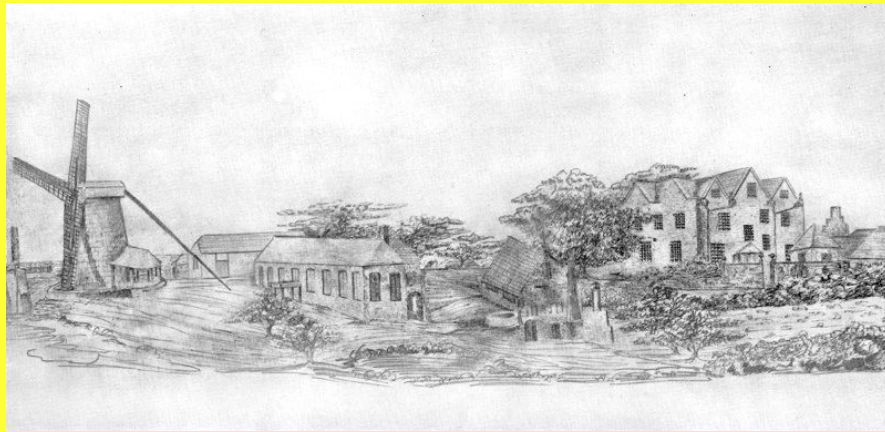


# The Drax Family Dynasty and the Business of Slavery

Why Reparations For African Enslavement  
is a Trade Union Issue

by  
Steve Cushion



*Drax Hall Estate, Barbados*



*Charborough House, Dorset*





CARIBBEAN LABOUR SOLIDARITY

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## **The Calculation of the Modern Equivalent of the Value of Money**

The calculation used in this publication is the *Relative Income Measure*, which measures an amount of income or wealth relative to per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When compared to other incomes or wealth, it shows the economic status or relative "prestige value" the owners of this income or wealth have because of their rank in the income distribution.

More details from <https://www.measuringworth.com/>.

Today's values calculated in this manner will be placed in brackets after the original figure. The annual rate of inflation between 1657 and 1704 averaged 1.5 per cent making £100 in 1657 the equivalent of £177 in 1704. This accounts for the same original figure being calculated differently depending on the year concerned.

We recognise that this can only be approximate and is to give some idea of what a particular transaction would be worth today.

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# The Drax Family Dynasty and the Business of Slavery

Why Reparations For African Enslavement is a Trade Union Issue

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## **Drax Hall Estate: How Slavery links Barbados and Dorset**

The Drax family have owned the Drax Hall Plantation in Barbados, along with the accompanying 621 acres of land, since the 17th Century. It is currently the property of Richard Drax, Member of Parliament for South Dorset. He also owns Charborough House, a Grade 1 listed manor house in rural Dorset. In addition, he holds the lordship of the manor of Longburton and owns the greatest acreage of land in the county of Dorset, owning approximately 13,870 acres.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Drax's 17th-century ancestors, James and William sailed to Barbados in the late 1620s, where they arranged for land in the centre of the island to be cleared and began growing and processing sugar.

The Drax family devised a commercial sugar plantation model, worked by enslaved labourers brought from Africa, that was copied across the West Indies and the Americas. In 1650, Sir James Drax paid for the construction of the plantation house Drax Hall.

David Olusoga said:

"The Drax family are one of the few who were pioneers in the early stages of the British slave economy back in the 17th century and, generations later, still owned plantations and enslaved people at the end of British slavery in the 1830s ... the Drax dynasty were able to generate extraordinary wealth through the cultivation of sugar by enslaved Africans".<sup>2</sup>

The Barbados plantation was worked by up to 327 slaves at a time. Sir Hilary Beckles, Chair of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, estimates that as many 30,000 slaves died on the Drax plantations in Barbados and Jamaica over 200 years.

After enslavement was finally abolished in the British West Indies in 1838, Richard Drax's ancestor John Sawbridge Erle-Drax MP, who also lived at Charborough House, received £4,293 12s 6d [£5,447,000] in compensation for his loss of property rights in 189 slaves.<sup>3</sup>

Sir Hilary says Richard Drax MP should:

"One: apologise to African people and the people of the Caribbean. Two: show remorse and participate in reparatory justice. Three: we would like to talk to you about how you should repay these debts".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Guy Shrubsole, "The ten landowners who own one-sixth of Dorset" *Who Owns England?*, (4 January 2020)

2. Paul Lashmar and Jonathan Smith, "He's the MP with the Downton Abbey lifestyle. But the shadow of slavery hangs over the gilded life of Richard Drax", *The Observer*, 12 December 2020

3. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2246>

See front for "The Calculation of the Modern Equivalent of the Value of Money"

4. Lashmar and Smith, *The Observer*, 12 December 2020

David Comissiong, Barbados's ambassador to CARICOM, says of the Drax family:

"You can't simply walk away from the scene of the crime. They have a responsibility now to make some effort to help repair the damage. We are establishing a fund into which families, corporations and establishments like universities that were implicated in some way in the crime of enslavement can pay".<sup>5</sup>

Barbados MP and Special Envoy on Reparations and Economic Enfranchisement, Trevor Prescod, is asking that Sir Richard Drax return Drax Hall Plantation to the people of Barbados. He said:

"Our people suffered a lot as a result of improper nourishment during the period of slavery and some of the major diseases that we have had to go through today derive from malnutrition and all types of challenges that we faced as a people. Some of the diseases that we face, apart from the foods and so on, were diseases that came because of the interaction between African people and the Europeans. However, the 21st Century must be the century where we call for justice against slavery and for reparations. There must be a compensatory approach to assist these people who are still living in mass poverty, illiteracy, poor public health, and whose development is being blocked because of the legacy of slavery".<sup>6</sup>

## **Sir James Drax (1609-1661)**

While there is archaeological evidence of Indigenous Arawak settlement in Barbados as late as the 16th Century, there were few signs of habitation when the English arrived. A pirate and merchant trader named John Powell was the first Englishman to land on the island in 1625, but did little more than claim it for King James I. Having received a patent from the King, John Powell's brother Henry returned in 1627 in the ship *William and John*, along with 50 settlers. During the voyage, they seized a Portuguese vessel heading to Brazil. Ten Africans were taken on board the *William and John*, and were soon to become the English empire's first enslaved agricultural labourers. Amongst the initial settlers was the 18 year old James Drax, the son of a Warwickshire Anglican vicar. His brother William and sister Frances joined him in 1632.

The first crop James Drax tried was tobacco, but this was of poor quality compared to the Virginia product and was not commercially successful. So, in the early 1630s, James Drax and some of his friends changed to growing cotton, which proved much more profitable and engaged the interest of some rich merchants in London. As well as commercial success, James Drax managed to gain political influence on the island, becoming commissioner for roads and a Captain in the militia.<sup>7</sup>

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5. Ibid.

6. *Barbados Today*, 16 October 2021

7. Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies*, (Hutchinson, 2011) pp.40-41

By 1641, James Drax owned over 400 acres, making him one of the biggest landowners on the island. He was the first to have a significant number of enslaved Africans working on his plantations, twenty-two in 1641. He purchased another thirty-four in 1644 and by early 1650s, his plantation, Drax Hall Estate, was worked by over two hundred enslaved labourers. Drax was the first to successfully cultivate sugar cane on a large scale, having learned the techniques of sugar production and refinement from the Dutch, who in turn had acquired their knowledge from the Portuguese in Brazil, part of which was under Dutch control from 1630-54. The Dutch colonists in Brazil had developed an industry, based on enslaved labour, that exported thousands of tons of sugar to Europe. Sensing an economic opportunity, Drax and other settlers began cultivating sugar around 1640 with the first Barbados sugar arriving in London by 1643.<sup>8</sup>

However, the English Civil War caused a temporary setback for James and William Drax. They were supporters of the Parliamentarians and so, when the Royalists seized control of Barbados in 1650, they were expelled, along with other local Parliamentarians. They returned to London, where they lobbied the House of Commons to send an expedition to retake the island. In 1651, Drax sailed in the fleet sent to re-conquer Barbados. After some inconsequential fighting, the Royalists surrendered and a new Parliamentarian governor was installed although, at least initially, the Royalists were allowed to keep their land. Restored to his estates and political power, James Drax again took up a leading role in the colony, expanding his holdings, increasing the size of his enslaved labour force and generally enriching himself.<sup>9</sup>

