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# **George Padmore and the Soviet Model of the British Commonwealth**

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## George Padmore and the Soviet Model of the British Commonwealth\*

*This article argues for an appreciation of the permeability of the Western socialist and black radical traditions and a recognition of their codevelopment. This relationship is illustrated through an analysis of George Padmore's intellectual history, particularly focusing on How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire (1946), in which Padmore applied Marxist ideas to his project of colonial liberation. The book functions as Padmore's manifesto for the transformation of the British Empire into a socialist federation following the model of the Soviet Union. Through comparisons with the manifestos of British socialist F.A. Ridley and American pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois, this article contextualises this manifesto within a moment of postwar internationalist optimism. This approach also facilitates a discussion of the meaning of "pan-Africanism" to Padmore, concluding that pan-Africanism was, for him, a methodology through which colonial liberation, and eventually world socialism, could be achieved.*

In *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire: A Challenge to the Imperialist Powers* (1946), the Trinidadian socialist George Padmore offered the Soviet end to the Russian Empire as a model for the future of the British Empire:

If it is possible for the former colonies of the Czarist Empire to come together in fraternal co-operation, there is no reason at all why a Socialist Britain, for example, should fear to

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extend the Right of Full Self-Determination to the subject peoples of the British Empire. Once these dependent territories are given the right to plan their future, in their own interests, they would link up with the more advanced sections of the new Socialist Commonwealth.<sup>1</sup>

This praise of the USSR does not correspond to the traditional historiographical view of Padmore's relationship with Stalinism and the Soviet Union. Padmore's first biographer, James Hooker, made his thesis clear when he subtitled his 1967 book *George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism*. For Hooker, there were two Padmores: the young, dogmatic Communist and the older, wiser pan-Africanist.<sup>2</sup> This was a story of discontinuity, and it became the conventional scholarly narrative. The narrative can be summarised as follows: Padmore, born in 1902 or 1903, was drawn to Communism while studying in the United States in the 1920s, moved to Moscow by the end of the decade and spent the early 1930s in Hamburg working for the Profintern's International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). In 1934, appalled by the Comintern's incipient shift to the Popular Front strategy, which would lead to an abandonment of anti-colonialism, Padmore became an avowed pan-Africanist and anti-Communist, thereby corroborating, in the phrasing of Vincent Thompson, "the assertion that 'youth dares and age considers'."<sup>3</sup> Rupert Lewis infers that Padmore at this moment became a

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<sup>1</sup> George Padmore, in collaboration with Dorothy Pizer, *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire: A Challenge to the Imperialist Powers* (London, 1946), 63.

<sup>2</sup> James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (London, 1967). In keeping with Padmore's own usage, throughout this article I use the term "Communism" to denote the organised Communist movement loyal to the Soviet Union.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent B. Thompson, "George Padmore: Reconciling Two Phases of Contradictions," in Fitzroy Baptiste and Rupert Lewis, eds., *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2009), 133-47, at 134.

“full-blown anti-Stalinist.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, as late as 1946, Padmore argued in *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire* that the British Empire should remake itself in the same manner as the Soviet Union. While no longer a member of any Communist organisation, Padmore in 1946 still found in the Soviet Union a path to the future, making the case for a simple rupture in 1934 less persuasive. A full account of the ideological continuities in Padmore’s thought is crucial to understanding his intellectual history.

The bifurcation thesis has been robustly repudiated by historians in recent years, most notably by Leslie James, Padmore’s latest biographer.<sup>5</sup> Yet there remains more to be said about the relationship between the black radical tradition and Western Marxism in shaping Padmore’s thought. One of the central contentions of this article is that Padmore, like his comrades C.L.R. James and W.E.B. Du Bois, did not differentiate his pan-Africanism from his socialism, but rather developed a form of pan-Africanist Marxism. As Minkah Makalani has argued about the black radical tradition, “it is important not to negate that encounter” between black radicals and organised Marxism in North America and Europe.<sup>6</sup> In this claim, Makalani is wanting to dispel the idea that there is a discrete black radical tradition, which can be thoroughly separated from Western Marxism. The most notable scholars to advance the latter thesis are Cedric Robinson and Anthony Bogues.<sup>7</sup> Both have a particular interest in James, Padmore’s closest political ally

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<sup>4</sup> Rupert Lewis, “George Padmore: Towards a Political Assessment,” in Baptiste and Lewis, *George Padmore*, 148-61, at 151.

