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Plantation Society in Guyana

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Let me first indicate what I shall not do in this discussion of plantation society in Guyana in the era after slavery. I shall not attempt any of those tremendous generalizations which have now become quite common about plantation society, which is supposed to express some special truth and some profundity about all plantation societies. Rather, I shall analyze it from our angle, that is to say, from within the Caribbean, from within Guyana in this instance. We are trying simply to understand our society, to understand our past, in a context of a profound underdevelopment of its historiography. This is not a new statement, but in a way the tragedy is that it is not a new statement. Twenty years ago, in that first generation of West Indian national scholars, nationalists who were at the University of the West Indies, people like Elsa Goveia, certainly already said that our historiography is miserably underdeveloped. Now, twenty years later, the statement still holds true. I am thus trying in a small way at the present moment in my own research to cover what is really a

*The Editors have edited this manuscript, with the permission of Patricia Rodney, from a talk given by the late Walter Rodney at the Fernand Braudel Center on December 11, 1978. We publish it in memoriam of our murdered colleague and comrade.

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very huge gap. We are not speaking about plugging a little hole here or filling a little lacuna there. It is a whole historical era, post-slavery era, that just has not been seriously dealt with by any large number of historians. To compound the problem, there is another historiographical difficulty, the question of approach. The one which exists is, by and large, not ours. It is not a part of our cultural product. It is not a result of Guyanese reflecting on their own society. And very often, it is not even a sympathetic analysis. It is not one that seeks to achieve empathy with the Guyanese people.

The best of the studies, a really excellent one done in 1974 in Guyana, is Alan Adamson's *Sugar Without Slaves.* But then his study, like all those that preceded it, is essentially a study from outside, about peoples living there, who tend almost to become reified. It is a study about systems. It is not a study about the Guyanese people living on the plantations. It is, in the very strictest sense, just functionally about the plantation.

What I then would suggest is that we need to understand how certain generalizations, which have essentially a class perspective in historiographical terms, have come to be taken as common truths, as universal truths, even by West Indian scholars. In the case of Guyana, at the end of the period of slavery, there was a debate going on as to what would be the future of the society. Now that debate, when one examines it carefully, was really a debate about the future of the plantations. The planters engaged in the debate with the British government were assuming that the future of the plantations and the future of the society merged, that there was no distinction. Plantation equals society; society equals plantation. And in a strange way many of us, including West Indians as I said, who discussed the issue have also fallen into that trap, and have equated the plantation as a social form, as an institution, with the totality of our society. Thus, in curious ways, the perspective of the planters has been passed on in the scholarship ever since then, even by persons who would certainly deny, almost violently deny, that they are taking a pro-planter position. And yet, when one examines the output, there is that tendency willy-nilly, usually unwittingly. They are

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propagating views that have very deep roots in the planter class in the old slave society and in the early years of the post-slavery era.

In this debate about the future, one of the significant elements was that planters were assuming that former slaves, that is, the slaves once freed, would not be willing to remain on the plantations. This was one of the points that the planters raised. In fact they demanded the abolition of slavery be postponed as long as possible. This is true not just of Guyana. It was a general thesis in the Caribbean, the thesis that the plantations would be ruined if the slaves were freed, because slaves would leave the plantations. I will illustrate how Guyanese historiography since has accepted the position that, after the abolition of slavery, the ex-slaves did in fact leave the plantations en masse, that the planter's vision of what would happen was in fact a correct appraisal of what did happen. In the vacuum created by the withdrawal en masse of Africans, of the Blacks, who were formerly slaves, Indian labor was imported as its substitute in the form of indentured labor.

That is the position held even by the most recent scholarship. We were fortunate in the 1970's to have new texts produced on Guyana after a very long gap with no history whatsoever being written. Alan Adamson's book is one, and the other is by Jay Mandle, *Plantation Economy: Population and Economic Change in Guyana, 1838-1960.* Jay Mandle would, I believe, describe himself as a Marxist. But on the crucial question of what the Blacks did after the abolition of slavery, his vision (like that of Adamson) is the planter vision. He has accepted lock, stock, and barrel the view that after slavery had been abolished, slaves fled the plantation.

I need only, before proceeding further, emphasize one difference between Guyana and the rest of the Caribbean, for those who know the Caribbean. Immediately after slavery was abolished, the planters in Guyana were relatively well off. So although we are speaking about a certain degree of decline in the sugar industry in the Caribbean in the nineteenth century, the Guyana planters were better off. First of all, they had more slaves, and they got more compensation money as a

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result out of the $20 million that the British gave to compensate the slave owners. Secondly, they had new land, very important in that type of system of production which is wasteful of the land. Places like St. Kitts or Barbados had already experienced land exhaustion; in Guyana there was new land. Thirdly, the Guyana plantations were not yet in debt in the way that the old plantation system in the Caribbean had fallen into debt. Indeed Guyana was always free subsequently of that pattern of debt in which there were three or four mortgages and liens and so on against plantations. There was a point, by the late nineteenth century, when most of the Jamaican planters were totally incapable of escaping from that lure of debt, and so it was in quite a number of other territories like St. Kitts and Antigua. The Guyana planters did not have to use their money to pay off debts, as was true of some other planters. Consequently they had some capital in hand and were able to keep the plantation system alive.