## **Divide and Rule**

Initially, the labour force in Barbados was made up of indentured labourers from Britain, poor farmers who had been driven from the land by the enclosures, along with vagrants and convicted criminals. But the largest numbers came as a result of the Civil War, with 8,000 Royalists sent to Barbados between 1645 and 1650. Royalist prisoners of war were sold as servants in Barbados, and thus the government rid itself of potential enemies and made a profit at the same time. Next came the English invasion of Ireland. After the victory at the Battle of Drogheda in 1649, Oliver Cromwell wrote that "When they submitted, these officers were knocked on the head, and every tenth man of the soldiers killed, and the rest shipped for Barbados".<sup>10</sup>

However, the supply of indentured labourers dried up after the end of the Civil War and the successful colonisation of Ireland. European indentured labourers were unsatisfactory from the plantation owners' point of view for a number of reasons: their period of indenture was limited, there was a limit to the whipping and torture the plantation owners

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8. P F Campbell, *Some Early Barbadian History* (St. Michael, Barbados: Carribean Graphics & Letchworth, 1993) pp.13-4, 99

9. N. Darnell Davis, *The Cavaliers and Roundheads of Barbados, 1650-1652* (Georgetown: Argosy, 1887) 145-149, 178, 190.

10. Parker, *The Sugar Barons*, pp.65-7



could use to extract greater productivity and word of the ill-usage they were subjected to got back to England and deterred further recruiting. Besides, one of the reasons people from Britain accepted the fate of indentured labour was in the hope of acquiring some land after their term expired, only to find that all the land had already been taken by the first colonists. This was when the plantation owners started to turn to purchasing kidnapped Africans. This was the effective start of English involvement in the large-scale transatlantic slave trade.

By 1654 James Drax had 200 enslaved Africans working on a labour camp of over 700 acres and had ordered the construction of the island's first "great house", Drax Hall. He was the richest land owner in Barbados. Not content with purchasing kidnapped Africans from traffickers from England, in 1654, he personally helped finance two slave trafficking voyages in the *Hope* and the *Samuel*, ships he jointly owned with two other Barbadian plantation owners.<sup>11</sup>

In 1649, a conspiracy was discovered for a joint rebellion of English and Irish indentured labourers in alliance with enslaved Africans.<sup>12</sup> This was the plantation owners worst nightmare and they did their best to disrupt any such workers' unity by giving small privileges to their poor European employees, if not being flogged half to death and having more than starvation rations can be considered "privileges". A militia was needed to keep control over the enslaved Africans who, by 1660, greatly outnumbered the European population. This was a scheme for class collaboration of Europeans that required a new term of social distinction: "White".<sup>13</sup> This expression only came into common use at the end of the 17th century, translated from the Spanish *Blanco*, while Africans did not even merit a translation, becoming *Negros*. White men were given the right to hold public office, to sit on juries, to vote if they held sufficient property, to carry arms, to move freely, to engage in economic activity.

In contrast, enslaved Africans were kept in order by arbitrary and tyrannical punishments, always supported by the full force of the colonial state.<sup>14</sup> This was inscribed in the 1661 Barbados Slave Code, *An Act for Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes*. This established that enslaved Africans could be bought and sold, instituting a system of legally sanctioned racial discrimination and violence.

If any Negro or slave whatsoever shall offer any violence to any Christian by striking or the like, such Negro or slave shall for his and her first offence be severely whipped by the Constable. For his second offence of that nature he shall be severely whipped, his nose slit, and be burned in some part of his face with a hot iron. ... And it is further enacted and

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11. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>

12. Jerome Handler, "Slave revolts and conspiracies in seventeenth-century Barbados", *New West Indian Guide* (1982) no: 1/2, pp.5-42

13. Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, (London: Verso, 1997)

14. Catherine Hall, "Gendering Property, Racing Capital." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 78 (2014) pp. 22-38.

ordained that if any Negro or other slave under punishment by his master unfortunately shall suffer in life or member, which seldom happens, no person whatsoever shall be liable to any fine therefore.

The Barbados Slave Code was adapted to Jamaica and other British colonies in the Caribbean and then to the mainland colony of South Carolina as the legal basis for the treatment of enslaved workers in the British North American colonies.

Giving the poor white workers some inexpensive privileges drove a wedge between the European servants and the African enslaved labourers, linked the white underclass with their white superiors and gave "race" an importance it never previously had. This linked the economic principle of exploited labour to the socially constructed hierarchy of race, thereby institutionalising white supremacy.

Eric Williams wrote:

Here then is the origin of Negro slavery. The reason was economic, not racial. It had to do not with the colour of the labourer, but the cheapness of the labour. Slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

If "race" is a social construct, then "White" is a construct of capitalism. The concept of "White Privilege" is often used as a euphemism for "White Supremacy". While the discussion provoked around the issue has been useful, the term itself is problematic from a social justice perspective. Privileges are granted and can be taken away. Rights are fought for and are more secure if they are universal. Those who feel they are entitled to privilege feel threatened by the unprivileged and grateful to the elite who granted them their minor privileges. This can develop into a feeling that, because they share a skin colour with their rulers, they have a common interest. This gives the "Poor White" a feeling of having a stake in the status quo and obscures the real privilege in society, the class privilege that goes with wealth.

Theodore Allen wrote:

First, racial slavery and white supremacy in this country was a ruling-class response to a problem of labor solidarity. Second, a system of racial privileges for white workers was deliberately instituted in order to define and establish the "white race" as a social control formation. Third, the consequence was not only ruinous to the interests of the Afro-American workers but was also disastrous for the white worker.<sup>16</sup>

Instead, it might be more useful to begin the discussion from a consideration of the denial of human and civil rights to Black people. This places us in a better position to fight for equal rights for all.

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15. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964) pp.19-20

16. Theodore W. Allen, *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* (The New England Free Press, 1976) p.28

As Bob Dylan wrote:

A South politician preaches to the poor white man  
"You got more than the blacks, don't complain  
You're better than them, you been born with white skin, " they explain  
And the Negro's name  
Is used, it is plain  
For the politician's gain  
As he rises to fame  
And the poor white remains  
On the caboose of the train  
But it ain't him to blame  
He's only a pawn in their game.<sup>17</sup>

Following the death of his wife and a political falling out with the Governor, James Drax left Barbados and returned to England in 1654. There he bought the Ellerton Abbey estate in Yorkshire as well as property in London, while continuing to profit from his vast estates across the West Indies that were said to be worth £8,000 [£30,000,000] a year. In 1658, Drax was rewarded for his loyalty to Parliament with a knighthood. He died in 1661, shortly after the return of Charles Stuart to the throne in 1660. His parliamentary politics do not seem to have caused his family much of a problem as his eldest son, Sir James Drax of Hackney, was knighted by King Charles II. He, however died without issue in 1663 and James Drax's second son, Henry (1641-1682) inherited the family estates and did most to bring scientific management to the extraction of surplus value from the enslaved workforce.<sup>18</sup>

## **Colonel Henry Drax (1641-1682)**

The massive scale of the sugar plantations that was required to generate such huge profits necessitated an equally vast resource of labour to work the estate. In the 400 years of the Atlantic slave trade, somewhere in the region of 12 to 15 million Africans were enslaved and transported by force to the Americas and the Caribbean. Between one and two million died crossing the Atlantic. Once in the Americas, these enslaved workers were forced to work in labour camps where the conditions were so harsh that most only lived for about seven years before the accumulation of fatigue, whipping and hunger sent them to an early grave. The attrition rate in a Caribbean plantation was worse than the Battle of the Somme. Edward Littleton, a 17th-century Barbados plantation owner who enslaved approximately 160 people, reported that a fifth to a quarter of his workforce died every year. Between 1708 and 1735, the island's landowners purchased 85,000 Africans from transatlantic slave traffickers yet, during that period, the total enslaved population of Barbados only rose by about 4,000.<sup>19</sup> Hilary Beckles has called this genocide.

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17. Bob Dylan, "A Pawn in their Game", *The Times They Are A-Changin* (1964)

18. <https://househistree.com/people/sir-james-drax>

Henry Drax took over ownership and management of the family's Drax Hall and Hope plantations in Barbados in 1663. A census produced at the behest of Governor Sir Jonathan Atkins and forwarded to London in April 1680, identified Drax as the owner of 705 acres and 327 slaves within Barbados's Saint George parish. Like his father before him, Henry Drax was a member of the Governor's Council of Barbados and made several trips to England on council business. In April 1679 he sailed for England for the last time. Before he went, he drew up a set of "Instructions which I would have observed by Mr Richard Harwood in the Management of My plantation". He never returned from England, dying there in 1682.<sup>20</sup>

## Soil Depletion

Part of the need for such detailed management instructions was the deforestation of the Caribbean islands to produce sugar, as well as the soil exhaustion resulting from monocrop, export-based agriculture.