<sup>5</sup> Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke, 2015), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; Chapel Hill, 2000); Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York, 2003).

in the 1930s, and in their treatment of him they aim to reformulate our approach to the study of black radical thinkers more generally. Bogues, for instance, argues:

Black radical intellectual production oftentimes began with an engagement and dialogue with Western radical political ideas, and then moved on to a critique of these ideas as their incompleteness was revealed. [...] In other words, black radical intellectual production engages in a double operation - an engagement with Western radical theory and then a critique of this theory.<sup>8</sup>

Robinson's and Bogues's critiques of the Eurocentricity of classical Marxism are valid, but the conscription of James, and in Robinson's case Padmore, to these critiques is problematic. While James would undoubtedly make more fundamental breaks from Trotskyism in the 1940s, both scholars focus on his 1938 book *The Black Jacobins*. James himself wrote that the break from Trotskyism to "reorganize" his Marxist ideas began in 1941.<sup>9</sup>

Robinson's and Bogues's approaches to black radicalism have proved to be more resilient than the myth of "two Padmores." Leslie James, while rejecting the bifurcation of Padmore and recognising the continued influence of Marxism, nonetheless locates him within Robinson's and Bogues's black radical tradition.<sup>10</sup> This article, conversely, contributes to a body of literature which challenges, in the words of Marc Matera from his study of interwar black London, the "binary opposition between Anglophilia and engagement with the European left, on

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<sup>8</sup> Bogues, *Black Heretics*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London, 1963), 149.

<sup>10</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 9.

the one hand, and an essentialized 'Black Radical Tradition,' on the other."<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Christian Høgsbjerg, in his study of C.L.R. James's time in Britain in the 1930s, takes aim at Robinson, making the case for James's serious commitment to Marxism and arguing that "James felt that the exploited mass of humanity ultimately had the same interests at heart whether they were in the West Indies or Western Europe."<sup>12</sup> This article will argue that while Padmore de-centred Europe in his projected world revolution, he achieved this through a pan-Africanist Marxism rather than through a break from Marxism.

Bogues has legitimate concerns about the discipline of intellectual history, decrying the "great chain of thought constructed around a hierarchical order wherein Africana thinkers are located on the margins."<sup>13</sup> However, his, and Robinson's, solution is to exaggerate the break that black radical thinkers made from the European canon. An alternative solution, and one used by this article, is to examine the codevelopment of radicalisms in order to acknowledge the influence of Marx and Lenin on the black radical tradition, while simultaneously maintaining that Padmore and other black thinkers were themselves innovative and should not be placed at the bottom of any Marxist hierarchical order. In this respect, I follow the approach of Stephen Howe in his study of British anti-colonialism, which he describes as a "story of contact and of the exchange of ideas between British socialists and colonial radicals."<sup>14</sup> Gary Wilder, in his study of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, has argued that instead of debating whether intellectuals'

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<sup>11</sup> Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland, 2015), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham, NC, 2014), 207.

<sup>13</sup> Bogues, *Black Heretics*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford, 1993), 25.

output was African- or European-rooted, we should instead think of them as *postwar* thinkers operating in a transnational context. His aim, which I follow here, is “not to provincialize Europe but to deprovincialize Africa and the Antilles.”<sup>15</sup> This approach safeguards against creating artificially insulated spaces of historical enquiry, while not ignoring the role played by the backgrounds and experiences of radicals in shaping their philosophies and ambitions.

