

# *Up Down Turn Around*

**The Political Economy of Slavery  
and the Socialist Case for Reparations**

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Caribbean Labour Solidarity



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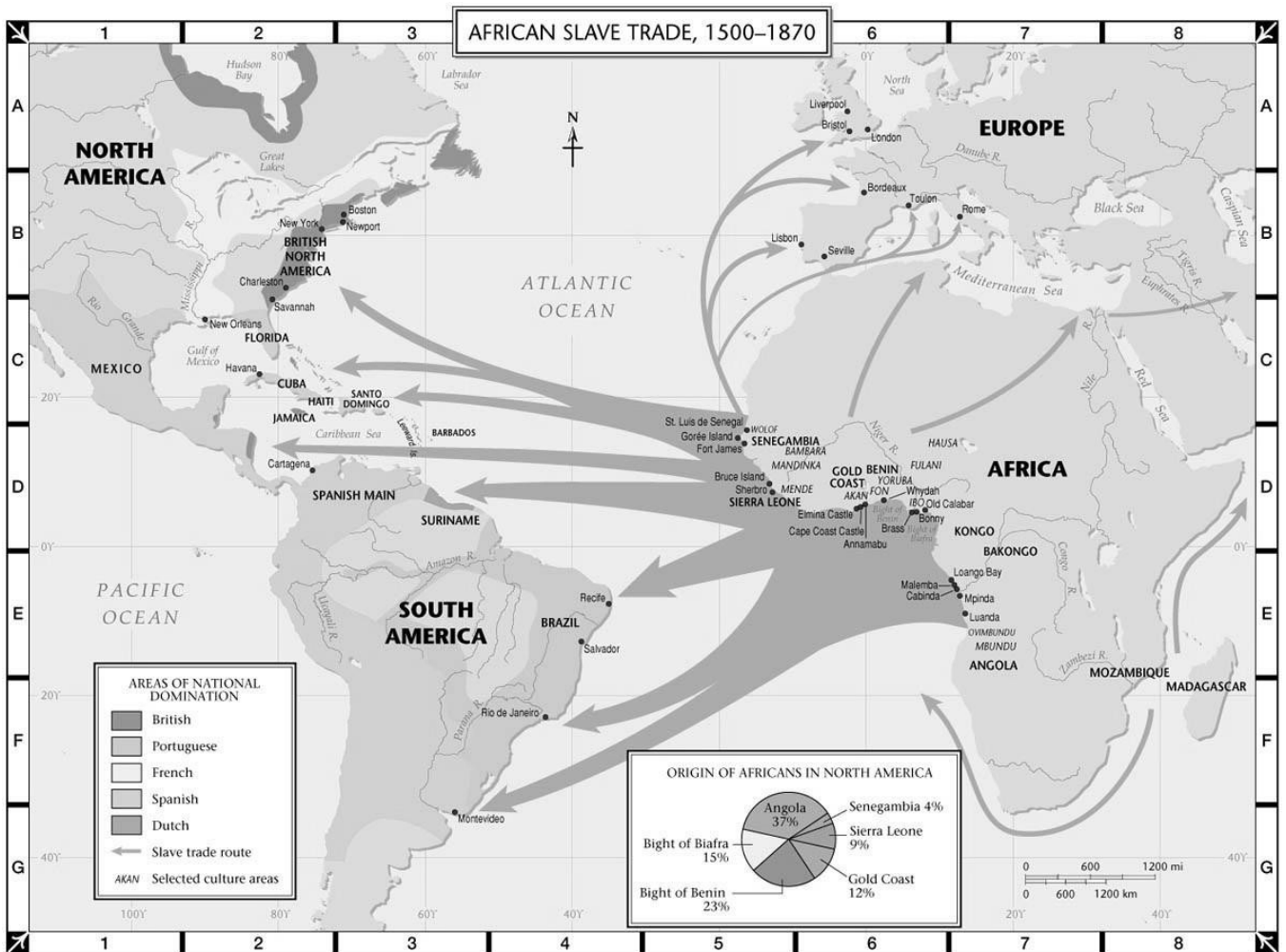
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# Contents

The Political Economy of Slavery and the Socialist Case for Reparations.....2  
 Slavery and the Industrial Revolution.....3  
 Banking and Finance.....6  
 Productivity.....8  
 Abolition.....10  
 Radical Abolitionists.....13  
 Compensation and compromise.....16  
 Reparations.....20  
 Bibliography.....25



## **The Political Economy of Slavery and the Socialist Case for Reparations**

When British Prime Minister David Cameron visited Jamaica in September 2015, he ignored calls for an apology and reparations for the Transatlantic slave trade, instead offering £25 million to build a prison for Jamaicans currently serving sentences in the UK. The British government has a long history of such contempt for those victimised by slavery and the ongoing consequences to the descendants of people enslaved under the British Empire despite or, perhaps, because of the vast wealth that British capitalists extracted from the Caribbean during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The preferred narrative congratulates the United Kingdom for being the first nation to abolish the slave trade.

Nevertheless, Jamaica was a British colony with a slave-based economy for 179 years from 1655 to 1834, with an average of 150,000 enslaved people. Given that a British agricultural labourer was paid around 25 pounds a year in 1750, a quick, back-of-an-envelope calculation leaves an unpaid wages bill of £671,250,000, worth about 600 billion pounds in today's money. And this is just for Jamaica. No wonder David Cameron was told to keep his mouth shut.

Ever since Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944, there have been furious arguments over this issue, with many historians attempting to prove that slavery did not contribute greatly to the development of modern capitalism. This pamphlet will examine the arguments about the relationship between capitalism and slavery, starting from Eric Williams's basic propositions in his famous book, and asking if subsequent research, particularly the work of the University College London (UCL) Legacies of British Slave-ownership project, endorses or invalidates his conclusions. In particular, we shall try to look at the question, not merely considering the effects on the British capitalist economy, but rather adding the perspective of the enslaved to cut through the "*almost impenetrable jungle of conflicting opinion, poorly defined conceptual frameworks and dubiously grounded computations*".<sup>1</sup>

Williams based his book on a number of propositions:

- Profits earned in the slave trade and in the colonies helped finance British industrialisation;
- The profitability of slavery, the slave trade and the Caribbean colonies declined in the aftermath of the American Revolution and their importance to England's economy waned;

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1 Sheridan, *The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century*, 1965 p.303

- Abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies were not primarily driven by philanthropy or humanitarianism but by economic motives within England.
- By their own rebellion and resistance, enslaved people contributed greatly to their own emancipation.