To keep the system alive, required, however, more than capital. Indeed, I would argue that capital is of less importance than having a labor supply of a particular type. That is the crucial characteristic, labor of a particular type. The question has been discussed as though it were an issue of the existence of a labor supply vs. no labor supply. But a plantation requires a labor supply *of a particular type*. The labor must be cheap and plentiful, and, even more important, the labor must be easily controlled. Unless labor can be provided under conditions that maximize the industrial control, you cannot have a functioning plantation system. I think that aspect of the situation has been obscured in the discussion so that it appears as though the question was whether there was a sufficient supply of labor, or whether labor would be amenable to certain rates of pay. In fact the real question was whether the ex-slaves, the freed slaves, could create a new way of life in which labor enters a relationship with capital under conditions that are at least partially determined by labor, whether labor could free itself from some of the absolute controls characteristic of slavery. It is that issue that was resolved to the advantage of the planters and to the detriment of the ex-slaves in the years after emancipation.

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How was this done? The first device, apprenticeship, was general to the Caribbean. The planters were given six years between 1832 and 1838 of a further lease of slave labor which was called apprenticeship, and about which a fair amount has been written in Caribbean literature. Quite a lot of this literature is totally misleading, because apprenticeship was simply a new name, a name which the planters gave to the continuation of labor under the controls that were characteristic of the slave period. In 1838, the legal era of apprenticeship came to an end and Africans were freed. The traditional interpretation is that this Black labor force then skipped the plantation. The evidence which is there the moment one begins to look at it is that the African people continued to work—in many senses they even intensified certain aspects of their work—on the plantation. But they did so under conditions in which they now had, and began to put into practice, an alternative vision about the organization of work, about their culture, about their politics, and about what they expected in society. It was a vision that they could not articulate under slavery, and this is where they came into conflict with the plantation system.

Not only have scholars committed the error of accepting the planters' version that Africans simply left the plantation, but they have gone on to utilize some other concepts which really are very fuzzy at best. They proceed to say that Africans left the plantation to become small peasant landowners. In fact, if one looks at the figures of land ownership and the numbers who acquired land, what in fact happened is that ex-slaves, when they moved onto the land, acquired household plots of land, garden plots, which did not in any way make them into a peasantry. They were nowhere close to being dependent on the land or to exercising their labor on the land so as to make a livelihood. Most of the individuals called "peasants" in Guyanese historiography, and in some instances in Trinidad, were in fact part-time workers (at least you can call them part-time workers). For the most part they were indeed workers on the sugar estates, and they merely turned to the land for a certain amount of subsistence for their families. They might have had half an acre, sometimes no more than a quarter of an acre, sometimes no more than the

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house lot and a small portion of land attached to it. My contention is that what was created after the abolition of slavery was a rural proletariat. This is the class that was created, not a peasantry. The behavior, the norms of a peasantry are totally different from that of a proletariat. A lot of the analysis goes askew by concentrating on so-called peasants, when in fact ex-slaves, working on a sugar plantation, whether in the field or in the factory, became automatically proletarians, rural proletarians. You may qualify this in as many ways as you like because there were of course peculiarities in the relationship between that labor and plantation capital, but they began to function as members of the working class.

As members of the working class, they were concerned first and foremost with working conditions and the rate of wages. The instinctive, immediate response of workers at the point of production is a struggle over wages and over working conditions. In the case of the ex-slaves immediately after 1838, the planters themselves recorded the number of demands that were being made about wages and working conditions. If the ex-slaves had been peasants, they would have been talking about the prices of peasant produce and they would have been talking about land. Instead, they were concerned with wages and working conditions.

They tried to create some forms of organization that would advance their own interest. The typical organization was what was known as the gang, or the jobbing gang, which in some ways had been encouraged by planters prior to the end of slavery. A few planters got slaves together in a gang and used the slaves in economic ventures. The would hire the gang out to another planter, and of course, the owner of the slaves would recoup the benefits from that. Now, after emancipation, there was an almost spontaneous process by which large numbers of the Black work force decided to organize themselves into independent jobbing gangs. The function of these gangs was to move from estate to estate, trying to establish rates of wages that were more favorable than those that were being offered. That was their main concern.

