of Organized Labor in the English-speaking West Indies*. New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004.

- Avril, E., and Y. Béliard. "Introduction: The British Labour Movement Between Unity and Division." In *Labour United and Divided from the 1830s to the Present*, edited by E. Avril, and Y. Béliard, 1–18. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018.
- Basdeo, S. "The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Development of Labour Organisation in Trinidad 1929–1938." *Social and Economic Studies* 31, no. 1 (1982): 40–73.
- Basdeo, S. "Walter Citrine and the British Caribbean Workers Movement During the Moyne Commission Hearing 1938–9." *The Journal of Caribbean History* 18, no. 2 (1983): 43–65.
- Bayly, C., Foreword to Gupta, P. S. *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*. London: SAGE Publications, 2002.
- Berger, S., and G. Patmore. "Comparative Labour History in Britain and Australia." *Labour History* 88 (May 2005): 9–24.
- Bickers, R. *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900–49*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.
- Blackmur, D. *Strikes: Causes, Conduct & Consequences*. Sydney: Federation Press, 1993.
- Bolland, O. N. *On The March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934–1939*. Kingston: Ian Randle, 1995.
- Buchanan, T. *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925–1976*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Buchanan, T. "China and the British Left in the Twentieth Century: Transnational Perspectives." *Labor History* 54, no. 5 (2013): 540–553.
- Campbell, S. "En'less Pressure: The Struggles of a Caribbean Working-Class in Their International Context." Trinidad, 1919–1956. PhD, Queen's University at Kingston, 1996.
- Chan, W. K. *The Making of Hong Kong Society: Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Chen, T. "The Labour Movement in China." *International Labour Review* XV, no. 3 (1927): 339–363.
- Chow, P. "British Opinion and Policy Towards China, 1922–1927." Doctoral diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011.
- Cohen, G. "The Independent Labour Party 1932–1939." PhD thesis, University of York, 2000.
- Cohen, G. *The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007.
- Cole, G. D. H. *Organised Labour*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1924.
- Elkins, W. F. "Black Power in the British West Indies: The Trinidad Longshoremen's Strike of 1919." *Science & Society* 33, no. 1 (1969): 71–75.
- England, J., and J. Rear. *Chinese Labour Under British Rule: A Critical Study of Labour Relations and law in Hong Kong*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Forster, J. *Great Britain Commission on Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances 1937 Report*. London: HMSO Cmd, 5641, 1938.
- Great Britain Parliament. *Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances, 1937: Report of Commission, Cmd 5641*. London: HMSO, 1937.
- Gupta, P. S. *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*. London: SAGE Publications India, 2002.
- Gupta, P. S. *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1975.
- Hain, P. *Political Strikes*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Hart, R. *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean Region Colonies*. Published jointly by Caribbean Labour Solidarity and the Socialist History Society, 2002.
- Høgsbjerg, C. "'A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain': CLR James and the Caribbean Labour Rebellions of the 1930s." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 15, no. 2 (2011): 24–42.

- Hon, T. K., and H. Y. Chan. "A Voice from the Margins: Collaborative Colonialism of Hong Kong, 1925–1930." In *Contesting Chineseness: Ethnicity, Identity, and Nation in China and Southeast Asia*, edited by T. K. Hon, and H. Y. Chan, 41–57. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2021.
- Horrocks, R. J. "The Guangzhou-Hongkong Strike, 1925–1926: Hong Kong Workers in an Anti-imperialist Movement." Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1994.
- Jacobs, W. R. "The Politics of Protest in Trinidad: The Strikes and Disturbances of 1937." *Caribbean Studies* 17, no. 1/2 (1977): 5–54.
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 1938. Reprint, London: Penguin, 2001.
- Johnson, H. "Oil, Imperial Policy and the Trinidad Disturbances, 1937." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 4, no. 1 (1975): 29–54.
- Jones, A. C. "Labour Problems in the Colonies." In *Labour* (September 1937): 15.
- Kelemen, P. "Modernising Colonialism: The British Labour Movement and Africa." *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 2 (2006): 223–244.
- Killingray, D. "'To Do Something for the Race': Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples." In *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, edited by B. Schwarz, 51–70. Manchester University Press, 2018.
- Kipling, R. "The White Man's Burden." *McClure's Magazine* 12 (February 1899).
- Klein, R. "The Empire Strikes Back: Britain's use of the Law to Suppress Political Dissent in Hong Kong." *Boston University International Law Journal* 15, no. 1 (1997): 1–70.
- Klugmann, J. *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Formation and Early Years, 1919–1924*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969a.
- Klugmann, J. *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, The General Strike, 1925–1926*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969b.
- Knowles, W. H. *Trade Union Development and Industrial Relations in the British West Indies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959.
- Knüsel, A. "British Conservatives, the Red Menace and Antiforeign Agitation in China, 1924–1927." *Cultural History* 2, no. 1 (2013): 62–92.
- Kwan, D. Y. *Marxist Intellectuals and the Chinese Labor Movement: A Study of Deng Zhongxia (1894–1933)*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997.
- Lenin, V. L. *Imperialism the Highest Form of Capitalism*. 1933 ed. London: Martin Lawrence, 1916.
- Levin, D. A., and S. W. Chiu. "Trade Union Growth Waves in Hong Kong." *Labour History* 75 (1998): 40–56.
- Louro, M. L., C. Stolte, H. Streets-Salter, and S. Tannoury-Karam, eds. *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020.
- Lukács, G. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972.
- Malmsten, N. R. "The British Labour Party and the West Indies, 1918–39." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 5, no. 2 (1977): 172–205.
- Morris, S. "Moody—the Forgotten Visionary." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1, no. 3 (1972): 193–196.
- Motz, E. J. "Great Britain, Hong Kong, and Canton: The Canton-Hong Kong Strike and Boycott of 1925–26." Unpublished PhD thesis, Michigan State University, 1972.
- Moyne, W. *The Report of West India Royal Commission*. London: HMSO, Cmd. 6607, 1945.
- Murray, J. *The General Strike of 1926*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1951.
- Ng, S. H., and O. Ip. "Dialectics of Capitalism: A Revisit to the Hong Kong Chinese Labor Movement and Perlman's Model." *Labor History* 45, no. 4 (2004): 450–496.
- "Note on Situation in China." June 30, 1925, TNA WO 106/79.