In pursuing the case for reparations, we shall start by examining the proposition that slavery was important for the development of modern capitalism and that currently existing business corporations owe their very existence to profits made from the slave-based economy of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Without this being the case, any claim for reparations lacks the focus of a target from which to demand payment.

We shall also question the comfortable and self-congratulatory view of abolition and emancipation summed up by the inscription on William Wilberforce's monument in Westminster Abbey which claims that he "*removed from England the guilt of the African slave trade*". Rather than such pious complacency, we argue that abolition was a far more complex process.

## **Slavery and the Industrial Revolution**

The discussion of the relationship between capitalism and slavery has not been helped by writers who only consider the economy of one particular country or empire. However, globalisation is nothing new and the inter-relationship of the world economy pre-dates the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the mainland colonies of North America that would become the USA, particularly the area known as New England, owed their early prosperity to the West India trade, supplying food and other essentials to the plantations in the British Caribbean, which in turn would have not have been able to function profitably without such a supply base. Similarly, the Manchester cotton industry was dependent for years on slavery in the southern states of the USA.

Furthermore, there is a tendency amongst many historians to see national economies as if they were a single entity. How many times have you read something along the lines: "This was vital for the British economy"? This approach neglects the division of nations into classes and interest groups; policies that help the financial services industry may be a disaster for industrial manufacturing, as we saw under the government of Margaret Thatcher. Similarly, to suggest that employers and workers have common interests has more to do with ideology than material reality. So, to look at a national economy as if it were a single entity, like a Stalinist, cent-

ralised, bureaucratic, planned economy, of the sort most modern writers purport to abhor, conceals much more than it reveals. Further, debating global economic figures such as GDP can be useful when looking for general trends, but ignores the fact that profit and loss take place at the level of individual enterprises. A single businessman making an exceptional profit can be significant in promoting development, but his role is obscured if we only look at average figures. The fact that some of the early developers of industrialisation made their initial money through slavery and the slave trade is therefore more important than the generalisations.

Industrialisation in Europe and North America was built on a primary accumulation of capital, the initial funding that could start the process. This was necessarily violent and involved the driving of peasant farmers from their farms and the privatisation of common land that had previously been open for all to use, processes known as clearances and enclosures. Between 1801 and 1831 alone, over three and a half million acres of common land were expropriated by the big landlords through acts of parliament.<sup>2</sup> In the metropolitan countries, the process of industrialisation needed to turn people into wage workers. By enabling the enclosure of common land, the law not only enriched the landowners who gained increased holdings, it also rendered independent farming inaccessible to most ordinary country folk, who had previously had access to the commons. This forced many to seek paid employment in the towns. In a parallel process, the indigenous population of North America and the Caribbean who did not prove amenable to agricultural slavery were subjected to a process of extermination by a mixture of violence and disease. This freed land for European colonisation, but left those colonists without a labour force to exploit. And so the other component of this process, which started with the seizure of the common land of ordinary country folk in Britain, was the expropriation of the very bodies of ordinary country folk in Africa as they were captured and sold into slavery. The coercion and violence required to operate slave labour was matched by the expansionist war against indigenous people all over the Americas. Thus, systematic violence destroyed subsistence agriculture and forced a move to commodity production, using coerced labour where necessary.

Colonial domination, slavery and genocide against the indigenous population was essential to this expropriation. In addition to this "War Capitalism", the industrial revolution itself required a strong state: a navy to force market access on reluctant "natives", the regulation and standardisation of trade to enable large-scale long-distance exchange between businessmen who did not know each other, as well as courts, soldiers and police to enforce contracts and property rights. In this last

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2 Linebaugh & Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 2000 p.315



context, slavery, which was the legal holding of property in the persons of human beings, needed a particularly strong state machine.

While the institution of slavery has its origins in the pre-capitalist era, the form that it took in modern times, plantation slavery on an industrial scale, was geared to the mass production of commodities and flourished as a result of market forces. It not only enabled the initial development of capitalism, but became an important component of the mature capitalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Slavery had its social origins in feudal times and contributed to the initial take-off of industrial capitalism but, before it was finally abolished in 1888, slavery had become a central feature of the modern economy. Thus, 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, was a banker whose family also made their fortune through slavery. The first US cotton manufacturer with 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>3</sup>

The increased economic activity engendered by the sugar-slave complex led to much increased international trade in manufactures, raw materials and foodstuffs. Those North American colonies whose economies were not based on slavery, earned enough from supplying the slave colonies to correct their balance of payments with Britain, buying manufactured goods with the proceeds. Thus the sugar/slave complex led to an international trade with increased flows of capital, manufactured goods and raw materials along with the expanded necessity for shipping and shipbuilding.<sup>4</sup>

A mutually reinforcing relationship between slavery and industrialisation meant that the one fed the other. Many slave traders, planters and merchants diversified into manufacture, agricultural improvement and infrastructure, or kept their money in banks and finance houses that extended credit to the developing capitalist economy. While part of the profits of slavery was spent on conspicuous consumption, even this helped spur the growth of the market economy.

However, the financial services industry became a very significant beneficiary as the slave economy expanded the need for credit, banking and insurance.

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

4 Solow, *Capitalism and Slavery in the Exceedingly Long Run*, 1987 p.731

## Banking and Finance

When slavery was finally abolished, the previous slave-owners were compensated to the tune of £20 million, probably worth £15 billion in today's money. This process was meticulously documented and the slave compensation records provide a snap-shot of the slave economy that gives us valuable data with which we can assess the competing claims of the relationship between the various sectors of the British capitalist class. The slave compensation records show that the contribution from British colonial slave ownership to industrialisation did not cease with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 or with emancipation in the 1830s. However, the relationship between slave-owning and the expanding industrial sectors such as textiles was less strong than the links to finance and commerce, with a greater generation of capital from the sugar industry than was previously thought.<sup>5</sup> This capital then largely returned to Britain, so that, in the earlier part of the 19th century, 1 in 6 of the richest, non-landowning people in Britain had derived a significant proportion of their wealth from the slave trade. Many former slave owners went on to be important contributors to the transformation of the British economy between 1840 and 1870, while slave-owners and their descendants were prominent among the Directors of the Bank of England throughout the 19th century. The merchant banks that came to dominate the City of London and the British financial services industry developed from merchants active in the West India trade, who evolved into bankers as they responded to the need for credit instruments to facilitate the flow of slaves and tropical produce. The "Bill of Exchange" became the most important means of settling the commercial transactions of the time and a way of increasing the money supply as an early form of institutionalised credit.<sup>6</sup> After emancipation, British capital continued to be active in the slave economy outside the British Empire in Cuba, Brazil and the USA; for example, Kleinwort Benson started its corporate life as cotton brokers, also dealing in Cuban sugar and cigars