Secondly, and this is important although it is a negative, the ex-slaves resisted any attempts to be bonded in long-term

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contracts to the plantation. I said it is a negative, but an important negative, partly because it is a reflection on what slavery meant, because slavery is a permanent bond. The workers were saying that we will work, but we will not work under a bond that limits our freedom of action over a long period of time. And a long period of time for them was anything over six months. Nothing longer than that was considered as a rational choice that an African, a free laborer, should make in that kind of society. On the contrary, when the jobbing gangs were established, their main concern was to establish the rate of wages for a particular crop, such as for the harvesting, or planting, or weeding of a particular crop. The task would be defined, and they would have the rate of wages set on that occasion. Thereafter, they kept themselves free to reopen negotiations for another task under different conditions, because they were very sensitive to all kinds of variations. On reflection, this is a very modern way of looking at their work situation, because they were taking into account the state of the weather, for instance, when they were bargaining over how much they should be paid for cutting a particular field. They recognized that job conditions vary, and therefore their returns from labor should vary. They did not want to accept contracts. Later, Indian labor was brought in as indentured labor, and we can note the contrast between free Black workers resisting contracts and Indian workers who are trapped within the contract system because they are in fact recruited as contract labor in India itself.

Labor after emancipation began to show certain qualitative changes. For instance (this has been noted by historians but somehow glossed over), there was a definite distinction between male adult labor on the one hand, and family labor, the labor of women and children, on the other. The slave system, and I will argue the plantation system, in order to function effectively in the Caribbean context, operated on the basis of exploiting family labor. Every single member of the family was considered as an asset to the plantation. Youngsters at the age of eight or nine were put into what were called the "Creole gang". The youngest members of the plantation, as soon as they could totter around, as soon as they could stand

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up straight, would learn to carry certain loads on their heads, would learn to carry tools or to carry water, and were integrated into the plantation system. The women were also given specific functions, usually weeding, which was a very common occupation for women on the plantations. Presumably, it was intended to be some sort of distinction based on the extent to which the women could endure the physical hardships of the fields, but then of course, women did perform all functions. Some women were even cane-cutters, which was the hardest task on the sugar plantation, but the majority would have been weeders. What is important in the post-slavery era is that in Guyana, as elsewhere, given the historical conditions of the time, women were discriminated against in terms of the rate of wages, and, of course, children were paid still less. Thus the ability to command family labor was at the same time the ability to incorporate cheap labor, because women and children were paid less.

Moreover, in a plantation system, apart from cost, there is also the matter of who controls the industrial process. Let us consider the making of sugar from the time it is grown to the time it is processed as a total industrial process. It has a rhythm that is partially dictated by the environment. You grow it at a certain time, and it is reaped at a certain time. It must be ground into sugar within a matter of hours after it has been reaped, so there is a rhythm imposed by the ecology, by the crop itself. But there is also a rhythm which is imposed by the classes engaged in that social process, by the planters as opposed to the workers. If the planters had their own way, then they would determine the tempo over the whole year, the tempo over the grinding season, the tempo in the slack season. They would determine what levels of intensity of labor are required at any given point in time. And when they made this decision—let us hypothesize a situation in which planters were totally free to make the decision—they would make it with the view that women and children could be thrown into the struggle, as it were, at particular junctures, and that therefore they could maximize their labor control. If they did not have the women and children available at certain points, it became rather difficult. If one is going to explicate the actions of the

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workers, we must appreciate that they became aware that their labor must not be given to the planters as family labor. They were beginning to articulate a notion of what a family unit was. A family unit was a place where one had a wife who was supposed to be in the house, or doing things connected with the family, in the narrowly defined sense of the word. Let us not get confused here with the more revolutionary position of what the role of the woman is. I am not suggesting that the role of the woman is in the house. But I am saying that those workers were making a decision which seems to have been an advanced decision, that if they had a choice between the woman being in the household and engaged in activities around the house, as opposed to being in the planter's field for fifteen hours a day, then they wanted her in the house where her function would be to take care of the children to provide for the continuity of that family.

Hence, there was a tendency to withdraw female labor and to withdraw child labor. Here again there was a new conception: children should go to school. The missionaries had said that in the last years of slavery, and Black people had taken them very seriously. This is always a problem with new ideas that come into a society that way. The missionaries did come along and say, well, we will offer some schooling. The colonized have a way of taking these things very, very seriously. Thus, there was now an immediate threat to the system of production that required a certain degree of child labor. Africans said no, the place for children is school, and there was a tremendous effort, as indeed was true of the United States in its post-slavery era, to get children into school. The Black workers furthermore recognized that the plantation was not a desirable context within which labor could express itself culturally. This goes back to the old notion about the plantation society that the plantation is the complete unit, not just a unit of production, but a social unit at the same time. It is undoubtedly true that it was a value-structuring unit. Under slavery, the plantation was virtually the only unit within which people structured their lives, because the slaves lived on the plantation. They had a section assigned to them, which in the Caribbean and certainly in Guyana, was known as the

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"niggeryard". They lived in the "niggeryard". Up until today that is a term that is still common in Guyana. It tends to have a certain notion regarding culture about it. If you come from the niggeryard, you are very backward. You come from the lowest stratum, and not just the lowest in a sort of economic sense. Crude, violent, thievish behavior would be associated with a niggeryard. The niggeryard was the lowest form of culture, but it was the only culture that existed under slavery. In the post-slavery era, the workers decided that it was possible to create a different living environment from that of the niggeryard. They proceeded to remove themselves physically from the plantation and to establish villages outside the plantation.