Fredrick Engels, wrote:

"What cared the Spanish plantation owners in Cuba who burned down forests on the slopes of the mountains and obtained from the ashes sufficient fertilizer for one generation of very highly profitable coffee trees—what cared they that the heavy tropical rainfall afterwards washed away the unprotected upper stratum of the soil, leaving behind only bare rock! In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only with the immediate, the most tangible result; and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different, are mostly quite the opposite in character".<sup>21</sup>

Already, in 1652, Sir Thomas Modyford, who owned a 500 acre plantation in Barbados, warned that the profits from sugar could not be sustained in the face of deforestation. By 1671 an unknown writer tells us: "At the Barbadoes all the Trees are destroyed, so that wanting wood to boyle their sugar, they are forced to send for coales from England." This would have been extremely expensive. So Drax's instructions stated, "I would haue noe timber bought except upon absolute nesessity or that you Can meete with it veary Cheape".<sup>22</sup>

As the fertility of existing cleared land fell, plantation owners ordered the clearing of hillsides and uplands previously thought unsuitable for cultivation, but the heavy rainfall quickly washed away the topsoil. Bridgetown harbour began to silt up and cane plants were increasingly vulnerable to wind damage.

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19. Simon.P Newman, *A New World of Labor: The development of plantation slavery in the British Atlantic* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) p.203.

20. Thompson, Peter, "Henry Drax's Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Sugar Plantation." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2009)

21. Frederick Engels, *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1934)

22. Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. David Smith (e-text, 2014, 5th edition).

With the conquest of Jamaica in 1655, new land was opened up for cultivation. As a 1675 report boasted, a sugar works with 60 enslaved workers in Jamaica could make more profit than one with 100 ‘in any of the Caribbee Islands, by reason the soil is new’. This attracted William Drax, the younger, nephew of Sir Henry, to move to Jamaica where in 1669, he founded the second Drax Estate in St Ann’s parish on the north coast. The much greater acreage of land available to the Jamaican plantation owners, in contrast to Barbados, allowed for plantations large enough to have 200 acres under cane, which was considered the maximum amount that could be handled by one processing plant. This still left the majority of the land for provisions, livestock, woodland or fallow. William Drax died in 1697 and his Jamaican estate passed to his son Charles, who ordered the building of the second Drax Hall. When Charles Drax died in 1721 he owned 307 enslaved workers, the total value of estate at probate was £8765.43 [£22,270,000], not a bad return for just over 50 years.<sup>23</sup> Charles died without issue and William Beckford of the Beckford family of slave owners and West India Merchants acquired the Jamaican Drax Hall Estate in 1722 from Samuel Reynolds, his brother in law, many said by means of a swindle. Be that as it may, this was the end of the Drax family's involvement in Jamaica and thereafter their efforts were concentrated on Barbados.

By 1690, where previously, it had been possible to harvest three cane crops in succession they were now forced to allow exhausted soil to lie fallow.<sup>24</sup> The Drax family, like most other plantation owners, attempted to preserve the fertility of their land through the constant use of dung as manure. They also attempted to prevent soil erosion and depletion through labour intensive cane hole planting. Both these techniques were extremely taxing on the enslaved labourers tasked with carrying them out, not to mention how disgusting it must have been to shovel cow shit all day. Working with large quantities of manure exposed enslaved workers to an increased risk of disease. Digging cane holes with a hoe was backbreaking work. Weeding cane fields, removing dead leaves and harvesting the cane subjected the field worker to innumerable leaf cuts, making matters worse.<sup>25</sup>

This increased effort required a more scientific approach to the management of the plantation and Henry Drax was in the forefront of developing these new methods.

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23. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146640585>

24. David Watts, *Man's Influence on the Vegetation of Barbados, 1627 to 1800* (Hull: University of Hull publications, 1966) p.45

25. Peter Thompson, “Henry Drax’s Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Sugar Plantation,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 66, no. 3 (2009) pp.565-604.

## Scientific Management

Ken Owen described Henry Drax's "Instructions which I would have observed by Mr Richard Harwood in the Mannagment of My plantation", written in 1679:

Drax's instructions are so unremittingly meticulous that the sense of an oppressive, controlling, and inhuman system keeps building for the reader. It is unremittingly clear how slaves were simply seen as cogs in a machine, at every part of the sugar production process, and in every part of plantation life. This is most chillingly seen in the off-hand way that Drax identifies the necessity of replacing as much as 20% of his plantation's workforce on account of death.<sup>26</sup>

These instructions were to form the basis of plantation management throughout the Caribbean and British North America. In 1755 William Belgrove published "A Treatise Upon Husbandry or Planting" in which he writes of the "Pleasure derived from procuring such useful excellent Instructions". Citing Drax, Belgrove stated: "The best Way I know of to prevent Idleness, and to make the Negroes do their Work properly, will be upon the change of Work, constantly to Gang all the Negroes in the Plantations in the Time of Planting". The strongest men to form a gang charged with digging cane holes, the "more ordinary" men to be tasked with dunging and the children in gangs under the oversight of "some careful old Woman". This development of the gang system of labour made sure that the pace of work for each task could be set to that of the strongest, rather than the weakest slave.<sup>27</sup> One can see parallels with the modern Human Resource Management obsession with "Team Working".

Continuing the family interest in sweating the maximum labour from their enslaved workers, his great-great nephew Edward Drax (1723-91), of whom more later, was the principal author of "Instructions for the Management of a Plantation in Barbadoes and for the Treatment of Negroes", published in London in 1786.<sup>28</sup>

Bill Cooke maintains there is a direct connection between the management techniques developed on the slave plantation and modern Human Resources Management practices:

"The industrial discipline which emerged on the plantations was not disconnected temporally, spatially or in substance from that which emerged in other parts of the US economy. The imprint of slavery in contemporary management can be seen in the ongoing dominance from that time of the very idea of the manager with a right to manage. It can also be seen in the specific management ideas and practices now known as classical management and scientific management..."

"There was a substantial and growing group of people using what are now seen as management practices, who were known as managers, running plantations. What is also

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26. <https://earlyamericanists.com/2014/01/14/teaching-through-primary-sources-henry-draxs-plantation-instructions/>

27. Thompson, *Henry Drax's Instructions*, pp.578-9

28. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/historical/view/2116334629/2146643067>

clear, and discomfoting, is that white supremacist racism underpinned the creation of the managerial identity....".<sup>29</sup>

The result was a scientifically calibrated instrument of physical and psychological torture to ensure maximum productivity.

"Racking to the utmost the toil of the slave - the duration of his life becomes of less moment than its productiveness while it lasts. The most effective economy is that which takes out of the human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost amount of exertion it is capable of putting forth".<sup>30</sup>

Following this assessment by Karl Marx, Robin Blackburn has calculated the basic economics of slavery, starting from the annual cost of maintaining a slave at £4 or £5. If the cost of raising a child to the age of 10 was only half that, it would still amount to £25, to which must be added the additional loss of the mother's time and output for a season and the interest to be paid on this unproductive expenditure over 10 years. Add in the possibility of losing some or all of this investment through the risk of high infant mortality and the total cost of raising a slave to working age could be over £40, while an adult slave could be purchased for £30-£35 and put to work immediately. The easier treatment required to reduce mortality would have equally reduced productivity and output. A British agricultural labourer earned £25 a year while, in comparison, after 3 years the plantation owner would already be £10 in pocket and then his costs would be £20 a year less for the remainder of the lifetime of the slave. This is the brutal calculation that made the business of slavery so profitable.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, one of the calculations that made the plantation owners disinclined to improve the conditions and treatment of their enslaved labourers was the prospect that this would result in their living longer into an unproductive old age. The colonial authorities placed a large fine on slaveholders who freed their slaves in order to prevent them from manumitting enslaved persons when they had passed their productive life and thereby making them a charge on the parish. By working enslaved labourers to death, the slave owners saved themselves the cost of maintaining elderly persons who were unable to continue working.