Padmore’s career is just one example of the impact of the Russian Revolution on black diasporic intellectual life. During the “short twentieth century,” to borrow Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, and particularly in the thirty years that followed the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet Union emerged as a beacon for many, shining against the racial capitalism of the West. One popular story, repeated to the extent that it became something like a parable, is that of Robert Robinson, an African American man working in a tractor factory in Stalingrad in 1930. When white American workers, who like Robinson had been recruited from the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, attempted to attack him during a lunch break, Russian workers leapt to his defence. The white Americans were found guilty of “racial chauvinism” and deported from the Soviet Union, to the approval of the Negro Delegation to the Profintern’s Fifth Congress.<sup>16</sup> Such stories were immensely powerful at a time when the vast majority of Africa and the Caribbean were under the heel of European colonialism and lynchings were a fact of life in the United States.

The putative anti-racism and anti-imperialism of the Soviet Union had profound effects on black radicalism, as Bolshevik anti-capitalism and Lenin’s theses on the national and colonial

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<sup>15</sup> Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC, 2015), 10 (emphasis in original).

<sup>16</sup> Negro Delegation of the 5th Congress RILU, “Down With Racial and National Chauvinism,” *Negro Worker*, February 1931, 16.



questions became immensely persuasive. Padmore was therefore, unsurprisingly, not the first prominent Communist activist to be drawn from the African diaspora. Communism was a particularly strong current in African American intellectual life, beginning with Cyril Briggs's African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) in the early 1920s. Jacob Zumoff has examined how the ABB were not simply passive recruits to the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA), but rather active members who agitated within the party to make it address the "Negro Question," with a degree of success.<sup>17</sup> Kate Baldwin, in her study of African American intellectuals who visited the Soviet Union, argues that "the experience of the Soviet Union as elaborated by each of these authors was crucial to the identifications and perceptions of the Soviet Union that influenced their formulations of black internationalism."<sup>18</sup> In many of these formulations the Soviet Union was to provide a model for the rest of the world; both the perpetrators and victims of imperialism and racism could transform themselves in the Soviet image. Bill Mullen, in his study of Du Bois, has observed "Stalin's tragic influence" on what he calls the "diasporic international" of left-wing and

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<sup>17</sup> Jacob A. Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919-1929* (Leiden, 2014), ch. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham, NC, 2002), 16. These intellectuals are Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson. Notable black activists who also joined the CPUSA, before or after Padmore, include Angela Davis, Harry Haywood and Claudia Jones. For other works which have explored the impact of the Russian Revolution on black radicalism, see Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939* (Trenton, NJ, 2013); Makalani, *In the Cause*; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London, 1998); Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-36* (Jackson, MS, 1998); Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *Blacks and Reds: Race and Class in Conflict, 1919-1990* (East Lansing, MI, 1995).

anti-colonial thinkers with world-revolutionary objectives.<sup>19</sup> Mullen notes that this was a contradictory influence, as the Soviet Union became an exemplary revolutionary model while at the same time the Comintern stifled goals of world revolution in favour of defending Socialism in One Country.<sup>20</sup> This observation aids our understanding of the tensions within much of Padmore's post-Comintern output, as he heaps praise on Soviet domestic policy while maintaining a distance from Soviet foreign policy and the later history of the Comintern in favour of a world-revolutionary goal.

This article argues that Padmore's commitment to the Soviet model of colonial transformation, best exemplified in *How Russia Transformed*, is essential to understanding his form of Marxist pan-Africanism. The argument will involve an interrogation of the meaning of pan-Africanism for the materialist Padmore, concluding that pan-Africanism was, for him, a methodology through which colonial liberation, and eventually world socialism, could be achieved. In this sense, it is inseparable from his Marxism. With the writing of the book in the 1940s sandwiched between Padmore's break from the Comintern in the 1930s and his ascension to leading spokesperson of the Gold Coast independence movement in the 1950s, *How Russia Transformed* is arguably Padmore's most overlooked work - his acknowledged historical contribution for that decade not seeming to extend much beyond organising the 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress.