It is this movement, which was essentially a residential and cultural movement, that has been confused in the literature with the idea of withdrawal from plantation labor. It is a serious confusion, but it is definitely there in the literature. For instance, in Jay Mandle's *Plantation Economy*, there are some tables which show plantation labor withdrawing from the plantation. When you look at them, the figures Mandle has presented are figures of the rise in the numbers of people living in villages. To live in a village said nothing about where one worked because, when one examines it, the villagers were working on the plantations. It was a residential withdrawal. And this residential withdrawal had its own significance because Africans were choosing a place in which to live outside the sugar plantation. Now, if one has never read about the niggeryards, one might find this a little difficult to understand, but any understanding, any familiarity with the niggeryards would show immediately that when one has an opportunity, one leaves the niggeryard. It is a place that people come from, not a place to which one goes. When one lives in the ranges on the estate, first of all, one is totally at the mercy of the planter. Planters went into the ranges and took people out as they saw fit to take them on assignments. It meant that one had to conform to all the norms of behavior. The only poles of reference when one lived in a niggeryard were the plantation field and factory on the one hand, and the big house of the plantation manager and the houses of the overseers on the other. That was the world and one had to relate all of one's

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values and development to the world. Africans moved in order to develop independent villages. And it is not surprising, again bearing in mind the limitations of the time, that they identified these villages with freedom. They named the villages Buxton, and Wilberforce, and Victoria. One might smile now and say that they were under a total illusion to believe that those individuals contributed to their freedom. But, as far as they were concerned, those names meant freedom.

A village was freedom. Living off the plantation was a qualitative aspect of freedom. Not only were they out of the plantation, but in the villages they also began to exercise what was totally impossible before, some political power. The villages were self-governing units. The villages were collectivities, communal arrangements that had a total aspect to them. They were not merely units of production. In fact their function was only marginally to produce. Primarily their function was to guarantee that life could be reproduced within that physical space called a village, and that the Africans themselves had the power to decide how that space was to be policed, and how the rates and taxes that were produced were going to be spent to maintain sanitation and so on within the village.

They exercised this political power for about 25 years after freedom in 1838. Then in the mid-1860's, the colonial power awoke to the realization that a whole alternative political center now existed, that local government was in the hands of a different class, the rural proletariat combined with a few peasants. This was untenable because they were coming into conflict with the central government which was still controlled by the planters. At this point in the 1860's, the central government moved to curtail the exercise of local government. But for some 25 years, the working class had organized itself as a political class because it was exercising political power at the local government level.

All of this is lost, I think, in the patterns of analysis which, in a somewhat sterile manner, talk about escape from the plantation. Once they talk about escape from the plantation, they are no longer in a position to see that the momentum in society was created by conflicts within the plantation. Because

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this same proletariat remained on the plantation. It fought the planter class. There was a day-to-day conflict between plantation capital and plantation labor. The question of where laborers lived and so on was a part of this conflict. If, for example, one lived in a village, then one was strengthened by this fact in a conflict with a planter who otherwise could say to one, "If you live in my house and you do not work x days at x rates, I will kick you out."

Tenancy relations were among the most backward. Indeed the tenancy relations were quasi-feudal, much more like those of crofters and that type of feudal relation in which the tenant was tied to the household. Now the exodus, as it were, to the villages did not occur in order to run away from plantation labor, but to strengthen the bargaining position of labor in dealing with planter capital by putting the laborer in a position where one would be unafraid of the threat that one might be kicked out of the house. It was no longer a threat. One lived in one's own village, in one's own house.

In addition, the new working class contributed something else. It had a novel conception of what its standard of living should be, of what a living wage in its situation should be. The term "living wage" has been used by many Marxists, and non-Marxists, and there is a sense in which one needs to try to define what is some sort of biological minimum, what is required so that people can exist, just physically exist. But that is a very abstract notion. Even after one defines that, what it comes down to is that the concept of a living wage arises out of class struggle, because the class that is dominant always has a conception that workers could live at any wage, to whatever low level it might be reduced. If it is left a question for the dominant class, then a living wage would even be a wage that presumably we could show biologically could not reproduce the human metabolism. But in reality all concepts of a living wage are determined within the class struggle itself so that workers (and peasants, if it is a peasant situation) have an input into saying that this is what we consider to be the minimum.