Slave trading required credit to finance the expedition and, given the risks involved, lenders demanded significant interest. The purchase of slaves when they reached the Americas required further credit, as few slave-owners had enough capital to buy the number of labourers they required. In turn, in a very modern format, these loans were often secured by mortgages on the estates, effectively a mortgage on the enslaved people themselves, who represented the most valuable asset. Given that the slave-based economy of the USA became more economically developed than that of the British Caribbean, it may be useful to examine the political eco-

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5 Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership, Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, 2014 p.23, 33

6 Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership*, 2014 p.58, 87, 108-11

onomy of US cotton planting to see the extent to which slavery can be seen as modern capitalism rather than an outdated hangover from a previous era.

Take the example of the Consolidated Association of the Planters of Louisiana (CAPL), which used slaves as collateral to raise capital overseas in order to build a lending institution under slave-owner control. CAPL was chartered by the Louisiana state legislature in 1827 and used the famous Baring Brothers of London as European brokers. US State administrations issued bonds that turned slave mortgages into securities to be marketed to European investors. This produced credit to buy more slaves. By 1836, New Orleans had the densest concentration of banking capital in the country. Other states followed suit, supporting banks that offered slave-based bonds to Europe; Alabama sold most of its bonds to Rothschild's of Paris. This all generated a speculative bubble in the South-West USA, which burst in 1839, resulting in the collapse of most of these state-sponsored banks. The state governments had guaranteed these banks and after the crash would have been required to increase taxes to redeem the bonds, thus privatising the gains but socialising the risks. In the event, 8 states and the territory of Florida defaulted on their sovereign debts.

In the recovery from these collapses, Southern US planters became dependent on Northern credit, but had a vast capital investment in 3 million slaves. A new system then developed based on Northern capital coming south to buy cotton. Lehman Brothers, the same banking corporation that notoriously went bankrupt in 2008, started life as "factors", lending money to slave-owners on the security of future crops and mortgages on slaves. These factors borrowed from New York banks such as Brown Brothers. It is interesting to see how many household names of the financial services industry started in this way. The earlier importance of West Indian slave-grown cotton to the Lancashire textile industry had resulted in the development of Liverpool cotton brokers who went on to be important in later cotton broking in the USA, with clear lines of continuity. Slave-holding was absolutely intertwined with cotton manufacture as well as cotton broking, with many parallel streams of business activity based ultimately on slavery.<sup>7</sup>

Slave trading was a risky business; in addition to the normal hazards of the sea during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was the ever-present possibility of slave revolt. The insurance industry developed in order to spread these risks, although insurance for suppressing rebellion at sea did not cover the loss due to deaths caused by putting down the insurrection if less than 10% of the enslaved cargo were killed. Slavery is

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7 Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership*, 2014 p.98

the most extreme example of the insurance principle of putting a monetary value on human life. In 1790, the slave-trade and the transportation of slave-grown produce from the West Indies was the most important single sector of the marine insurance sector, accounting for at least a third of the premiums of the London Assurance Company. Insurance played an important role in the take-off of finance capitalism in London and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century such insurance boomed, taking on a capital accumulation logic of its own. These companies are still with us today; the 1720 Act of Parliament that allowed the formation of two joint stock insurance companies, both heavily involved in insuring the slave trade, facilitated the formation of Royal Exchange Insurance, later Guardian Royal Exchange and currently part of AXA and the London Insurance, later incorporated in Royal and Sun Alliance. The most important business of Lloyds of London was the slave-based West India trade<sup>8</sup>

In the face of this picture, so similar to the modern financial services industry, there is no way to argue that slavery is in any way pre-capitalist.

## 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>9</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 risk of losing some or all of this investment through 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.<sup>10</sup> The easier treatment required to reduce rates of mortality among mothers and children would have equally reduced productivity and output. A British agricultural labourer cost his employer £25 a year in wages. In comparison, after three years a planter would have spent £35 to purchase his slave and £15 in provisions, etc. He would thus already be £25 in pocket and thereafter his costs would be £20 a year less for the remainder of the lifetime of the slave. This is the brutal calculation

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8 Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England*, 2002, pp. 313-361

Rupprecht, *Excessive Memories: Slavery, Insurance and Resistance*, 2007, pp. 12,15, 21

9 Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*, 1977 p.177

10 Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 1997, pp425-6

that made slavery so profitable.

One of the arguments of the abolitionists in their campaign against slavery was that "free labour", with workers paid a wage and free to leave employment when they wished, was more productive than the labour of the enslaved who, it was argued, had no incentive to work unless forced to by the whip. Not that the free labour alternative was always expressed in the most tactful way. In 1786, the Reverend Joseph Townsend wrote: "*hunger is not only a peaceable, silent, unremitted pressure, but the most natural motive to industry and labour, it calls forth the most powerful exertions*".<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, this did not prove to be the case. Slaves worked under drivers in gangs that would build up a fierce momentum. Modern "human resources" techniques, such as speed-up and measured task working, enforced by the whip and other torture, pushed a cotton-picking productivity increase of 400% between 1800 and 1860 in the USA. Industrialisation did nothing to lighten the workload of the slaves, rather it made matters worse since slaves were driven harder to keep up with the steam-driven processing of the harvested cane.

In 1850 a slave picked 200 lb of cotton a day, in the 1930s, despite technological advances, a "free" labourer was only picking 120 lb.<sup>12</sup> This resulted in many abolitionists expressing disappointment at the lack of productivity of the emancipated labourers, and we have the hideous spectacle of men, who would not have survived a single day cutting cane under the tropical sun, complaining of "lazy Negroes".

Thus slavery was more "efficient" than free labour, thereby disproving the assertion that it was an inefficient system swept away by modern industrial capitalism. The violence of slavery was not random sadism but an inherent part of the system, as was the ideology of white supremacy used to justify this barbarity, the legacy of which we are still suffering, as we see in the contemptuous way US police so frequently gun down African-Americans.