The scientific management and cost accounting introduced by Colonel Henry Drax was enhanced and extended over the next 200 years as relentlessly efficient overseers determined the maximum sustainable pace of labour and then drove enslaved workers to achieve that maximum.<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx described plantation slavery as "a calculated and

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29. Bill Cooke, *The Denial of Slavery in Management Studies* (University of Manchester 2002) pp.21,23

30. Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy* (1977) p.177

31. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997) p. 524, 542

32. Caitlin Rosenthal, "Slavery's Scientific Management, Masters and Managers" in eds. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, *Slavery's Capitalism, A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) p.79

calculating system". Bookkeeping and accounting practices using pre-printed reports and forms became universal from about 1780. These imposed accountability and obedience at every level of the chain of command, created efficient bureaucratic structures with clear duties and responsibilities. Developments in accounting practices paved the way for two other core principles of scientific management: the separation of ownership and management, and employee surveillance. This, in turn facilitated the tendency for the plantation owners to return to England and set themselves up on country estates purchased with their ill-gotten gains.<sup>33</sup>

## Henry Drax (1693-1755)

On their return, many of the slave owners purchased landed estates in England. As many as 300 new palatial country houses were erected in this time, each designed to insert its owner within the established hierarchy, over by the English aristocracy. Their architecture imitated the Greeks and Romans; in an attempt to conceal the origins of their wealth in the rapacious exploitation of African labour on the plantations.<sup>34</sup>

These stately homes were always more than just places to live, they were also public relations exercises. They represented power, permanence and a self-justified entitlement, expressing in bricks and mortar the determination of the ruling class to retain and expand their wealth, no matter how they acquired it. This sanitisation of the process of the accumulation of capital has become an important part of the capitalist ideological offensive, part of their definition of being British. The importance of this is shown by the great amount of our licence fee money the BBC spends on lavish costume dramas like *Downton Abbey*, as well as the ruling class fury whenever there is the slightest challenge from reports into the colonial origins of the money that created these ostentatious displays of wealth.<sup>35</sup> The outcry from the *Daily Mail* over the recently published *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery*, shows the importance of such whitewashing.<sup>36</sup>

Colonel Henry Drax had been one of the first to indulge in such ostentation. It was also a financial diversification as he developed Ellerton Abbey in Yorkshire, which had been purchased by his father Sir James Drax, as well as land in Lincolnshire. By the time he died in 1682, his English estates were producing as much revenue as the Drax Hall plantation in Barbados. Henry outlived all of his children and left his estates to his sister's son Thomas Shetterden, on the condition that he took the name "Drax".<sup>37</sup>

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33. Sébastien Rioux, "Slavery, Capitalism, and Imperialism" in Zak Cope and Immanuel Ness (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Imperialism* (2022) pp.8-9

34. Stephanie Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2017) pp.69-89

35. Nick Hayes, *The Book of Trespass, Crossing the Lines that Divide Us* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020) pp.125-6

36. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/addressing-the-histories-of-slavery-and-colonialism-at-the-national-trust>

37. <https://househistree.com/people/henry-drax>



Thomas Shetterden Drax, about whom little is known other than the fact that he died in Drax Hall, Barbados, in 1702, had a son, Henry Drax (1693-1755). By now, the Drax family had clearly become part of the English elite; Henry was educated at Eton and Magdalene College, Cambridge. In the way that the British ruling class keeps the money in the family, around 1718 he married his first cousin, Elizabeth Erle, daughter of Sir Edward Erle of Charborough House, Dorset, and heiress of both the Erle and Erle family fortunes.<sup>38</sup>

Built in 1652 for Sir Walter Erle (1586-1665), the original house at Charborough was destroyed by Royalists in retaliation for his siege of Corfe Castle, some of the materials from which were later used to build his new home. In the 18th Century, political power and landed estates went together. What passed for elections at the time consisted mainly of local landowners being returned to Parliament by a mixture of bribery and intimidation. The Drax/Erle family realised early on that a presence in Parliament would be a useful means of ensuring and extending their wealth.

## **The Drax/Erle family in Parliament**

Henry Drax became Member of Parliament for Wareham in 1718, after General Thomas Erle, his wife's grandfather, vacated the seat, probably as part of his marriage settlement. In 1720, he was one of the Members who were credited with £1,000 stock by the South Sea Company without paying for it. In 1722, his father-in-law, Sir Edward Erle, took the family seat. At the 1727 British general election he was returned as MP for Lyme Regis. He was back as Member of Parliament for Wareham 1734 -1748 and 1751 - 1755. Meanwhile, Henry's son, Thomas Erle Drax (1721 - 1789), was MP for Corfe Castle from 1744 to 1747 and MP for Wareham between 1761 and 1768.<sup>39</sup> The fact that Henry was a Whig and Thomas a Tory, yet they worked together to dominate South Dorset's politics, speaks volumes about the nature of British parliamentary politics. The important thing for the Drax Family was advancing what became known as the "West India Interest".

Thomas Drax had no children so, when he died in 1789, the estate passed to his brother Edward, who in turn died in 1791, thence via his daughter Sarah Frances to her husband Richard Grosvenor who became Richard Erle Drax Grosvenor (1762-1819). He was MP for East Looe 1786 - 1788, Clitheroe 1794 - 1796 and Chester 1802 - 1807, enabling him to vote against the "Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade" in 1807, one of only 16 voting against, with the other 283 Members of Parliament voting for abolition. He returned to politics to the seat of New Romney in 1818, but died in 1819, when the constituency passed to his son Richard Edward Erle Drax Grosvenor (1797-1828) who held it until 1826. Before the Reform Act of 1832, it would appear that Members of Parliament could

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38. <https://househistree.com/people/henry-drax-1>

39. [www.historyofparliamentonline.org](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org)

pass their seats in the House on to their heirs with the same ease as they bequeathed their estates. While the Drax family MPs were famous for their lack of interest in most aspects of the work of Parliament, they were very much part of the "West India interest". It is estimated that in 1765 there were 40 MPs in Parliament with West Indian connections.

In 1783 absentee plantation owners, merchants trading to the West Indies and colonial agents, organised themselves into a formal lobbying group. Between 1783 and 1833, the London West India Committee acted as a political pressure group for the merchant and plantation owner interest in Britain as well as the slave owners living in the West Indies, initially lobbying the government against restrictions on the slave trade, against measures to ameliorate the working conditions of their enslaved workers, against free trade in sugar and then, fighting a rearguard action against the abolition movement.<sup>40</sup>

The full name of the current owner of both Drax Hall and Charborough estates, Richard Grosvenor Plunkett-Erle-Drax, stands as a record of the family connections.

Family members who served as Members of Parliament for the family's pocket borough of Wareham include:

1679–1698, 1701–1718, Thomas Erle (born c. 1650, died 23 July 1720)

1701, 1704, 1710, 1722 Sir Edward Erle (born c. 1673, died 31 Jan 1729)

1718, 1734, 1751, Henry Drax (born c. 1693, died 24 May 1755)

1747, 1754, 1761, Thomas Erle Drax (born c. 1721, died December 1789)

1755, Edward Drax (born c. 1726, died April 1791)

1841, 1859, 1868, John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge Erle-Drax (born 6 October 1800, died 7 January 1887)

The current owner, Richard Drax (born 1958), has sat as Member of Parliament for South Dorset since 2010

## Radical Abolitionists

In 1819, at a meeting in his Hopkins Street Chapel in Soho, Robert Wedderburn, whose father was a plantation owner and his mother an enslaved female labourer, asked the congregation "Has a slave an inherent right to slay his master, who refuses him liberty?" Following a discussion, "nearly the whole of the persons in the room held up their hands in favour of the Question". Wedderburn then exclaimed "Well Gentlemen, I can now write home and tell the Slaves to murder their masters as soon as they please".<sup>41</sup> This led to his prosecution for sedition and blasphemy and he was sentenced to two years imprisonment in Dorchester prison.<sup>42</sup>

40. Angelina Gillian Osborne, *Power and Persuasion: The London West India Committee, 1783-1833* (PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2014)

41. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (London: Verso 2000) p.319

42. Louisa Adjoa Parker, *Dorset's Hidden Histories* (Poole: DEED, 2007) p.45

But it would be a mistake to see emancipation as arising principally from British politics, whether radical, moderate or conservative. The enslaved themselves played an essential part in their own liberation.

They did not sit passively and await "saviours from on high to deliver". They fought on the beaches of Africa, they mutinied on the slave ships, they deserted to form free, independent communities in the hills of the Caribbean colonies and, given the slightest opening, engaged in full scale rebellions. This history needs to be more widely known.