Immediately after the abolition of slavery this question was sharply posed. Planters went about saying Black people only

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need so-and-so to live on. However, the ex-slaves were saying that the whole conception of what we need to live on is now quite different. We believe that we need clothes to wear to church on Sundays, for instance. This is part of our existence. The missionaries were here, and they built churches, and Africans were taking them over. When the European went to church, he went dressed very well. The African said that the whole conception of freedom is that we must have clothes to wear and that our houses must be of a certain standard. Children must go to school, and if it costs to get them clothes and so on, we have to get money to pay for this. Automatically there was struggle now about what was a living wage, what should be the new condition of the working masses. For the first time in history, the free slaves, or should I say Africans who are no longer slaves, were in a position to make an input into what their living conditions should be. By definition they were not allowed to do this under slavery. There was no scope within the struggle between the slave and the master to allow the slave to define the conditions of consumption. But this occurred on the post-slavery plantation.

Dramatic illustrations of most of what I am saying came first in 1840-41 and again in 1847 with two general strikes in the Guyanese sugar industry. In 1840-41 the workers as a whole, which means essentially sugar workers because the economy was then totally a plantation economy concentrating on sugar, went on strike. Now the thing that is significant about that strike was, first of all, the fact that it took place only three years after full emancipation. Secondly, there was no organization of a trade-union type that preceded the strike, and therefore one can imagine the kinds of hurdles that had to be crossed in order to move spontaneously. A group that had no organization, no separate communications network of its own, launched a general strike in a given industry. Thirdly, the strike was successful. It lasted for about twelve weeks, and the planters had to give in. The strike was basically about two things: the rate of wages, and certain working conditions. The workers won on both scores. Looking at that I would say that, in any historical terms, it was a major achievement. Newly freed slaves, Black labor on the plantation, that only three

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years before had been described as persons dehumanized within the most fearsome social system we have known, were operating like a modern proletariat, making wage demands, making demands for working conditions, and going on strike to back those demands, staying away from work for weeks in a rural situation to bring the planters to heel.

Perhaps of course it tells us something about our ideas of slavery. Maybe our ideas about slavery have misconstrued it a little. It strikes me that the Blacks would not have been able to do what they did unless, under slavery, they had established some prior network; there had to be means of communication. This idea that the plantation was a discrete unit that isolated everyone from everybody else is false. That is what the planters would have liked, that is what they advocated, but obviously the activity of the oppressed went beyond those boundaries, so they must have had links among themselves. (But I am not going into that now; I am not looking at the data on slavery.)

Certainly, however, in the post-slavery era the Blacks operated like any modern proletariat—not just like any proletariat, but like a modern proletariat. They were not a peasantry. A peasantry may hold back its produce; that is all a peasantry can do. A general strike is a phenomenon of a working class. It is not surprising, then, that this major general strike in 1841 gets little attention from all historians, because they have already said that the workers had left the plantation and had become peasants. They cannot seriously deal with a strike after that. It is just too much of a contradiction.

In 1847, there was another strike. It arose because in 1846 capital at the center, that is British capital, was undergoing a certain crisis, and the political state wanted to make some readjustments. It changed the sugar tariffs. Sugar duties were equalized, and in the wake of the equalization of duties on sugar entering Britain, British sugar from Guyana was disadvantaged. The planters reacted as they continued to react later in our history by saying that any threat to their existence at the international level had to be resolved partially at the expense of the workers, or I should say, largely at the expense of the workers. If the sugar duties were to reduce the profits on

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sugar by x, then this had to come from the wages of workers. So the planters proceeded to announce that they were lowering the wages by 25% across the country, and again, in 1847, there was another strike, one that lasted for fourteen weeks. That is to the best of my knowledge the longest general strike in our history until the one that took place in Guyana in 1977-78 which lasted for 135 days. (This also tells us something about the present Guyanese regime. I am trying to sandwich myself in between slavery and the present so I am not going to take that on either.)

But in 1847, the general strike this time failed. It failed because since 1846 the planters had brought in a significant number of new identured workers—mainly from the Madeira Islands and from India. By 1848 they had imported approximately 6000 workers to replace the regular work force. Note that the regular work force was replaced; it was a substitution for striking workers, not the filling of a vacuum. It is the present historical interpretation that Africans had left the plantation and that the planters were in a terrible mess and had to get labor from somewhere else. They went to India, and they bought labor. This is the conventional interpretation. In reality, the working class was there and available. But it was articulating certain demands, it was struggling for certain conditions of labor, and the planters, in order to defeat the class with whom they were embroiled brought in outside labor, indentured labor. They brought it in as scab labor, if you like, to break a particular strike, and not just to break the strike, but to break the social strength of this class which, as I have already indicated, had an alternative vision of how the society should function as compared to that which was offered by the planters themselves.

Unfortunately for the working people, that strike was broken, and after the strike, rather than before, there was a considerable attempt to try to flee from the plantation to the land. After the strike, when the workers saw that there was no hope on the plantation, then they struggled to get away from the plantation, as peasants this time. This did not really work, this attempt did not prove successful, mainly because the planters had already covered that possibility. They had

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decided that they would enact certain controls over the land so that the land was not available or such land as was available could not be worked agriculturally. If there was no drainage and irrigation, if the infrastructure was not there, then it would be extremely difficult for the Blacks to work the land. Land was artificially priced by legislation after the end of slavery to insure that ex-slaves did not get their hands on land and become independent peasants.