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11 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*, 1975 p.358

12 Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 2015 pp.164, 332, 426

## Abolition

*"Great mass movements show a curious affinity with the rise and development of new interests"*<sup>13</sup>

Eric Williams argued that the decline in profitability of slavery, the slave trade and the Caribbean colonies in the aftermath of the American Revolution was an important factor in the British government's decision to abolish the slave trade and later to emancipate the slaves in the British West Indies. This challenged the previously widely held view that abolition was an act of unselfish humanitarianism. Predictably, this rejection of the comfortable notion of British Establishment benevolence was widely criticised with a number of authors producing data to prove that the profitability of slavery was not in decline.<sup>14</sup> The implications of this argument are important; if the British government emancipated the slaves solely out of charitable benevolence and the "British economy" lost money in the process, than the case for the demand for reparations for slavery becomes somewhat weaker.

And, at first sight, the case for the continued profitability of slavery in the British West Indies seems to have been well made. Not only are the figures convincing, but there is a logical argument that there would have been no need for the massive campaigns run by the abolitionists if there was such a decline; it would have been enough to allow the practice to die the death of a declining industry. When we look at slavery in the USA, that logic is reinforced: one cannot imagine the need for the Civil War, with its great losses and huge expense, if the practice over which it was fought was on its way out. Another indication of the continued profitability of the slave economy 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 planters, returned estate managers and West India merchants. It was also an opportunity for others to invest in the profits 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>15</sup>

13 Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, 1944 p.211

14 Drescher, *Econocide : British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*, 1977

15 Draper, *The City of London and Slavery: Evidence from the First Docks Companies 1785-1800*, 2008

### **The Hibbert Family**

The Hibbert brothers were sons of linen draper. Robert Hibbert (1717-84), was a West India Merchant, and Thomas Hibbert (1710-80), superintended the family estates in the West Indies where he also operated as a slave factor who purchased the enslaved directly off the boat, then resold them to the planters on credit. In the ten years from 1764-1774, he bought 16,254 slaves off 61 ships.

His nephews worked in the family counting house, working with various London partners, supplying plantations, buying sugar on commission and organising finance and credit. One of them, Thomas (1744-1819), worked with his brother-in-law, Thomas Greg (1752-1832) in the insurance business.

Robert Hibbert's son George (1757-1837) was involved in the shipping and distribution of sugar from Jamaica. He became the senior partner in the Hibbert family partnerships, the Chairman of the West India Dock Company, a central figure in the Society of West India Planters and Merchants, an Alderman for the City of London (1798-1802), a Member of Parliament for Seaford (1806-1812), and finally the Agent for Jamaica (1812-1831).

The Hibbert family was awarded £103,000 in compensation upon the ending of slavery, with George Hibbert awarded £16,000

However, the plantation economy, while still profitable, was being overtaken by the manufacturing industry it had helped to establish.<sup>16</sup> Capitalism requires continuous expansion; witness the modern obsession with economic "growth". British slavery was based on the Caribbean islands, which meant there was a physical limit to the possible growth of the sugar economy. This lack of possible expansion was offset by protectionist legislation that artificially increased the price of sugar, thereby maintaining the planters' profits. In the same way, agriculture in mainland Britain was protected by the so-called Corn Laws. On the other hand, while manufacturing industry, particularly textiles, had benefited from similar protective

legislation in the early days, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the British manufacturing bourgeoisie no longer needed such help and saw their business being restricted by the protection still afforded to agriculture in general and sugar in particular. The essence of the matter was that manufacturing required a different form of state that would implement policies that were in conflict with the continued domination of the the old land-owning gentry in Britain and the slave-based "West Indian Interest" in the colonies. 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.

Cotton fabrics were linked from the outset with slavery and the slave trade as Indian cloth was a popular trade item at the African end of the slave trade. This had produced considerable profit for the East India Company, but

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16 Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership*, 2014 p.33

European businessmen coveted this market and the replacement of Indian imports by home produced exports became a priority for English capitalists. Cotton fabrics originating in India proved very popular in England and in 1685 the English parliament imposed a duty of 10% on cloth imported from India, this was doubled in 1690 and the import of Indian printed cotton banned altogether in 1701. The early stages of the development of any capitalist economy requires protection from the competition of rival producers in other parts of the world but, once the new economy has become established, this protection inhibits further growth.

The riches generated by slavery came from the combination of the exploitation of enslaved labour in the Caribbean and a protected British market with regressive taxes on items of everyday consumption that, like all such consumption based taxation, fell mainly on the poor.<sup>17</sup> As textile production became more mechanised, technology overcome the relatively high cost of British labour in comparison with that of India while, at the same time, the British Empire deliberately undermined textile production in India. As a result, the British cotton industry lost the need for such protectionism and saw the advantages of "Free Trade". To achieve this, the cotton bourgeoisie needed political power for its representatives in order to control the state in the face of competing elites, principally the British landed gentry and the "West Indian Interest", whose profits were maintained by import tariffs on corn and sugar respectively. On the other hand, manufacturers sought to maximise their profits by reducing the wages they paid to their labourers. But these wages had to be sufficient to feed and clothe the workers and their families and so high grain and sugar prices increased factory wage costs. Thus we can see that one aspect of the abolition of slavery was its role in a process of internal rivalry within the ruling class. The struggle for ascendancy by the manufacturing bourgeoisie over the previously dominant land-owning agricultural interests and their slave-holding allies was achieved through the Slave Trade Act of 1807, the Reform Act of 1832, the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, the New Poor Law of 1834 and the Importation Act of 1846. This last, popularly known as the Repeal of the Corn Laws, also removed protection for the sugar produced in the British Caribbean colonies and was the move that finally ruined many sugar plantation estates.

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<sup>17</sup> Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership*, 2014 p.50



But if the elite abolitionist movement aimed at the transformation of British capitalism from an agricultural to a manufacturing and financial services economy, there was another thread to abolitionism that saw it as part of a struggle for reforms that would empower ordinary working people.