Despite the cruel punishments for rebellion and resistance there were important revolts and conspiracies in Barbados in 1649, 1675, 1686, 1692, 1708 and 1816.<sup>43</sup> This last, the 1816 rebellion known as Bussa's War was a well organised uprising, carefully planned, that started in St. Philip parish, at the easternmost end of the island, then quickly spread throughout most of the southern and central parishes of Christ Church, St. John, St. Thomas, St. George and parts of St. Michael. Damage estimated at £175,000 [£203,900,000] was caused during the uprising, for which the Drax Hall Estate claimed £4084 [£4,758,000] in compensation. Twenty five percent of the year's sugar cane crop was burnt, as arson was used extensively by the rebels to undermine the economic base of the colony<sup>44</sup>. The revolt was defeated militarily by the local militia aided by imperial troops. A contemporary account speaks of "a little short of 1,000 slaves were killed in battle and executed at Law".<sup>45</sup>

Hilary Beckles wrote:

The rebellion failed to fulfil its immediate objective, but the anti-slavery movement in the metropolis succeeded in pushing emancipation bills through Parliament in 1833 and 1838, legally ending slavery and terminating almost half a century of intense and heated debate. The rebellion was the contribution of Barbadian slaves to that debate. It was their attempt to influence the future path of their society. They proved to the English Parliament that, contrary to the plantation owners' assertions, they were not content with their status as slaves, and that their intention was to free themselves by force of arms, as imperial reformist means seemed unduly slow, if not unreliable.<sup>46</sup>

There were two further major uprisings in the British West Indies the early 19th Century, the Demerara rebellion of 1823, involving more than 10,000 enslaved people that took place in the colony of Demerara-Essequibo (Guyana). and the "Baptist War", as the Jamaica uprising of 1831 became known. These three revolts can be credited with concentrating the minds of the British government to face the fact that increasing

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43. Richard Hart, *Caribbean Workers' Struggles* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture, 2012) p.26

44. *The Report from a Select Committee of the House of Assembly Appointed to inquire into the Origins, Cause, and Progress of the Late Insurrection - April 1816* (Barbados, 1818)

45. *An Account of the late Negro Insurrection which took place in the Island of Barbados on Easter Sunday, April 14, 1816*, cited in Beckles, Hilary McD. "The Slave-Drivers' War: Bussa And The 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion." *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe*, no. 39 (1985) p.87

46. Beckles, *The Slave-Drivers' War: Bussa And The 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion*, pp. 85–110.

rebelliousness was causing the whole system to fail.<sup>47</sup> The slave power would equally have been aware of the Nat Turner rebellion of enslaved people in Virginia, which also occurred in 1831. Meanwhile, the increasingly militant working-class opposition in Britain, starting with the Luddites from 1811 to 1816, the "Captain Swing" movement in 1830, followed by the widespread strikes in 1831, presented the authorities with the danger of fighting on two fronts. In general, the slave unrest of 1816-32 helped both to destabilise and discredit slavery and force the slave-holders to accept emancipation. But they did not give up without extracting as much money as possible from the public purse.

## **Reform and Compensation**

At the beginning of the 19th Century, the slave economy was still profitable. An indication of this was the decision to build, between 1800 and 1802, the West India Dock in London specifically to deal with the trade in tropical products from the Caribbean. The principal investors were slave traders, London based firms of West Indian slave factors, Commission agents, absentee plantation owners, returned estate managers and West India merchants. It was also an opportunity for others to invest in the profits of the slave economy. At this time, the West India trade represented one third of London's overseas trade by value and the slave economy was an important contributing factor in the growth of the City of London as a financial centre.<sup>48</sup>

But the plantation economy, while still profitable, was being overtaken by the manufacturing industry it had helped to establish.<sup>49</sup> The connection between industrialisation and slavery is well illustrated by the origins of the finance that enabled the expansion of the Welsh slate quarries at the end of the 18th century. In 1781, Richard Pennant inherited the family's estates in Jamaica and in north Wales. He owned four sugar plantations in Jamaica, worked by more than a thousand enslaved workers. The money Pennant generated from sugar and slavery in Jamaica was invested in building road, railway and port infrastructure, as well as expanding the slate industry in Wales, in particular his Penrhyn slate quarry.<sup>50</sup>

Pennant was one of the two MPs for Liverpool, Britain's major slave trading port. He frequently spoke in the Commons against abolition of the slave trade. Thus, the Pennant family profited from both slate quarrying in Wales and slave-produced sugar and rum from Jamaica. There is already a plaque in memory of the three-year Penrhyn quarrymen's strike of 1900-03. Perhaps the Welsh government might like to consider another plaque in memory of the hundreds of enslaved labourers who were worked to death on the Pennants' Jamaican plantations.

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47. Mary Turner, "The Baptist War and Abolition", *The Jamaica Historical review*, vol.XIII, 1982, pp.31-41

48. Nick Draper, *The City of London and slavery: evidence from the first docks companies 1785-1800*, 2008

49. Hall et al., *Legacies of British slave ownership*, 2014 p.33

50. Chris Evans, *Slave Wales : The Welsh and Atlantic Slavery, 1660-1850* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010) pp.65-72

There are many similar examples. Samuel Greg, who set up the first water-driven yarn spinning factory in England at Quarry Bank near Manchester in 1784, also owned Hillsborough Estate, a large sugar plantation on the island of Dominica. He also had other family connections to the transatlantic slave trade, including his brother-in-law, Thomas Hodgson, who owned slaving ships and another brother-in-law, Thomas Pares, a banker whose family also made their fortune through slavery. The first US cotton manufacturers to use mechanical spinning in 1790 at Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was owned by Moses Brown who had made the money he needed to set up the mill from the West Indian provisioning trade.<sup>51</sup>

However, the dominance of sugar in the British West Indies and the unsuitability of the islands for mass production of raw cotton meant that British textile manufacturers, once some of them had used profits from the sugar industry to start up their businesses, had no further interest in supporting the plantation owners. At the same time, popular anti-slavery was an excellent cover for their campaign for control of the levers of power. The essence of the matter was that manufacturing required a different form of state, one that would implement policies that were incompatible with the continued domination of the slave-based "West Indian Interest" and their allies in the old land-owning gentry in Britain. Thus, one aspect of abolition can be seen as part of a struggle between two different factions of the British ruling class with conflicting interests. Nevertheless, in order to win that campaign, those capitalist interests opposed to slavery had to reach a compromise with the still powerful "West Indians".

The Reform Act of 1832, by introducing a limited increase in the size of the electorate and thereby undermining the ability for local landowners to buy their seats in Parliament, severely reduced the number of MPs committed to the West India Interest. Seeing the writing on the wall, they opted for compensation. While there can be no doubt that the prominent elite abolitionists such as Wilberforce and Clarkson were genuinely and deeply appalled by the violence and cruelty of slavery, they still firmly believed in the sanctity of property and were extremely reluctant to do anything that might undermine the capitalist system. The "West Indians" exploited this to the full. The initial scheme proposed by the government was to loan the plantation owners £15 million, but by shrewd negotiation and political manoeuvring, the West India Interest managed to turn this into a non-repayable grant of £20 million and retained the services of their enslaved workforce for another four years, retitled as "apprenticeship". Compensation was the equivalent of a ransom paid to kidnappers.<sup>52</sup>

While this outraged many rank-and-file abolitionists, upper class opponents of slavery clearly felt that the slave owners had engaged in a legitimate business and that

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51. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, 2014 p.166

52. Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (Vintage, 2021) Chapter 7.

emancipation without compensation would threaten the basis of capitalist property relations. Besides, the compensation was good business for the Rothschild family of bankers, who organised a loan to the British government to cover the compensation. The vastly increased National Debt was mainly paid off by taxation on items of everyday consumption - workers in Britain effectively compensated the slave owners for their losses, who were then able to invest their compensation money in new business ventures.

In the last third of the nineteenth century, both the British acquisition of new territorial influence and control in Africa, and territorial expansion of existing empire holdings like Australia, had damaging consequences for both indigenous populations and those moved there from other parts of the empire. Forced labour recruitment by different names was used in East, West and Southern African territorial acquisitions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. From China and India came millions of Indentured workers. These movements of labour were not merely a response to the push factor of famine in the context of colonial occupation. They need to be seen as part of this reorientation of capitalism in the face of the formal ending of slavery.

Thus, on the one hand, emancipation can be seen as a reorientation of British capitalism, away from reliance on agricultural production towards a manufacturing economy, on the other it led to reorientation as well towards using a variety of sweated labour forms.

Of course, some of the compensation money went on conspicuous consumption and continued corrupt purchasing of political power and influence.