This article also undertakes an analysis of the function of *How Russia Transformed* as a *manifesto* rather than as simply a *history*. Here, Laura Winkiel's study of modernism, race and

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<sup>19</sup> Bill V. Mullen, *Un-American: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Century of World Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2015), 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

manifestos is instructive. Although *How Russia Transformed* does not call itself a manifesto, it sits with other documents containing what Winkiel calls “functional similarities” to manifestos, salient features including “seek[ing] to break from the past” and “draw[ing] attention to the present moment in order to generate a radically different future, changing the world and starting the revolution [...] now!”<sup>21</sup> Particularly useful is her idea that manifestos reveal a “crisis of modernity,” and that there was “a counter-history, a black revolutionary tradition, that existed in relation to European modernity and its history of slavery” which “articulated alternative modernisms in the sense that they experienced and expressed most forcefully modernity’s uneven development.”<sup>22</sup> While agreeing with Winkiel that black radicals used manifestos to promote alternative modernisms, this article, as stated above, also seeks to locate Padmore’s position within European socialism as well as Winkiel’s black revolutionary tradition. The symbiotic movements both possessed a language of alternative modernisms.

Finally, this article seeks to locate *How Russia Transformed* within the context of the latter half of the Second World War and the immediate postwar period, as part of a trend of internationalist optimism that pervaded the socialist and pan-Africanist milieus in which Padmore operated; radical global political reconstitutions seemed not just possible, but probable. This mood, it shall be seen, was one of the first victims of the Cold War. In this way, the article buttresses the work of Penny Von Eschen and Carol Anderson, who have studied this moment in an African American context. Von Eschen has argued that the formation of the United Nations and the independence of India oriented activists towards international strategies of liberation, but at the onset of the Cold War, African American liberals wedded their civil rights hopes to US foreign policy, silencing African Americans with sympathy for Communist anti-

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<sup>21</sup> Laura Winkiel, *Modernism, Race and Manifestos* (Cambridge, 2008), 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 30 & 41.

colonialism.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Anderson mourns the loss of the goal of “human rights” in favour of “civil rights” (the former encompassing economic rights and thus “Soviet-tainted” by the 1950s) in mainstream African American activism.<sup>24</sup> This article explores this moment, and its end, in a transatlantic context.

The political thought of two of Padmore’s comrades, the British socialist F.A. Ridley and the American pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois, will be compared and contrasted with Padmore’s own political thought. Ridley was a leading member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the British party to which Padmore was most sympathetic, and was also particularly prominent in the movement for a United Socialist States of Europe (USSE). Du Bois was a leading pan-Africanist, who, after an antagonistic relationship with Padmore in the early 1930s, continued to move to the left, helped Padmore organise the 1945 Pan-African Congress and agitated during the postwar period for an anti-colonial UN. Both Ridley and Du Bois, as well as enjoying personal and political relationships with Padmore, were therefore part of this global mood of internationalist postwar optimism. Their blueprints for postwar reconstitutions - influenced, like Padmore’s, by an analysis of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism - provide a lens through which Padmore’s political thought can be contextualised and its idiosyncrasies drawn out. Furthermore, studying Padmore and his comrades allows us to zoom in on the permeable boundary between the Western socialist and black radical traditions, rejecting any neat distinctions between the two.

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<sup>23</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism* (Ithaca, NY, 1997), 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, 2003), 7.

## ***How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire and Padmore's intellectual history***

When Padmore published *How Russia Transformed*, in collaboration with his British Jewish partner, Dorothy Pizer, he had been living in London for the past decade. He had spent much of this time agitating alongside Britain's black radicals under the banner of the International African Service Bureau (IASB), while forming relationships with sections of the British socialist movement. He was an organiser and speaker, but his favoured form of activism was as a political writer who documented and criticised imperialism. Padmore later remembered that "one of the chief functions" of the IASB, which had a membership including C.L.R. James, Jomo Kenyatta and T. Ras Makonnen, was "to help enlighten public opinion, particularly in Great Britain [...] as to the true conditions in [...] Africa and the West Indies."<sup>25</sup>

James and Padmore developed in this period a theory of the mutual dependency of the European and African revolutions. In *The Black Jacobins*, James observed that "If [Toussaint L'Ouverture] failed, it is for the same reason that the Russian socialist revolution failed [...] - the defeat of the revolution in Europe."<sup>26</sup> But he also argued that "[t]he part played by the blacks in the success of the great French Revolution has never received adequate recognition. As Franco's Moors have once more proved, the revolution in Europe will ignore coloured workers at its peril."<sup>27</sup> This theory of mutual dependency was influenced by Lenin's theses on the national

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<sup>25</sup> George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London, 1956), 147.