## Radical Abolitionists

In 1819, at a meeting in his Hopkins Street Chapel in London, Robert Wedderburn 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>18</sup>

One of the first abolitionist petitions was launched by the Manchester Society for Constitutional Information in 1787. Petitioning went on to become an important tactic not only against slavery and the slave trade but for many other radical and working-class causes, such as parliamentary reform. Tom Paine, author of *The Rights of Man*, was a leading member of the Society for Constitutional Information, which in turn played an important part in setting up the London Corresponding Society, one of the first radical working-class political organisations in Britain. Thomas Hardy, founder of the London Corresponding Society, shared a house with Olaudah Equiano, the African ex-slave and abolitionist. Equiano was important in the development of the London Corresponding Society because he provided a link between the radicals in London and militant workers in Manchester and Sheffield, whom he knew through his abolitionist campaigning. The Sheffield cutlery workers made a particularly firm connection between abolition of slavery and reform at home; a mass meeting in Sheffield in 1794, the largest ever in the town, called for total abolition of slavery, at a time when Wilberforce and his associates, known as the the "Clapham Sect", were merely calling for the end of the slave *trade*. Meanwhile, Samuel Taylor Coleridge transformed the intellectual propaganda of elite abolitionists, which was aimed at influencing the powerful, into popular, radical agitation. The London Corresponding Society clearly linked the slave-owners to the corrupt political establishment that they were fighting in Britain and argued that the end of slavery would reduce the reactionary political base of the "The Old Corruption", as many "West Indians" controlled the so-called "Rotten Boroughs", where the Member of Parliament was effectively appointed by a rich man who controlled the "electors". Any attempt to reform the undemocratic

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18 Linebaugh & Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 2000 p.319

electoral system in Britain would bring the reformers into head-on collision with the entrenched landed elite and their allies among the slave-holders.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the struggle for reform in Britain and the campaign for the abolition of slavery became linked as part of the radical popular

***He that taketh away his neighbour's living slayeth him; and he that defraudeth the labourer of his hire is a bloodletter.***

Ecclesiastes Chapter 34, Verse 22

democratic movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, with its demands for political and human rights. Unfortunately, the British government also saw the connection only too well and Thomas Hardy was put on trial along with John Horne Tooke and John Thelwall. When the jury failed to convict them, the government brought in a the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795, following with a Parliamentary Act of 1799 "*for the more effectual suppression of societies established for seditious and treasonable purposes; and for better preventing treasonable and seditious practices*", which banned all reformist associations, specifying the London Corresponding Society by name. William Wilberforce voted for all these "gagging bills" as well as being in favour of the Combination Act, which suppressed trade union activity.

Radical anti-slavery activists suffered severe government repression along with the rest of the reform movement and so, when merely the trade in slaves was abolished in 1807, there was little space in which those who thought the measure too moderate could campaign for full emancipation. In the slightly more relaxed political atmosphere after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, anti-slavery petitions restarted a wave of radical political activity. This was again repressed after the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 by the notorious "Six Acts", particularly the Seditious Meetings Prevention Act and the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act, again passed with the support of Wilberforce. However, once the Seditious Meetings Act was repealed in 1824, anti-slavery became inextricably linked with agitation for parliamentary reform and trade union rights. So much so that, in 1832, the political opportunist William Cobbett, when seeking election in Oldham, with its strong working class militant traditions, had to espouse anti-slavery despite his own racist views. In 1831-32, more than one and a half million names were added to anti-slavery petitions.

Women's anti-slavery activists were often considerably more radical than the men. Following the publication of Elizabeth Heyrick's 1824 pamphlet *Immediate not Gradual Abolition*, women's anti-slavery groups such as the Birmingham

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19 Walvin, *The Impact of Slavery on British Radical Politics: 1787-1838*, 1977 pp344-350

Ladies Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves led the way in establishing the aim of the movement to be immediate rather than gradual emancipation, despite the foot-dragging of the (male) national abolitionist leadership. One of the founders of the Ladies' Association for Calne expressed the hope that no ladies' association would ever be found with the word "gradual" attached to it. During the US Civil War, the International Workingmen's Association, with the support of British and French trade unions, instructed Karl Marx to write to Abraham Lincoln congratulating him on his re-election. In his letter, Marx said that so long as the US Republic was defiled by slavery, they would never be able to obtain true freedom of labour.

But it would be a mistake to see emancipation as arising from British politics, whether radical, moderate or conservative. The enslaved themselves played an essential part in their own liberation. The revolution in Haiti not only freed the slaves on what was probably the most important sugar colony of the time, it also made the slave-owners on other islands realise the precarious nature of their position and required an increasing militarisation of the region. Slave revolts, escapes, marronage and similar acts of resistance undermined the attractiveness of slavery as an investment proposition, while also heartening radical abolitionist opinion back in Britain.

Throughout the history of slavery in the Americas, the enslaved made constant attempts to escape. Some went to live in remote and well-defended Maroon communities away from white society, many hid amongst the free population of ex-slaves in the towns, and others lived as gangs of bandits. A common form of escape was to flee to the next island by canoe, stow away on a merchant vessel or join a pirate company. Nowhere did marronage end slavery, but it considerably weakened the institution. The constant concern that slaves might make their escape proved costly, both for the loss of slaves who succeeded and the need for soldiers and slave-catchers to prevent more from running away. The plantation owners lived in a state of insecurity and fear of their slaves; with good reason as there were many small scale revolts, sometimes resulting in the death of the planter and his family, that were made with the intention of mass escape. Maroons provided a disruptive role-model for other slaves and the penalties for escape, torture, mutilation and death, left recaptured maroons less valuable and less productive.<sup>20</sup>

The owners were in a contradictory position as they saw the need to execute rebellious slaves, but thereby lost property. Massive revolts were exceptional and depended on exceptional situations, reflecting the slaves' understanding of the odds against them and their ability to plan for the most propitious moment when they

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20 Helg, *Plus Jamais Esclaves!*, 2016 pp.66-77

stood the best chance. Despite the cruel punishments for rebellion and resistance there were important slave rebellions in Barbados in 1816, Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831-32. The cruel suppression of the 1823 revolt, along with the death in prison of a protestant missionary, was key to convincing British abolitionists that the very existence of slavery caused these rebellions. Thenceforth, they stopped merely campaigning for reforms and moved towards emancipation as the principal aim.<sup>21</sup> The British Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1823. The "Baptist War", as the 1831 Jamaica uprising became known, can be credited with concentrating the minds of the British government to face the fact that increasing rebelliousness was causing the whole system to fail. 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 reconcile the slave-holders to emancipation. Rather than continue to resist abolition, the West Indian planters moved away from defending slavery towards demanding compensation for their loss of property.

## **Compensation and compromise**

The British Establishment has been remarkably adept at taking the demands of its opponents and twisting them to its own advantage. Thus, the demand for "equality" is translated into "equality of opportunity", leaving the existing hierarchy intact while offering a few places to women, black people and members of other oppressed groups. Similarly, "social mobility" is proposed as a response to demands for general improvements in living standards for all working people. So it was with the demand for the total freedom of the enslaved, which was implemented by a system of compensated emancipation, delayed by a period of "apprenticeship". By this stroke of genius, radicalism was undermined and the compensation was largely paid by the workers as, in those days, the majority of state revenue was raised by regressive taxation on items of basic consumption, which always hits the poor hardest. The Establishment has boasted ever since of its freedom-loving generosity, probably believing its own propaganda.