### **John Sawbridge-Erle-Drax (1800-1887)**

In 1827, John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge married Jane, the daughter of Richard Erle-Drax Grosvenor and assumed the name of Erle-Drax in order to take possession of Charborough House. After serving a term as High Sheriff of Dorset in 1840, Erle-Drax was the Tory Member of Parliament for Wareham 1841–1857, 1859–1865, 1868–1880. Even after the Reform Act of 1832, Wareham still had only 342 electors, controlled jointly by Erle-Drax and John Hales Calcraft, who between them arranged for one or the other of them to be returned at each election. Immediately prior to the opening of the polls at one election, Erle-Drax made the following statement to the electors of Wareham:

I understand that some evil-disposed person has been circulating a report that I wish my tenants, and other persons dependent upon me, to vote according to their conscience. This is a dastardly lie, calculated to injure me. I have no wish of the sort. I wish, and intend, that these people should vote for me.<sup>53</sup>

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53. William Fraser, *Disraeli and his day* (London: Kegan Paul, 1891) p.270

The Drax Hall plantation made him an average yearly net profit of £3,591 [£3,984,000] and when compensation was paid following the abolition of slavery, he received just over £4,293 [£4,866,000] in compensation for his 189 enslaved workers.

## Charborough

John Sawbridge Erle-Drax "spent money prodigiously" on Charborough, using two million bricks to build the longest brick wall in England, while also constructing the "Stag Gate" and the "Lion Gate" entrance arches. He was able to extend the park to the north, west, and south in by the diversion of the existing Wimborne to Dorchester road, today's A31, and the enclosure of Sturminster Marshall Common Field and some of its neighbouring land.<sup>54</sup> This was another money making scheme as it enabled the construction of a toll road in which Sawbridge-Erle-Drax was its chief promoter and investor.

This was a period of extensive enclosures of common land. The Enclosure Acts were a series of Parliamentary Acts between 1750 and 1860 privatising the previously common land where the ordinary country folk had traditional and collective rights of access in order to pasture animals, harvest meadow grass, fish, collect firewood, or otherwise benefit. There were 4,041 such parliamentary enclosures during this period and enclosures dispossessed former occupiers from some 30 percent of the agricultural land of England. Rural labourers who lived on the margin depended on open fields and the so-called wastes (uncultivated land) to supplement their meagre incomes. This left four alternatives: to work like serfs as tenant farmers for large landowners, to emigrate, to live by poaching or to move into already-crowded cities, where they pushed down each others' wages by competing for a limited number of jobs.<sup>55</sup>

Within the wall and on the newly acquired land, John Erle-Drax planted trees extensively and laid out the High Wood plantation of specimen trees. When the tower built by his wife's grandfather, Edward Erle-Drax, was damaged by lightning in 1838, he rebuilt it adding a further 40-feet in the process, raising it to an even more conspicuous 120-feet. Inside, he added the armoury that he filled with weapons and a picture gallery. In the chapel, he added a Renaissance altarpiece from a church in Antwerp and a fine set of Renaissance choir stalls.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, the abolition of enslavement did not seriously inconvenience the Drax family, indeed the enclosures enabled them to extend their landowning in Britain, a process for which the compensation money would have been very

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54. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000713>

Related Enclosure Acts - 1829 Cranbome Chase; Lytchett Minster; Lytchett Matravers; Owermoigne, 1845 Caundle Marsh; Chesiborne; Sturminster Marshall, 1846 Bere Regis

55. Wendy McElroy, *The Enclosure Acts and the Industrial Revolution* (Future of Freedom Foundation, 2012);

J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

56. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2246>

<https://househistree.com/people/john-sawbridge-erle-drax>

useful. Moreover, their presence in Parliament must have greatly assisted in getting the necessary legislation passed to expropriate their poorer and less influential neighbours in Dorset. These changes in the rural economy were frequently resisted by the local population and, significantly, Charborough is only a stones throw from the village of Tolpuddle.

## **Tolpuddle**

The deportation of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834 coincided in time with the implementation of the Slave Emancipation Act. Coincidental as this appears at first sight, it can also be interpreted as being part and parcel of the reorganisation of the British economy of which we spoke earlier and a particularly bourgeois view of "Free Labour".

Upper class abolitionists extolled the virtue of "Free Labour", but an employer sees the concept of free labour as an individual right allowing the worker to choose his employer, subject to the needs of the business, and to leave that employment as they wish or, more likely, to be dismissed when their labour power is no longer required. This concept of free labour is hostile to collective rights such as trade unions; one worker leaving when they wish is fine, the entire workforce leaving work at the same time and putting on a picket line is intolerable. For a capitalist, individual human rights are allowed, collective civil rights are much more problematic. So it proved in Tolpuddle, although for once, the Drax family proved to be more progressive than some of their landlord neighbours, although with all the ambiguities that the term "progressive" conceals.

John Sawbridge-Erle-Drax, who stood unsuccessfully for a parliamentary seat in Dorset in 1831, was a supporter of parliamentary reform. He had organised some of his tenants into a personal unit of the Dorset Yeomanry and, while his mounted thugs managed to overcome the "cudgelmen" of the local anti-reform leader, Bankes, he lost the election. Defeated again in 1837, he was finally elected for the seat of Wareham in 1841, which he represented on and off until his death in 1887, sometimes standing as a Whig, sometimes as a Conservative, depending on the way the wind was blowing.<sup>57</sup>

During the Captain Swing disturbances of 1830-31, Drax negotiated with the workers on his estate in the ale-house at Bere and urged his tenants, their employers, to pay them ten shillings a week, which was the standard demand at that time. He initially only offered nine shillings, but had to concede ten when his neighbours gave in to their employees' demands.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, James Frampton, Drax's neighbour and the magistrate who prosecuted the Tolpuddle trade unionists, read the Riot Act and used his section of the Dorset Yeomanry to repress similar demands. When Frampton tried to swear in Drax's militia unit as constables, Drax refused and the pair never spoke again. This paid off as

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57. F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1832-1885* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977) p. 318

58. Tom Scriven, "The Dorchester Labourers and Swing's Aftermath in Dorset, 1830-8", *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 82, Issue 1, Autumn 2016, p.5



there was no "Swing" activity at Charlborough, while Frampton required barricades and a standing militia to defend his country house at Moreton, only 10 miles away.<sup>59</sup>

The Drax family may have taken up residence in England, but they have continued to own Drax Hall estate in Barbados up to the present day. The plantation economy that their forebears pioneered survived the abolition of enslavement and continued to be profitable at the expense of the hopes of the emancipated workers.

## Post-emancipation Barbados

The period between 1834 and 1838, during which the name of slavery was changed to "apprenticeship", not only gave the plantation owners another four years of free labour, it also gave them time to prepare a new labour regime that would ensure that, thereafter, a supply of cheap labour would maintain their profits. Key to this was to ensure that there was little or no land available for the emancipated former slaves to gain the independence that small-scale farming might have given them.

Having used the enclosures of common land in England and the Highland Clearances in Scotland to proletarianise or pauperise the majority of country people in Britain, the ruling class were hardly likely to allow the recently emancipated enslaved labourers to live by farming in the Caribbean. In an attempt to ensure an adequate supply of cheap labour for the plantations, the colonial authorities adopted measures to prevent the newly emancipated workers acquiring enough land on which to survive without working for the plantation owners. As the Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote in 1836:

It will be necessary to prevent the occupation of any Crown lands by persons not possessing title to them, and to fix such a price upon all Crown land as may place them out of the reach of persons without capital.<sup>60</sup>

The imperial government had no wish to dismantle the plantation system.

This "landless freedom" was deliberately designed to maintain the status quo of white supremacy with the plantation oligarchy maintaining their economic and political control. The African descendent working class had little option but to work in the cane fields at near starvation wages. The lack of land also ensured that the oligarchy maintained political control, as the property qualification for voting ensured that there were only 1,322 electors, even after the voting reform of 1849 - 5% of the population.<sup>61</sup> In Ireland, a similar system of corrupt elections is known as "Gerrymandering".

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59. Kevin P. Bawn, *Social Protest and Popular Disturbances, Public Order In Dorset, 1790-1838* (PhD, University of Reading, 1984);

Griffin, Carl, "The Culture Of Combination: Solidarities And Collective Action Before Tolpuddle, *Historical Journal*, 58 (2015) pp. 443-480

Baker, Leonard, *Spaces, Places, Custom and Protest in Rural Somerset and Dorset, c. 1780-1867*, (PhD, University of Bristol, 2019)

60. Richard Hart, *From Occupation to Independence: A History of the Peoples of the English-Speaking Caribbean Region* (London: Pluto, 1998) pp.40-44

In 1840, the Barbados colonial legislature passed a *Master and Servant Act* which restricted the right to strike and other collective activity that might have increased wages. The emancipated workers faced having to pay rent, which was frequently deducted from their miserable wages, while their proletarian status was reinforced by penal laws against vagrancy and debt.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, various laws were passed to ensure that emigration was not practically possible. To enforce this new system, a police force was created in 1835. Meanwhile, the main tax base was shifted from a land tax to duties on imported food, thereby moving the burden of taxation from the employers to the workers.