<sup>26</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London, 1938), 237.

<sup>27</sup> C.L.R. James, *A History of Negro Revolt* (London, 1938), 13.

and colonial questions for the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920. Lenin argued that anti-colonial revolutionary movements challenged the foundations of European capitalism, and should therefore be supported, as colonial revolution would accelerate the collapse of capitalism in the metropole.<sup>28</sup> The IASB used this theory to argue that African and Asian workers and peasants therefore had a role to play not only in destroying the British Empire, but also in defeating European capitalism. This theory was the basis of their appeals to the British working class. During the Caribbean labour unrest of the 1930s, the IASB's journal published a message to the delegates of the British Trades Union Congress. It bluntly stated that "[a]t the present moment Africans and West Indians are struggling for their elementary democratic rights. What are you going to do about it?"<sup>29</sup> Never arguing that revolution in the centre was more important than revolution in the periphery, they de-centred Europe by theorising that revolutionary movements in different parts of the world were mutually constitutive. Anticipating the more detailed argument to be made in *How Russia Transformed*, the IASB yearned for a "world socialist commonwealth," in which case an alliance between Britain and its former colonies would be achieved.<sup>30</sup>

Padmore in the second half of the 1930s also, unlike the Trotskyist James, continued to defend Stalin's domestic policy, most notably its domestic racial and national relations. In his 1936 book *How Britain Rules Africa*, he argued that racism "does not exist in the Soviet Union where capitalism has been abolished" and that the former colonised peoples of Central Asia

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<sup>28</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions" (1920), [\[https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm#fw3\]](https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm#fw3), accessed 7 January 2017.

<sup>29</sup> *International African Opinion*, September 1938, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *International African Opinion*, May-June 1939, 3.

lived in harmony with their former Russian oppressors.<sup>31</sup> Maintaining this analysis in the postwar period, *How Russia Transformed* took as its starting point Bolshevik ideas of self-determination and federation as pronounced in the 1910s, frequently citing Stalin's 1913 pamphlet, *Marxism and the National Question*, and Lenin and Grigory Zinoviev's 1915 *Socialism and War*.<sup>32</sup> These foundational Communist texts on the national question were in part written to explain how the Bolsheviks proposed to end the Russian Empire and put in its place a multinational socialist federation. By recognising national oppression and defending the right to self-determination, the Bolsheviks aimed to create the conditions under which formerly oppressed nations would use this right to voluntarily enter union with the formerly oppressing nation.<sup>33</sup>

In *How Russia Transformed*, Padmore attempted to demonstrate how Lenin and Stalin successfully applied these ideas in the Soviet Union. Large parts of the book were devoted to demonstrating how the Soviet Union had successfully industrialised and combatted illiteracy in the "former colonies" (to use Padmore's terminology) and (pertinently in the context of the Second World War and in contrast to the rapid loss of British territory in Asia) produced a unity of interests between Russian workers and the colonial peoples. The latter factor had created vital support for the Red Army during the Civil War. Following Lenin's analysis that imperialism, characterised by colonialism and monopoly capital, was a stage of capitalism, Padmore stressed that socialist revolution was a prerequisite for socialist unity between metropole and

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<sup>31</sup> George Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa* (London, 1936), 335.