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,

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21 Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement*, 2006

once some of them had used profits from the sugar industry to start up their businesses, had no further interest in supporting the planters. At the same time, popular anti-slavery was an excellent cover for their campaign for control of the levers of power. Nevertheless, in order to win that campaign, those capitalist interests opposed to slavery had to reach a compromise with the still powerful "West Indians". This was the basis for the £20 million compensation paid to the slave-owners. 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 emancipation without compensation would threaten the basis of capitalist property relations. Besides, the compensation was good business for Rothschilds who organised a loan to the British government to cover the compensation and the vastly increased National Debt was paid off by taxation on items of everyday consumption - workers in Britain effectively compensated the slave-owners, who were then able to invest their compensation money in new business ventures. Thus, emancipation can be seen as a reorientation of British capitalism, away from reliance on agricultural production towards a manufacturing economy. We also see a reorientation of British Imperialism in the intensified direct colonisation of India, South East Asia and Africa as "War Capitalism" sought the raw materials, at the lowest price possible, that were required for the new manufacturing industry.

Part of the long-term problem with slavery as a system, from the point of view of capitalist development, is that considerable amounts of capital are locked up in slave ownership. Compensation solved that by releasing the capital. A significant proportion of the slave compensation money was reinvested in railways, canals and steamship lines, essential to and profiting from manufacturing industry.<sup>22</sup> For example, the Bristol West India interest was prominent in financing the Great Western Railway. James MacQueen, pro-slavery polemicist and slave owner invested heavily in the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, of which 9 out of the 12 directors were recipients of slave compensation.

In 1833, the finance house Baring Brothers had £250,000 invested in mortgages on West Indian estates. The bank also invested heavily in slave-produced US cotton and had earned \$1 million commission for organising the finance of the "Louisiana Purchase" which had vastly extended the scope of cotton slavery in the USA. Such was the nature of the compensation scheme that Barings, along with the majority of British commercial, financial and manufacturing companies, gained rather than lost as a result of emancipation as they were in a position to diversify

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22 Hall et al. , *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership*, 2014 p.99-102

Draper, 'Possessing Slaves': *Ownership, Compensation and Metropolitan Society in Britain at the time of Emancipation 1834-40*, 2007 p.89

their investments into new and profitable businesses.<sup>23</sup>

The compromise nature of emancipation can be seen in the full title of the Act of Parliament of August 1833: "An Act for the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies, for promoting the industry of the manumitted slaves and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the services of such slaves".

While there can be no doubt that the prominent elite abolitionists such as William Wilberforce and Thomas 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. Thus we find such prominent abolitionists as the banker George Peters were creditors of slave owners. As a result of foreclosures on mortgages, London-based financiers came to hold interests in slave plantations. This explains how committed abolitionists came to be included in the slave compensation scheme, such was the integrated nature of the London finance and credit system.<sup>24</sup>

Moderate abolitionists equally firmly believed in the superior productivity of "free labour", but at the heart of the concept of "free labour" is a contradiction: reward is supposed to make workers more productive and harder working than punishment, but the pressures of capitalist competition force individual employers to reduce wages to the lowest level that allows the worker to live, work and reproduce another generation of workers. As a result of this, while Wilberforce and Clarkson could have won considerable working class solidarity for the enslaved by reminding workers that slaves were denied even the pitiful level of wages earned by the 19th century weaver, one can search their speeches in vain looking for any indignation that a slave must work without wages. But then, while they might have wanted working class signatures on anti-slavery petitions, they were as opposed to workers self activity in Britain as they were to slave revolts in the Caribbean.

To quote AL Morton's, *A People's History of England*:

"These laws were the work of Pitt and of his sanctimonious friend Wilberforce, whose well known sympathy for the black slave never prevented him from being the foremost apologist and champion of every act of tyranny in England, from the employment of Oliver the Spy or the illegal detention of poor prisoners in Cold Bath Fields gaol to the Peterloo massacre and the suspension of the habeas corpus."

In his 1807 pamphlet, *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, Wilberforce

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23 Hudson, *Slavery, the Slave Trade and Economic Growth*, 2014

24 Draper, *The City of London and slavery*, 2008

wrote:

"It would be wrong to emancipate. To grant freedom to them immediately would be to insure not only their masters' ruin, but their own. They must first be trained and educated for freedom"

Meanwhile another prominent abolitionist, Zachary Macaulay, spoke of:

"preparing the slaves, gradually ... for the grand change of substituting a moral impulse of labour, for that of the whip".

Of course the "moral impulse of labour" needed reinforcement, even in England, by laws such as the 1824 Vagrancy Act (An Act for the punishment of idle and disorderly persons, rogues and vagabonds) and the introduction of Workhouses in the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834. It is no coincidence that the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 was quickly followed by this new Poor Law, forcing people who had no means of support to enter the workhouse; this was a law to force proletarianisation even when the system could not provide work. Having used the enclosures of common land in England and the Highland Clearances in Scotland to proletarianise or pauperise the majority of country people, the British ruling class were hardly likely to allow the recently emancipated enslaved to live by subsistence 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 acquiring enough land on which to survive without working for the planters. 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>25</sup>

Emancipated workers in the British West Indies faced having to pay rent, frequently deducted from their miserable wages, while their proletarian status was reinforced by penal laws against vagrancy and debt. Protest was met by eviction, the demolition of their houses and destruction of provision grounds.<sup>26</sup> Colonies passed "Master and Servant Acts" restricting the right to strike and other collective activity that might have increased wages. Similarly in the USA, after the Civil War, charitable abolitionists were behind new vagrancy laws.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the abolitionists' firm belief in the superiority of "free labour" was to be imposed, if necessary, at the point of the bayonet although, as always, hunger was the principal threat.

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25 Hart, *From Occupation to Independence*, 1998 pp.40-44

26 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, 2014 p.281

27 Stanley, *Beggars Can't Be Choosers*, 1992

## 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 the 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 such as canals, docks and railways were financed out of the profits of slavery and the compensation received after abolition. But from the point of view of the enslaved, this is of little moment. Economically speaking, the big difference between slavery and free labour is the lack of wages paid to the enslaved.