To this repressive legislation, the landowners in Barbados added an additional twist, by introducing a system of "tenantry", whereby small plots of land were granted on contract to the labourers on an estate in return for regular labour on the estate owner's fields. This involved them in a form of debt peonage, with the rent for these provision grounds and the accompanying dwellings concealed in the reduced wages. A similar system to the notorious "tied cottages" used by British agricultural landowners to control their workforce. Drax Hall Estate, ever in the forefront of political and economic changes, built some new housing to reinforce the landlord/tenant relationship which they were hoping would replace the plantation owner/slave relationship that had preceded it. Part of the response from the previously enslaved labourers was to create the "Chattel House", a wooden construction that could be quickly dismantled and re-erected elsewhere when its owners found other employment.<sup>63</sup>

But the overcrowding was dreadful as a contemporary witness recounts:

Who has ever entered one of these wretched homes, those almost loathsome scenes of human existence, without being shocked at the misery and extreme degradation in every corner of the dwelling. In a wooden hut, not twenty feet by ten, with the bare, unlevelled earth for a flooring, you not uncommonly find families of eight, ten twelve in number, of every age and sex crowded and huddled together more like the beast that perish than members of a Christian household.<sup>64</sup>

In the days of enslavement, the slave owners had been obliged to maintain the unproductive old and infirm. With the move to so-called free labour, they were no longer required to do so. As a result of the immediate emancipation in 1834 of all children under six, infant mortality rates rose alarmingly. The new regime allowed for a structural adjustment as unproductive persons were driven from the estates and only the able-bodied

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61. Hilary Beckles, *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers' Protest in Barbados 1838-1938* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2004) p.90

62. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, (Penguin, 2014) p.281

63. Henderson Carter, *Labour Pains: Resistance and Protest in Barbados, 1838-1904* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2012) Chap. 3

64. *The Creole*, October 30, 1872

were retained. As a result, plantations in Barbados considerably increased their production of sugar while employing 25% less labour.<sup>65</sup>

Wage rates became dependent on the international market price of sugar. When the Sugar Duties Act 1846 removed the protective tariffs from imported sugar, thereby considerably reducing the price of sugar in Britain, the employers saved their profits by cutting wages in Barbados by 50%. Meanwhile food prices increased dramatically.

There was a decline in the quantity and quality of foods consumed by the workers as they became responsible for the provision of their own subsistence. They needed to earn enough money to buy provisions or to rent enough land to provide for their own subsistence, both of which proved unattainable. The majority lived on the old slave diet of rice, salt fish, yams, potatoes, breadfruit, cornmeal pap and biscuits, which was not only deficient in the vitamins and minerals necessary for health, but did not even provide a sufficient calorific intake for the heavy manual labour they performed. Even the drinking water was unwholesome.<sup>66</sup>

Malnutrition was widespread. In 1858, the Reverend Edward Pinder wrote:

I have seen repeatedly children wasting away from starvation, when sickness has prevented their parents from earning subsistence for them by their daily labour. I have known instances where old labourers, who have worked all their lives on one estate or another, have at last ended their days without food, shelter, or clothing, in some out-building of our properties, either in the stock-house or in the stock-hole.<sup>67</sup>

The plantation owner oligarchy were opposed to education as they wished to maintain an abundance of child labour and feared the increased resistance that might arise from an educated working class. Despite the widespread and often expressed desire for education for their children, the high cost of school fees meant that most workers had to choose between education and food

Meanwhile, any protest was met by eviction, the demolition of their houses and destruction of provision grounds.

## **Resistance**

The workers did not take this assault lying down. The first *Master and Servant Act* of 1838 was met with strikes, which started on August 2nd, just one day after legal emancipation. These strikes were accompanied by a campaign of arson, burning cane fields and the fuel used to power the sugar processing machinery. The Colonial Office in London realised that the situation was unworkable and struck down this first law. The

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65. Beckles, *Great House Rules*, p.50-52

66. Carter, *Labour Pains*, Chap.3

67. Edward Pinder, *Letters on the Labouring Population of Barbados*. (1858. Barbadian Heritage Reprint Series no.1, N.C.F. 1990)

subsequent 1840 Act was somewhat less draconian, but still produced 10 days of strike action, particularly strong in St. George parish, the site of Drax Hall. These strikes were broken by the police and army, with hundreds of arrests.<sup>68</sup>

Thereafter, strikes still took place, but they were difficult to sustain because of the threat of eviction and arrest so, as workers the world over will frequently do in such circumstances, they turned to sabotage. There was a long tradition of the enslaved labourers setting fire to cane fields as a form of resistance and as a way of bringing their grievances forcefully to the attention of the employer without the risk of individual victimisation. This continued in the 1840s and 50s as the emancipated workers expressed their disappointment in their wages and working conditions as well as their generally oppressed and subordinate role in society.<sup>69</sup> Further outbreaks of strikes, arson and rebellion occurred in 1854, 1863, 1872, 1874, 1895 and 1937. This last, the 1937 riots was part of a much wider uprising in the British West Indies and which led, eventually, to independence.

## Reparations

Where does this all fit in with modern capitalism? How does this affect the argument over reparations for slavery.

The debate over the contribution of slavery to modern capitalism cannot be confined to narrow considerations of profit and loss or to a single national economy. Atlantic slavery was inextricably interwoven with the markets, commodification, capital growth, credit and raw materials that were required for the expansion of capitalism in Europe and North America. West Indian merchants became the merchant bankers who were so important to the growth of the City of London. The modern insurance industry had its roots in the maritime insurance of the "Triangular Trade". Important infrastructure projects such as canals, docks and railways were financed out of the profits of slavery and the compensation received after abolition. But from the enslaved worker's point of view, this is of little moment. Economically speaking, the big difference between slavery and free labour is the lack of wages paid to the enslaved.

Let us do a calculation for the amount of unpaid wages owed in the case of Barbados. Using the available figures for slave numbers between 1617 and 1838, and calculating the average number for each period under consideration, then multiplying this figure by the number of years in that period, and also multiplying by £15, the average wage of a British agricultural worker from 1650 to 1780, and by £25 being the average for the period 1780-

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68. Carter, *Labour Pains*, Chap 4.

69. Beckles, *Great House Rules*, p.76

1850, gives a total of £211,113,465.<sup>70</sup> In today's money that would amount to around five hundred billion pounds sterling.

Year	Number of Slaves	Years under Consideration	Unpaid wages
1627	0		
1655	20000	28	£4,200,000
1660	27000	5	£1,762,500
1673	33184	13	£5,867,940
1684	46502	11	£6,574,095
1696	42000	12	£7,965,180
1750	65000	54	£43,335,000
1780	70000	30	£30,375,000
1838	83150	58	£111,033,750
<b>Total</b>			<b>£211,113,465</b>

A similar calculation applied to the whole of the former British West Indies produces a figure of one thousand five hundred billion pounds sterling.

Eric Williams argued that racism was "a consequence, not the cause of slavery". Workers in Britain have long suffered from divisions caused by racism that have weakened our ability to defend and advance our wages and conditions. A recognition of the origins of such divisions in the slave-based economy of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century will go some way to combating racial prejudices and assist building a united response to the problems facing today's workers.

We urge the British trade union and labour movement to follow in the radical internationalist tradition of so many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century workers and support the claim of the descendants of the British West Indian slaves for reparations. As Thomas Hardy of the London Corresponding Society wrote: "for I am perswaded that no Man who is an advocate from a principle for liberty for a Black Man but will strenuously promote and support the rights of a White Man and vice versa".<sup>71</sup>

We suggest that the starting point for this discussion should be repayment of the unpaid wages due to the enslaved and that the most appropriate means of payment would be a special Corporation Tax to directly charge the institutional descendants of those who profited from slavery. Any modern trade union representative worth their salt immediately responds to support any worker who is not paid their wages. Reparations for slavery is a means to address a similar grievance for many millions of unpaid enslaved labourers whose descendants are calling for our solidarity.