<sup>32</sup> *Marxism and the National Question* was, partly owing to Stalin's prestige, a particularly important text for black Communists and Marxists. It was also used to justify the "Black Belt Thesis," of which Padmore disapproved. For a passionate, contemporaneous espousal of this thesis, see Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation* (New York, 1948), ch. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question: A Collection of Articles and Speeches* (London, 1942), 18-19; Grigory Zinoviev and Vladimir Lenin, *Socialism and War* (London, 1931), 25-6.

colonies. He stated that “[o]nly the proletariat can cut the Gordian knot which binds the subject peoples to the yoke of imperialism.”<sup>34</sup>

To treat *How Russia Transformed* primarily as a work of historical scholarship, however, is to miss its function as a manifesto for a new postwar global order. The subject matter and significance of the book extended far beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union. Padmore wrote the book during the second half of the Second World War, at a time when he was enmeshed in the British socialist movement and a network of radicals in the black Atlantic. Aiming his book at both British socialists and colonial radicals, Padmore hoped to align these forces in reshaping the British Empire through simultaneous revolution. As the Second World War came to an end, the transition of the British Empire into the Commonwealth of Nations was underway. Padmore believed that a transformation which retained the bourgeois and racialised facets of the British Empire would be inadequate to address the problems of the colonial peoples. He thus mined Soviet history with a clear eye to its utility as a model for post-imperial development. Padmore stated that “[i]t is not enough to describe and admire the achievements of the Soviet Union” without also attempting to infer from these “the solution of the Colonial Question in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean [...] at the end of this war.”<sup>35</sup> Throughout the book he drew parallels between the British and Russian empires and used his historical analysis of Soviet colonial policy to conclude that the British Empire should follow this model and transform itself, through revolutions in the metropole and the colonies, into a *socialist* commonwealth.

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<sup>34</sup> Padmore, *How Russia*, xiv.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, ix.



There has recently developed a historiographical interest in the postwar “federal moment,” focused mainly, but not exclusively, on the French Empire. Of particular importance is Frederick Cooper’s book, which argues against the inevitability of empires being replaced by independent nation states, and which “tells the story of how it happened that in 1960 the political actors of France and French West Africa ended up with a form of political organization that neither had wanted during most of the previous fifteen years.”<sup>36</sup> Cooper contends that, though there were of course programmatic differences about precisely what form such a union should take, “French West African political leaders [including Senghor and Mamadou Dia] sought instead to transform colonial empire into another sort of assemblage of diverse territories and peoples: a federation of African states with each other and France.”<sup>37</sup> These proposed transformations bear similarities to Padmore’s plans for the federalisation of the British Empire into the British Commonwealth, though Padmore abandoned the project much earlier than 1960. Moreover, even if we accept Cooper’s argument as correct, Padmore’s federalism differed from many of the projects Cooper recounts in that it was dependent on socialist revolution in Britain, and not a political union to be achieved through constitutional reform.

Cooper has been criticised for his lack of attentiveness to the limits placed on federalism by capitalism, racism and the Cold War. As Samuel Moyn has observed, metropolitan France did not desire a politically equal union, and former colonial subjects did not desire one that was unequal.<sup>38</sup> Richard Drayton has criticised Cooper for his lack of a serious acknowledgement of the barriers to federalism caused by racialised capitalism: “there was a fundamental tension

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<sup>36</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, 2014), 3. See also Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

<sup>37</sup> Cooper, *Citizenship*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Moyn, “Fantasies of Federalism,” *Dissent*, 62/1 (2015), 145-51, at 148.

between France's grand strategy, for which colonies were a source of national power and wealth, and the idea of a shared future, in which the former would always win out.”<sup>39</sup> It is difficult to see how these tensions could be resolved through reform, and Padmore, writing in a British context, clearly did not believe this to be possible. Drayton has further criticised Cooper for not adequately understanding the impact of the Bolshevik revolution on the 1946 moment; the prominence of French Communists instilled hope in actors such as Senghor and Césaire that a socialist French Union could be achieved, but these hopes were dashed following the marginalisation of the Communists after 1947.<sup>40</sup> Wilder, in his study of French federalism, is more sensitive to these developments, crediting “resurgent Gaullism, official anticommunism, and syndicalist social unrest” with closing the “postwar opening.” Like Cooper, however, Wilder tends to overlook or criticise colonial ambitions for national sovereignty.<sup>41</sup>