We started with a calculation for the amount of unpaid wages owed in the case of Jamaica. Let us do the same calculation for the whole of the British colonial Caribbean. Using Barry Higman's figures for slave numbers at abolition in 1834 and using the same method applied to Jamaica in the beginning of this pamphlet - dividing the final number of enslaved persons by two to represent a rough average of the number during the years of British orchestrated slavery, then multiplying this figure by the number of years under British occupation and also multiplying by £25, the average wage of a British agricultural worker in 1750. As the table below shows, this gives a total owed of £1,222,781,000 in the money of the day. In today's money that would amount to approximately one thousand billion pounds sterling. While that seems a large sum of money, it is a conservative estimate. In 1807, when the slave trade was abolished, there were 775,000 slaves in the British West Indian colonies, but such was the harsh treatment, even when no more could be legally imported, that number had declined to 665,000 by 1833. Secondly the calculation assumes that there were no slaves in the island when the British took it over. This may be nearly correct for the older colonies of Barbados, St Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat, Virgin Islands and Jamaica. However, the newer colonies seized during the wars with the French, already had an established slave economy. Twenty-five pounds a year is a reasonable basis for the actual wages of the time, considering that free workers in Jamaica in 1838 were asking one shilling and sixpence a day which, for 6 days work a week amounts to nearly £24 a year. Interestingly enough,



if we were to do the calculation based on the current national minimum wage of £6.70 to be paid for a 12 hour day, 6 day week, the figure owed would be just under £1,227 billion. Much the same amount is therefore owed, whichever way you do the maths.

Colony	Number of Slaves in 1834	Year of Colonisation	Years under Occupation	Unpaid wages
Barbados	83150	1627	207	£215,150,625
St. Kitts	17525	1625	209	£45,784,063
Nevis	8840	1628	206	£22,763,000
Antigua	28130	1632	202	£71,028,250
Montserrat	6400	1632	202	£16,160,000
Virgin Islands	5315	1672	162	£10,762,875
Jamaica	311070	1655	179	£696,019,125
Dominica	14165	1763	71	£12,571,438
St. Lucia	13275	1803	31	£5,144,063
St. Vincent	22250	1763	71	£19,746,875
Grenada	23645	1763	71	£20,984,938
Tobago	11545	1763	71	£10,246,188
Trinidad	20655	1797	37	£9,552,938
British Guiana	83545	1803	31	£32,373,688
British Honduras	1895	1670	164	£3,884,750
Cayman Islands	985	1734	100	£1,231,250
Bahamas	9995	1648	186	£23,238,375
Anguilla	2260	1650	184	£5,198,000
Barbuda	505	1685	149	£940,563
<b>Total</b>	<b>665150</b>			<b>£1,222,781,000</b>

Calculation of the amount of unpaid wages by colony, based on:  
Higman, *Population and Labor in the British Caribbean in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 1986, p.608

Therefore, a thousand billion pounds seems a reasonable round figure on which to base the claim arising from unpaid wages to the enslaved in the British West Indies, and similar calculations can be done for the wages owed by other European slave economies and the USA. But to whom should this claim be presented?

Atlantic slavery was an important component of the development and expansion of modern capitalism, 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 slave trade, to the shipping industry, to the construction of infrastructure such as canals and railways, but above all to the financial services industry. Many of today's large banks and insurance companies can be traced back directly to concerns that had their first growth as part of the slave economy. It would therefore seem reasonable that these modern firms should refund the unpaid wages from which their predecessors profited so handsomely forming the basis of their current prosperity. Those that did not directly gain, benefited from the investment of slave compensation payments in infrastructure projects that helped the re-orientation of the British economy away from agricultural production

towards manufacturing. Given that the majority of the slave-owners' compensation was effectively paid by working people through indirect taxation on basic necessities, we need to be careful that any reparations for slavery are not similarly shifted onto the shoulders of ordinary people. The best way to do this would be to propose a special, additional Corporation Tax to fund reparations, so that the descendent institutions of those who did not pay the slaves their wages might now be made to do so.

Some authors have suggested that British workers also gained from slavery thanks to the increased number of jobs in manufacturing. Yet, no one who has read Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* or Frederick Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* can seriously suggest that the British working class gained anything from the development of capitalism at the beginning of the 19th century. The late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries saw Britain ruled by the most repressive and reactionary government in its history. This is the time of the suppression of *habeas corpus*, resulting in an early form of internment without trial, and the *Combination Act*, outlawing trade unions, all enforced by the establishment of a police state employing armies of spies which culminated in the Peterloo Massacre. The most committed radical opposition to this repression was led by Thomas Hardy and Olaudah Equiano of the London Corresponding Society, Edward Despard, who was hanged for treason following a rigged trial, Thomas Wooler, editor of the radical newspaper *Black Dwarf*, and Robert Wedderburn, author of *The Horrors of Slavery* who, along with their supporters among the militant workers of Sheffield, Manchester, London and Norwich all linked the fight against slavery to the struggles of Britain's industrial working class and used this link to push forward the campaign for abolition with far more verve than Wlberforce and the elite of the "Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery".<sup>28</sup>

Equally, the fight against slavery inspired and gave confidence to workers struggling for their rights in Britain. When some public freedoms were reclaimed in the 1820s, slavery was widely seen as yet another symptom of the "Old Corruption", while anti-slavery was firmly entrenched as part of the demands for reform. At the Chartist rally in Birmingham in 1838, where 200,000 people gathered to launch the national petition for universal suffrage, the mover began his speech by saying, to loud cheers, that he had attended Birmingham Town Hall to "*celebrate the emancipation of the blacks in Jamaica*" and was now campaigning "*to work out the emancipation of the whites at home*".<sup>29</sup> By the time of the Civil War in the USA,

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28 Linebaugh & Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 2000

29 Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, 1986, p.151

finance houses Erlanger's and Schroeder's floated Confederate war bonds to finance the slave-holders' rebellion, to buy arms and warships, much of which were manufactured by British firms. This contrasted with the textile workers of Lancashire who, despite being laid-off for lack of raw cotton, were solid in their support of the Union and abolition of slavery. The textile manufacturers' attitude can be summarised by the view of Lord Thomas Macaulay that British obligations "in respect to negro slavery had ceased when slavery itself had ceased in that part of the world for the welfare of which I, as a member of this House, am accountable".<sup>30</sup> In 1857, *The Times* declared "*we are partners with the Southern planter ... and take a lion's share of the profits of slavery*".