- Padmore, G. *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers, Red International of Labour Unions for the*. London: International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1931.
- Paisley, J. "Bertrand Russell and China During and After His Visit in 1920." Master's thesis, Harvard Extension School, 2020.
- Palme Dutt, R. "Labour and the Empire, CPGB Pamphlet." 1929.
- Peak, S. *Troops in Strikes. The Cobden Trust*. London: The Cobden Trust, 1984.
- Perry, E. J. *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Pimlott, B. "The Socialist League: Intellectuals and the Labour Left in the 1930s." *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 3 (1971): 12–38.
- Pugh, A. "Some Impressions of a Tropical Island." *Labour* (February 1938): 134.
- Reddock, R. "Women Workers' Struggles in the British Colonial Caribbean: The 1930s." In *Revisiting Caribbean Labour: Essays in Honour of O*, edited by C. R. Sutton, 19–40. Kingston: Nigel Bolland, Ian Randle Publishers, 2005.
- Rush, A. S. "Imperial Identity in Colonial Minds: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples, 1931–50." *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 4 (2002): 356–383.
- Russell, B. *The Problem of China*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922.
- Sassoon, D. *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West Europe Left in the Twentieth Century*. London: Fontana Press, 1997.
- Schneider, F. D. "Fabians and the Utilitarian Idea of Empire." *The Review of Politics* 35, no. 4 (1973): 501–522.
- Seifert, R. *The Transport and General Workers' Union: 'No Turning Back': The Road to War and Welfare; Volume 2 1932–1945*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022.
- Seifert, R. "The British Labour Movement Responses to Strikes and Riots in the English-Speaking West Indies 1934–1939: Solidarity with Strings." *Exchanges, Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 11, no. 4 (2024): 87–98.
- Seifert, R. "'Red Friday', 31 July 1925: Unity Constructed and Deconstructed." *Theory and Struggle* 126 (2025).
- Selden, M. "Labor Unrest in China, 1831–1990." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 18, no. 1 (1995): 69–86.
- So, A. Y. "Changing Patterns of Class and Status-Group Struggles in Hong Kong: A World-Systems Analysis." *Development and Society* 29, no. 2 (2000): 1–21.
- Sun, Y. "Geography of a 'Foreign' China: British Intellectuals' Encounter with Chinese Spaces, 1920–1945." PhD thesis, University of South Carolina, 2022.
- Swain, G. "Was the Profintern Really Necessary?" *European History Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1987): 57–77.
- Taylor, A. J. *English History 1914–1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- The WLG Database. The World Labor Group (WLG) Database. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://arrighinetwork.org/download-data/>.
- Thorpe, A. *A History of the British Labour Party*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.
- Walonen, M. "Resistance, oil, and Awakening: Textual Responses to the Butler Strike and its Aftermath." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 44, no. 2 (2013): 59–84.
- Wan, K. "The Guangdong-Hong Kong Nexus in Grassroots Collective Actions Amid Sino-Anglo Interface, 1841 to 1927." *Public Administration and Policy* 24, no. 3 (2021): 253–263.
- Westmaas, N. "Firebrands, Trade Unionists and Marxists: The Shadow of the Russian Revolution, the Colonial State and Radicalism in Guyana, 1917–57." In *The Red and the Black*, edited by D. Featherstone, and C. Hogsbjerg, 157–173. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.
- Williams, T. *Making the Revolution Global: Black Radicalism and the British Socialist Movement Before Decolonisation*. London: Verso, 2022.