One might well ask why the planters should not have been happy, as it were, to be rid of the African work force if it was creating problems, and if the planters had brought in thousands of laborers from India, then they should have been happy to let Africans go off and become peasants. But this was not the case because the planters were deliberately creating a situation in which there was, first of all, a massive surplus of labor taken in the most general sense, which is another characteristic, it seems to me, of the plantation system. It required more than the usual surplus of labor. I do not mean flexibility, the so-called reserve army of the unemployed of capitalist society. I mean a significant ratio of employed to unemployed, sometimes as much as 1:1 within that social framework. This allowed the plantation flexibility both to choose labor when it wanted (the rhythm of production as well as the reduction of the wage rates) and also to use the fact of unemployment as a means of social control. The post-slavery plantation system in Guyana used the fact of unemployment as a major instrument of social control. In other places, perhaps in Barbados, the major form of social control came through the small size of society, the total inability to find alternatives, because the land was just not there. In Guyana, it was unemployment that was very consciously used to make the African workers aware that they risked being totally unemployed unless they came to terms with the planters. There was no longer that flexibility where one could say "let us withhold our labor for a period of time and force the planters to come to terms."

With indenture, with the large masses of Portuguese and Indian and Chinese labor, the planters were in a position to say, "We have the upper hand, we are saying to you that unless

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you come in on such-and-such terms, which are only slightly better than the terms that we offer indentured labor, then in fact there will be no work offered." Thus indenture became a powerful weapon of social control. It served to control the indentured themselves, because when one was indentured for five years, one was effectively slave labor for that period. Furthermore, that five years, in Guyana, was often transformed into ten years by certain devices which the planters had to trap Indians into reindenture for another five years. Thus, indentureship served the purpose of keeping the rate of wages static. I do not mean keeping it low or keeping it from advancing slowly, but keeping it static. There was one rate of payment when indenture was introduced in 1838. It was discontinued, but when indenture was reintroduced in 1846, they gave a certain statutory payment. In 1917, when it was decided in India that no more indentured laborers should come to Guyana, the payment was still the same as in 1846. In 1921, when indenture finally ended, wages had been static for almost a century, quite apart from the fact that over this period there had of course been inflation, so that in reality, the money wage was purchasing less by the end of that period.

Secondly, and this is more important from the point of view of the dynamic of the class struggle, indenture was a useful device for insuring that free labor, labor that had been freed from slavery, lost its capacity to maneuver, and found that it had to withdraw from certain areas of plantation work because it was too unremunerative. The only areas that free laborers could secure for themselves were the areas where they had either greater proficiency or for which they were physically better suited than the indentured labor. Cane-cutting, for example, required a certain proficiency and a certain strength.

Fresh indentured laborers from India, very often peasants, sometimes from the urban poor, came under difficult conditions. The first year or two of most laborers' lives were relatively unproductive. They were in and out of the hospital. They had to acclimatize. They could not cope with the hard work. The next generation of Indian labor of course had to do the hard work like anyone else. The first generation usually could not produce as much, and therefore African labor became a

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sort of elite labor on the plantation, doing the hard work or the work requiring skills in the factory, such as the actual production of sugar from the sugar cane. This situation was such that, at no time after 1846 right up until 1921 when indenture ended, did free labor have a capacity to impose its will, its vision on the planter. Indenture was a tremendous weapon for the employers as far as the class struggle was concerned.

Now let me say something about the characteristics of capital and the planter class before bringing this all together. The planter class was not static: it changed over the period of the late nineteenth century. It ceased to be a planter class with a heavy local representation. Under slavery in all of the territories there was always a significant local planter class, small owners who lived in the territories concerned. This is not just a fact of residence or even of size, but of social behavior. Small planters residing in the territories tended to operate in ways that were somewhat different from those of large planters who were non-residents. There was more of a feudal overtone to the operations of small planters resident in the society than one of the capitalist profit motive per se. They made their profit, but the way in which they used those profits, or that portion of the profits that remained to them, was essentially for subsistence. They tried to establish not patron-client relations but, to some extent, reciprocal relations that had the feudal dependency ethic written into them rather than just production and money values.

As the nineteenth century progressed, it was clear that the small local planters were being replaced by large foreign owners. Guyana moved away from a quasi-feudal type of plantation to the joint-stock capitalist plantation, a plantation which, in Guyana, was able to modernize technique. From the 1870's through the 1890's, plantation technique, at least in the factory, advanced quite rapidly in Guyana. What I am driving at is that the planter class had transformed itself into a modern capitalist class by all the definitions and with all the trappings of such a capitalist class.