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>31</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.

**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

30 Blackburn, *The Scope of Accumulation and the Reach of Moral Perception*, 2014 p.27

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



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## Barbados PM sends Reparations letter to Britain for Caricom

The 15-member Caribbean Community (Caricom) countries have sent a formal letter of complaint to Britain seeking reparation for slavery. The letter, which was written by Barbados Prime Minister Freundel Stuart and sent to the British Foreign Office, calls on London to formally acknowledge the region's demands for payment for the transatlantic slave trade. Caricom has said it will not release the contents of the letter, until there is a reply by the British Prime Minister David Cameron. But Caricom has warned that it is prepared, as its next option, to take the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Netherlands for a ruling, but that it prefers a negotiated settlement.

Last October, on an official visit to Jamaica, Prime Minister Cameron acknowledged the "wounds of slavery run very deep" but avoided speaking on the issue of reparations as he addressed a joint sitting of the Parliament, instead offering £25 million to build a prison for Jamaicans currently serving sentences in the UK. The British government has a long history of such contempt for the victims of slavery and the ongoing consequences to the descendants of people enslaved under the British Empire despite or, perhaps, because of the vast wealth that British capitalists extracted from the Caribbean during the 17th, 18th and early 19th century. The preferred narrative congratulates the United Kingdom for being the first nation to abolish the slave trade.

### Move on

His only comment on slavery was "I do hope that we can move on from this painful legacy and continue to build for the future".

Last month, Sir Hilary Beckles, who chairs the Caricom Reparations Commission, said that a suggestion by European countries that "they have now moved on... sorry it is a closed chapter there is nothing to discuss" does not negate the call for compensation.

The Caribbean countries say they will allow "a two-year period to elapse" before formally taking the matter to the International Court of Justice for adjudication. However, a Downing Street spokeswoman said: "We don't think reparations are the right approach. The PM's point will be, he wants to focus on the future. We are talking about issues that are centuries old and taken under a different government when he was not even born." This would seem

to imply that Caricom will wait a very long time before it gets any response from the British Foreign Office.

### Reservations

While Caribbean Labour Solidarity welcomes the fact that Caricom has raised the issue, we have serious reservations about the approach they are taking. Firstly, the International Court of Justice has no power to enforce its rulings, even if it finds against the United Kingdom. "Compulsory" jurisdiction is limited to cases where both parties have agreed to submit to its decision. There is no entity that could force the states to comply with ICJ decisions. Therefore, the absence of binding force means that the 193 member states of the ICJ do not necessarily have to accept its rulings. Moreover, membership in the UN and ICJ does not give the court automatic jurisdiction over the member states, but it is the consent of each state to accept adjudication that matters.

Secondly, the very fact of waiting two years before proceeding shows a pussyfooting approach which will just be seen as a sign of weakness by the hard-nosed British government.

**But, most tellingly, by keeping the contents of the letter secret, the Caricom governments are clearly showing that they do not want any popular involvement in the campaign for reparations.**

**We believe that only a widespread campaign of militant activity will force the British and other European governments to face up to their responsibilities and pay up.**

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## **Caribbean Labour Solidarity**

CLS is not tied to any political party in the United Kingdom or the Caribbean. We work to unite all those who support equality, democracy, justice and social progress in the Caribbean. We will support all who recognise that the struggle against racism, fascism, imperialism and neo-colonialism in the Caribbean requires the building of strong international links between the working people there and their sisters and brother globally. We continue to play an important role, along with our sisters and brothers everywhere, in the worldwide peoples' movement for justice through the publication of articles in a variety of media; production of our bulletin Cutlass; organising or participating in public meetings or conferences; arranging pickets and demonstrations; joining deputations; collating and presenting petitions; distribution of our literature; and other associated activities. Through these actions we continue to popularise the activities and causes of the anti-imperialist fighters of the Caribbean.

Through our links with the trade unions and solidarity organisations in Britain we set ourselves the objectives of mobilising opinion in aid of these struggles. In doing so we also recognise the special bonds that exists between black peoples everywhere particularly Africa, America and Europe despite the different conditions in which their specific struggles are waged. We also actively participate in the struggle against racism, which has been the springboard for the development of organisations like the British National party and English Defence League in the UK, the Front National in France, Golden Dawn in Greece and other fascist organisations now gaining strength in Europe on the back of the current economic crisis. We therefore support anti-racist, anti-fascist campaigns in various forms including exposing these fascist organisations; the fight against the police harassment of black youth, trade unionists and progressive workers; the fight against institutionalised racism in employment, education, housing and its other forms.

In so doing we recognise that the British Empire has bestowed a bitter legacy on sections of the working classes in the UK and the former colonies. As an organisation seeking to maintain and expand solidarity with the black workers and their allies in the Caribbean we already make a distinct contribution to the anti racist struggle in Britain.

We urge all those who share these aims to join us and to participate in our work. It is fun, informative and empowering. In our work we collaborate with and seek united action with all sororial/fraternal groups that share our commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle.

**Write to: 29 Myddelton Street, London EC1R 1UA**

**or email: [info@cls-uk.org.uk](mailto:info@cls-uk.org.uk)**

**See our website - [www.cls-uk.org.uk/](http://www.cls-uk.org.uk/)**

# Up Down Turn Around

## The Political Economy of Slavery and the Socialist Case for Reparations

*By their revolutionary activity the slaves had succeeded in setting the time table for the abolition of slavery. But their triumph was only partial. Because of the suppression of their rebellions, the slaves did not preside over the process of abolition. The exercise was carried out by the establishment by parliamentary means. The consequence of this was that only the system of exploiting labour was altered. Property relationships were not disturbed. The planters continued to own the plantations and, in addition, these former slave owners (or their creditors) received from the British government twenty million pounds sterling in compensation. But those who had been slaves, and therefore propertyless before the transition remained propertyless and uncompensated after it.*

*For the majority, their acquisition of human status also marked their transformation into propertyless wage earners or seekers of employment. They entered the historical stage as free men, but so divorced from the ownership of property capable of producing wealth that for 150 years the great majority of their descendants have known only persistent poverty.*

*The abolition of slavery, like the abolition of other social and economic systems, has often been described as a social revolution. If this term is to be applied with any degree of accuracy to the events of the fourth decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the British sugar colonies, then it must also be recognised that the revolution did not then complete, and has not yet completed, its full cycle.*

Richard Hart "Slaves Who Abolished Slavery"