While there was far more discussion of federation in the French Empire than in the British, Padmore was aware that in the postwar period a reconstitution of the British Empire, whether from above or below, was likely. Michael Collins has revealed that much of the drive towards the Commonwealth came from the imperial centre and was seen by figures like the Colonial Office’s Andrew Cohen as “a way of reconfiguring the politics of collaboration” in order to “maintain key British spheres of influence.”<sup>42</sup> Actors such as Jan Smuts, the segregationist South African premier, promoted a vision of commonwealth which would retain the racialised

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Drayton, “Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial Power,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 37/2 (2017), 401-6, at 404.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 87.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Collins, “Decolonisation and the ‘Federal Moment,’” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 24/1 (2013), 21-40, at 24. Collins also notes that some federal initiatives originated from anti-colonialists.

order of empire as the best means to defend the interests of his country.<sup>43</sup> Padmore was staking his claim in an active debate with high stakes.

Unfortunately, the most important element of *How Russia Transformed* - its manifesto for the British Empire - was overlooked by reviewers. Upon publication, *How Russia Transformed* was criticised by many on the British Left because of its defence of the Soviet Union. Walter Padley, who around this time left the Independent Labour Party in order to rejoin the Labour Party, argued, with much justification, that Moscow maintained an imperialistic relationship with Eastern Europe.<sup>44</sup> Conversely, he had nothing to say about Padmore's proposals for the transformation of Western European powers. Even in a positive review in the same newspaper, the ILP's F.A. Ridley similarly failed to engage with the book-as-manifesto. He simply praised Padmore's analysis of the Soviet Union and criticisms of the British Empire without joining the dots of these arguments.<sup>45</sup> Recently, the historians Carol Polsgrove and Leslie James have broken from the early responses, observing that the Soviet Union functioned in *How Russia Transformed* as a "model" and "blueprint," respectively.<sup>46</sup>

Padmore's use of the Soviet Union as a model provokes the question of whether he was more invested in providing an historically accurate account of the Soviet Union or in offering an idealised model that could be applied to other empires. The ILP's John McNair, in an interview with Hooker, remembered that "in debates with communists during the war Padmore used to

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<sup>43</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009), 20.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Padley, "Padmore, Stalin and P.O.U.M.," *Socialist Leader*, 11 January 1947, 9.

<sup>45</sup> F.A. Ridley, "Searchlight on Imperialism," *Socialist Leader*, 14 December 1946, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Carol Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* (Manchester, 2012), 62; James, *George Padmore*, 108.

claim that the ‘Russian Communists were the worst of all Imperialists in their subversion of the Baltic Provinces, their attack on Finland and their record in Poland’.<sup>47</sup> Hooker himself believed that once Padmore “had written a manuscript, he could not bear to have it overtaken by events,” suggesting that the delay in publishing *How Russia Transformed* accounted for Padmore’s defence of the Soviet Union as late as 1946.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Padmore did publicly criticise the Soviet invasion of Finland, even if these interventions were not as fierce as the private criticisms reported by McNair. During the Winter War of 1939-40, Padmore wrote that the Soviet invasion was a response to the danger of imperialist war being waged against the Soviet Union, which was itself “the logical outcome of Stalin’s fundamental error of attempting to build ‘Socialism in a single country,’ at the expense of the Revolution abroad.”<sup>49</sup> Padmore did not shy away from criticising Stalin for this error, but argued that the Soviet Union should nonetheless be defended from capitalist intervention. A similar critique was featured in *How Russia Transformed*.<sup>50</sup> It is here that we can see the tension in the influence of Stalinism on world-revolutionary politics observed by Mullen.