70. Donald Winford, "Intermediate" creoles and degrees of change in creole formation (2001) [www.researchgate.net/publication/300456682\_Intermediate\_creoles\_and\_degrees\_of\_change\_in\_creole\_formation] Gregory Clark, *Farm Wages And Living Standards In The Industrial Revolution: England, 1670-1850* [http://faculty.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/papers/farm\_wages\_&\_living\_standards.pdf]

71. Fryer, *Staying Power : the History of Black People in Britain*, 1984 p.106

## Decolonising education

Part of the problem with campaigning for reparations is the systematic neglect over many, many decades of education about colonialism and imperialism in schools. One effect of this misleading education has been to undermine pressure for the adoption of government and opposition policy in taxation, etc. to facilitate reparations. While attempts at correcting this neglect also have a long history, recently they have received boosts from sections of a reinvigorated anti-racist movement, under the titles such as decolonising education, increasing diversity in education, etc. But this in turn is now the focus of a wide-ranging government education policy reform push back. This year we have had DfE guidance entitled “Political Impartiality in Schools” designed to, among other things, intimidate those involved in teaching who may have been encouraged to improve teaching about the history of racism and colonialism. The guidance explicitly mentions both such teaching and Black Lives Matters. As this guidance is directed at managers as well as teachers, the proposed changes to school control in the form of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) should also be considered. The recent Education White paper proposes to include all schools in MATs; and new regulations for MATs are set out in the new Schools Bill. Put bluntly, it is going to be easier to intimidate and impose curriculum and teaching restrictions via MATs. In addition, we have in the Government’s, misleading titled ‘Inclusive Britain’ report, with vague proposals for a ‘more inclusive history curriculum’ due in 2024, which will adopt a ‘knowledge rich approach’ to teaching. This proposed change, needs to be seen in relation to proposals for a new curriculum body link to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). This is an organisation explicitly mentioned in the White Paper and very much favoured by both Michael Gove when Education Secretary and the current Education Secretary.

As we speculate on the particulars of what is being planned for history education specifically, we also need to prepare for future government manufactured controversies while we campaign for reparations.

**Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.**

**But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation.**

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 10

*The London, East and South East Region of the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) has set up a Reparations for Afrikan Enslavement Steering Group.*

## **LESE TUC Reparations for Afrikan Enslavement Steering Group**

In the 400 years of the 'Atlantic slave trade', somewhere in the region of 12 to 15 million Africans were enslaved and transported by force to the Americas and the Caribbean. Between one and two million died in the crossing and millions more people in Africa also died because of raids, wars and on the way to the coast for 'sale' to European traffickers. Once in the Americas, these enslaved labourers were forced to work in labour camps where the conditions were so harsh that most only lived for about seven years before the accumulation of fatigue, whipping and hunger sent them to an early grave. The attrition rate in a Caribbean plantation was worse than the Battle of the Somme. The UN World Conference Against Racism 2001 recognised this as a crime against humanity.

For the African continent, trafficking represented depopulation of its societies, the destruction of political and social structures, the stifling of economic development and prepared the way for eventual colonial occupation by the European powers.

Profits from British trafficking and the unpaid labour of enslaved workers contributed significantly to the accumulation of capital in England, which financed the Industrial Revolution and, conversely, contributed to the underdevelopment of member states of the Caribbean Community, both through the profits made from sugar and other tropical products as well as the supply of cheap raw materials such as cotton to European and North American manufacturers. These profits went, directly or indirectly, to the manufacturers and other suppliers of the trafficking, to the shipping industry, into the construction of infrastructure such as canals and railways, but above all to the financial services industry. Many of today's banks and insurance companies can be traced back directly to concerns that had their first growth through their financing of trafficking and enslavement. It would therefore seem reasonable that these modern corporations should refund the unpaid wages from which their predecessors profited so handsomely.

The international trade union and Labour movement has a duty to be in the forefront of the Reparations movement because this struggle is about redress for the unpaid labour, including the special oppression of women, who were forced to have children to provide a continued source of enslaved labour. Furthermore, this struggle is also about stopping and repairing the effect of the ongoing super exploitation of Afrikan people worldwide by institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

Racism, which the supporters of the trafficking used as a justification for enslavement, has infected British society. The racism of the police, the unemployment figures for young Black people, the endless discrimination and petty humiliations of everyday life, the

Windrush scandal: all these factors and more have their origins in the invention of racism to explain the wealth and power that the British ruling class gained from enslavement.

As well as the return of unpaid wages, we seek Reparations for the former enslaved Afrikans and their descendants for the denial of their culture and history; human rights abuses, including but not limited to murder, rape, flogging, branding, denial of freedom of movement, freedom to worship, freedom to own land, and the right to education; and for the severe generational psychological damage to enslaved people and their descendants, long after 1838, caused by their status as enslaved people and perpetuated by associated systemic racism and racial discrimination.

The call for Reparations for enslavement appeals in a broader sense to the "correcting of a wrong". In the case of the trafficking and enslavement with its persistent legacies, this means implementing measures of compensation at different levels. It embraces a multitude of symbolic and material dimensions, including the call for apology and recognition, but also for collective investments that would address the structural inequalities and racial discrimination Afrikan people still suffer in terms of accessing education, health systems, income, housing and labour markets, to name just a few. Besides financial transfers, claims for Reparations demand support for historical and commemorative activities, the erection of memorials, returning artefacts, days of remembrance and museums that would contribute to decolonising the history of enslavement and its legacies.

### *A better world is possible*

The LESE TUC Reparations for Afrikan Enslavement Steering Group sets as its aims to:

- Campaign in the trade union movement for Reparations for enslavement.
- Support and publicise the work of the CARICOM Reparations Commission.
- Support those governments, such as Belize, that have lodged claims for Reparations and encourage other governments to follow their example.
- Liaise with other bodies such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations and local Reparations groups such as Global Afrikan Congressuk (GACuk).
- Work for the decolonisation of education at all levels.
- Support local campaigns for the removal of statues and similar memorials to traffickers and enslavers.
- Produce printed and digital material to support the above.
- Provide speakers for trade union meetings.
- Support the campaign to overturn the convictions of all those who were convicted for their role in the historic 1823 Demerara rebellion by enslaved workers. This should be extended to all enslaved persons executed or punished for acts of resistance.



## **Open Letter to Richard Drax, MP for South Dorset from Stand Up To Racism Dorset**

The enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean has a living legacy – the time for justice is now

The CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) is comprised of 12 member states in the Caribbean region. It is calling for reparations for genocide and for the enslavement of African people by former colonising powers. It also addresses this call to those who have profited from centuries of slavery.

“It is time to repair the harm and suffering that have resulted from crimes committed against enslaved and indentured peoples,” says the Commission: “This is a time for moral leadership. This is the moment of reparatory justice.”

We join forces with the CRC in their demand for reparations and ask you to address this call. The Drax family is prominent among British beneficiaries of transatlantic slavery. Drax Hall Estate in Barbados, still held by your family after more than 350 years, bears testimony to the genocide of Africans and to the trauma, pain and suffering of generations of African slaves and their descendants all over the world.

Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Chair of the CRC, says: “Black life mattered only to make millionaires of English enslavers and the Drax family did it longer than any other elite family.” He adds: “The Drax family has done more harm and violence to the black people of Barbados than any other family. The Draxes built and designed and structured slavery.”

It was one of your ancestors, James Drax, who pioneered the use of African slaves rather than white indentured servants to cultivate sugar. The use of African slaves for sugar cultivation and production yielded high profits and was immensely lucrative for plantation owners. This model was rolled out across the Caribbean and the Americas.

Your own wealth, Mr Drax, including your estate in Dorset today, is witness to this legacy of the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean. Black Lives Matter – then and now. The time to effect reparatory justice is now, starting with the return of Drax Hall Estate in Barbados to the people of that nation, for the benefit of Barbadians and the people of the Caribbean region. This would represent a significant step in truly acknowledging the harm caused by the enslavement of Africans of which you and your family are direct beneficiaries. It will also be a significant recognition of the economic inequality between the Caribbean region and Britain: a direct consequence of the enslavement of Africans for the cultivation of sugar.

We, your constituents in South Dorset, together with elected representatives in the county, and community organisations, trade unions, political parties, faith groups and others ask you to make reparations to the people of the Caribbean region, without delay.

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# The Drax Family Dynasty and the Business of Slavery

Why Reparations For African Enslavement  
is a Trade Union Issue

by  
Steve Cushion



*John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge Erle Drax  
Olantigh Towers, Wye, Kent*

The Drax family are one of the few who were pioneers in the early stages of the British slave economy back in the 17th century and, generations later, still owned plantations and enslaved people at the end of British slavery in the 1830s ... the Drax dynasty were able to generate extraordinary wealth through the cultivation of sugar by enslaved Africans.

*David Olusoga*