The planters had declined in power in Britain relative to other sectors of industry and trade. This is to say, the preemi-

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nence of the West Indian planter of the eighteenth century no longer existed. The West Indian planter in the nineteenth century could not call the tune in the British houses of Parliament as he could have done, or as they collectively could have done, in the eighteenth century. This was shown, for instance, over the issue of beet sugar and the tariffs. When the West Indian planters made a tremendous lobbying effort to try and get the British to exclude the continental beet sugar, which was being subsidized in their own countries, the lobby in Britain that countered them was based on the British confectionary industry, which wanted cheap sugar to make confectionary in England, what they called the "cheap breakfast table." At that point in time, the West Indian planters were not powerful enough to contend against another sector of capital in Britain. Nonetheless they remained preeminent relative to any other social classes in the Caribbean. The planter's will still triumphed over peasants, proletarians, or the middle classes in the Caribbean in the late nineteenth and in the early twentieth century.

In the light of these facts, I find that one has to be very careful in the use of certain terminology that is still prevalent in the literature. For instance, indenture is described as a precapitalist social form, a precapitalist technique. I find difficulties with this even as a matter of just sheer linguistics and language. If I am trying to tell you that a highly developed modern capitalist is using a method that is essential to his reproduction and I call this method precapitalist, I find the very language itself defeating. It seems to me that what we have to say is that it is true that free wage-labor is really only the classical form of metropolitan capital. It is a system which both capital and labor accepted in the metropole, because in the metropole, the capitalist struggle to free labor from feudal ties so that labor could move into their factories. In our colonial situation, it was precisely the same capitalist, who was banking in London, had financial ventures in London, had moved to modern joint-stock forms, who fought against the rise of free wage-labor, while he promoted non-free labor, the non-economic coercion of labor so that capital could be accumulated and its value expanded. Now it was the same

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capitalist doing both things. I cannot then call one form of labor capitalist and the other form precapitalist or noncapitalist. We must recognize that capitalism in its colonial variant operated with certain peculiarities. The plantation was par excellence a colonial form. It was perhaps the most effective of the colonial forms of exploitation that had been established.

Perhaps I should close with at least some reflection on the kinds of tools and methodologies that have been used with respect to plantation societies in recent times and the extent to which one feels that these can be modified or discarded or reinforced. First, for those who know something about Caribbean studies, I remind you that we used to have a very popular notion called "pluralism" as a tool for analyzing Caribbean societies, and for that matter African societies too. While it is no longer much in vogue, it is by no means totally out of vogue. There are theses and books still being produced that are utilizing the so-called "pluralist" model. In any event, I would not discard it as being totally useless or foolish. I think it advanced Caribbean studies at a particular juncture, and gave some insight into conflicting cultures.

It was, however, too static. It did not let us see the way in which the various segments of society were related to each other. Almost by definition it made the "cultural" units discrete, and culture was defined for the most part very narrowly. It was defined essentially in terms of a nonmaterial culture, whereas the fact of going to work on a sugar plantation is a fundamental aspect of culture. I do not need to move from that to talk about clothing and religion, and so on. We must talk first of all about the common conditions of work. That is a fundamental aspect of culture. As such it embraced all social groups who came to Guyana. It is interesting to note that the Indian population, which became free as its indenture ended, began to act in precisely the same fashion as the former slaves had when they were freed after 1838. The planters started to write saying "Look, the Blacks are infecting the East Indians. They are training them to behave in this absurd fashion of forming jobbing gangs and demanding higher wages and so on." In reality, even though there may have been some contact, the critical factor was that the Indians were responding

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to the same social conditions. Whatever language they had come with, whatever clothes they wore, whatever food they ate, when they were put into the plantation mold, they had to behave a certain way and respond in certain ways. When they were put to live in the niggeryard, because that was what it was called even after the Indians were put there, they too began to be molded by those same forces that operated in the niggeryard.

Pluralism as a concept was inadequate. Then came the so-called plantation model, which did advance us, I think a little bit more than the idea of pluralism. The advantage of the plantation model was first of all that it allowed us to see the Caribbean as an integral part of a larger system. Cultural pluralism seemed to imply that we had some little peculiarity that we had worked out by ourselves down in that part of the world. It did not really allow us to be integrated with the metropolitan center. The plantation model allowed one to see the overall international scene. Secondly, the plantation model concentrated much more on the production of wealth. That, after all, was why the colonies were established—to produce wealth in a particular form, and not to allow a different social group or different cultural groups to coexist, plurally or otherwise. I think, therefore, that the plantation society model allowed us to come to grips with the real essence of Caribbean society to a greater extent.

Nonetheless, the plantation society model was also a static model. The plantation form existed under slavery and after slavery, and it has existed right up to now in Cuba in a socialist order. Now if one is going to use the term "the plantation society," one has collapsed too many stages of development under just that one heading. There is no way in which one can explain the internal dynamic that transforms it either from a plantation society to a non-plantation society, as in the case of Antigua or even Jamaica, or explain why one type of plantation society becomes another type of plantation society. It does not seem to me to be any more effective than to go around talking about joint-stock societies. The earliest joint-stock companies go back to the seventeenth century, I take it, and they have existed right up until the present. I think we would

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have defeated ourselves totally if we had been running around calling Western society "joint-stock society" for the last x number of years. The plantation model has its limitations in that respect. Describing the institutional form of the plantation and the relations that exist within it does not necessarily allow us to explain the direction of movement within the society.

To explain the direction of movement in society, I go back to the pivotal contradiction between the planters and free labor. Out of the response of planters and workers respectively to this contradiction came the shape of the society over the next many years. Indenture itself was a response of the planters to the contradiction with free labor. When the indentured labor came in, Black labor made its response to those indentured laborers. Curiously enough, that response was predicated upon a vision that was elaborated by the planters themselves. Racism had already been extended throughout the society. A racial perceptiveness, if you like, had been elaborated by the planters as part of the mechanism of keeping the structure intact. They had old stereotypes that were applied to Africans, and they applied new stereotypes to Indians. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, in fact in the 1840's soon after the arrival of Indians, one finds that African and Indian began to relate to each other via the White stereotype. They both had internalized those factors of control. As many people are aware, this ultimately became a very important factor in our society, leading at one stage to communal violence in the 1960's.

If one had the time to elaborate on the details, I think it could be shown fairly conclusively that tying oneself to the notion that the principal contradiction was between the plantation and the rest of the society, or the plantation and the peasantry as Adamson puts it, does not really explain anything. It does not allow us to explain the rise of the middle classes who ultimately become the petty bourgeoisie. This latter is the most important class in the society today in terms of its command over the state. Out of what did it arise? If we took the model of plantation and peasant, the middle class is

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not explained at all. Where did it come in? Did it grow out of the plantation? Did it grow out of the peasantry? And in what particular way? Instead, if we focus on the class struggle between workers and planters, workers and planter capital, there are all kinds of ways in which it can be shown that the middle class itself arose in the interstices of the capitalist system as a consequence of that struggle between labor and capital.

Finally the plantation itself became relatively unimportant. It had outlived its usefulness. It lived much longer in Guyana than anywhere else, partly because of the advantages I mentioned at the very outset, and also partly because there was, to some extent, a greater continuity of reinvestment of the capital made from sugar from the plantations in the economy to create an ever-burgeoning capitalist structure. In fact, a monopolistic structure was created. In the end, one company arose, Booker Brothers McConnell Limited, which had a long history going back into the slavery era, that ultimately dominated the whole plantation sector. It used capital out of the sugar plantation for investment both in the economy outside of sugar, in the service sectors, in the light industrial sectors, and so on, and more significantly in countries outside of Guyana, including Britain itself. By the 1970's, when the Guyanese government nationalized the sugar plantations, they were in effect nationalizing something that had served its historical purpose. They had already generated the capital which was no longer resident within Guyana. They had already held back the development of the society in so many ways: by restricting the population to the coastland, by holding back the development of agricultural activities such as food growing outside of the plantation itself, etc.

Essentially the plantation is a colonial form, and I doubt whether it is going to have much of a life span in any society in the neocolonial period. The plantation guaranteed a series of noneconomic sanctions which are part and parcel of the colonial relationship. This formulation goes beyond the plantation model, and emphasizes not just that it was a social, as well as a political and economic unit, but that its economic function depended upon forces that came from outside rather than upon so-called "market relations" or "relations that are

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strictly economic." Perhaps that is why persons who talk about "the plantation economy" get caught in certain problems. The plantation was not just an economic unit. Adamson is aware of this and makes a very good point at one stage of his analysis where he makes it clear that he is not falling into the trap of thinking that the plantation is just an economic model. He says, "I hope it will become abundantly clear that the continued production of sugar without slaves had nothing to do with the operation of blind economic forces. On the contrary, the survival of sugar was the result of several deliberate acts of policy." He goes on to list those and he indicates that they were essentially the "conscious intervention of a certain class in the economic process," not a matter of waiting on the forces to determine the rate of wages and the rate of profits.

We need to think about the question a little bit more in this context. I am not sure if I have clarified my own ideas as much as I would like on the issue. I think the colonial economy can function outside of the plantation or without the plantation, but certainly the plantation had been one of the most dominant forms, one of the most readily accessible forms of the colonial economy. Therefore, I am still not certain to what extent certain trends in Guyana should be attributed to the plantation qua plantation, and to what extent they are functions of the colonial economy. But in any case, the plantation serves to underscore the point that when one is examining the colonial economy in all parts of the world, the examination has to proceed in series of integrated stages. We must first of all define the total system within which the colonial economy is functioning. Then we must look at our society in far more detail. Finally, we must return to examine the links between ourselves and this total society. Without these stages, I think we will mesmerize ourselves. One extreme is as bad as the other. If we are caught up in looking at our society with a microscope, we are not going to see anything, and if we are discussing only a system which is macroscopic and disembodied, we might see something, but what we see would not be reality. I think we have to function at these interrelated levels.

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