Leslie James is less dismissive than Hooker of Padmore’s sincerity, arguing that “the consistency of his statements on Soviet anti-racism shows that he seems to have genuinely believed his main argument to be true.”<sup>51</sup> James is more convincing than Hooker on this matter. Padmore was a committed anti-capitalist who admired the Soviet Union because of its challenge to global capitalist-imperialism. He was consistent in praising Soviet anti-racism and

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<sup>47</sup> Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 72.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 72-3.

<sup>49</sup> George Padmore, “Hands Off the Soviet Union,” *Left*, February 1940, 47-52, at 47.

<sup>50</sup> Padmore, *How Russia*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 110.

continued to do so until his death in 1959, well after the publication of *How Russia Transformed*. His comments on Soviet foreign policy were usually critical but sympathetically contextualised, as his analysis of the Winter War illustrates.

Padmore finished writing the first draft of *How Russia Transformed* in 1942, but the book would not be published for another four years following a lengthy editorial process. James has highlighted the disjointed text that this delay created, observing that “the first half of the book makes its case for the granting of self-determination primarily based upon the need for colonial support to the war effort, while the final chapters make a postwar plea for a new socialist party in Britain.”<sup>52</sup> What is common to all sections of the book, however, is a sense, which would be vindicated, that European colonialism was in crisis. Fascism had exposed the ugliness of the racial ideologies which underpinned imperialism, the Allied powers depended on their colonies to sustain the war effort, and Japan’s victories in Asia had dented notions of white superiority.

In this context of moribund colonialism, Padmore increasingly began to feel that the colonial peoples were in a position from which to negotiate with the British ruling class. His writing in the 1930s had envisaged the reconstitution of the world occurring through the joint revolutionary struggles of the European proletariat and the colonial workers and peasants. This vision was eschewed in his only book published during the Second World War, *The White Man’s Duty: An analysis of the Colonial Question in the light of the Atlantic Charter*, published in late 1942. The book took the form of a series of conversations with Nancy Cunard, the white shipping heiress with radical political views. These conversations, which were typed up by Pizer, consisted mostly of Cunard asking questions about the conditions and future of the colonies, with Padmore responding. The premise of the book was that Cunard and Padmore would take

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 111.

at their word the statesmen who had made promises of democracy. In 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt had articulated his “Four Freedoms,” and later that year he and Winston Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter, which included a principle that all peoples had the right to self-determination. Padmore dogged the Allied powers about their undelivered promises, and argued that the “ideal solution of postwar reconstruction is the *application of Clause 3 of the Atlantic Charter to all peoples, regardless of the stage of their social development.*”<sup>53</sup> Demanding that liberal doctrines, uttered initially with only European people in mind, be extended to people of colour is an old tactic, which can be traced back at least as far as the Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint L’Ouverture.<sup>54</sup>

Padmore also went beyond calling for an extension of liberalism and set a precedent for his argument in *How Russia Transformed* by stating that “we would like to see the collaboration and co-operation of all the lands which now comprise the British Empire put on a Federal basis, evolving towards a Socialist Commonwealth.”<sup>55</sup> But Padmore in *White Man’s Duty* rarely went beyond social democracy. There were no discussions of Marx, Lenin or the Soviet Union. There is an irony that Cunard and Padmore refrained from talking about the Soviet Union during the Second World War, when Communism was at its most popular in Britain. Padmore’s Leninism was merely hinted at, for example when he discussed the inevitability of war under imperialism.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, his concrete proposals were strictly reformist. For instance, he

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<sup>53</sup> Nancy Cunard and George Padmore, *The White Man’s Duty: An analysis of the Colonial Question in the light of the Atlantic Charter* (London, 1943), 19 (emphasis in original).

<sup>54</sup> For a collection of L’Ouverture’s writings that illustrates this tactic, see Toussaint L’Ouverture, *The Haitian Revolution*, ed. Nick Nesbitt (London, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Cunard and Padmore, *The White Man’s Duty*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

proposed the federation of the British West Indies based upon universal adult suffrage, implying through the absence of any other suggested methodology that this should be achieved through Westminster voluntarily divesting itself of power. This proposal was a top-down model of transformation - more decolonisation than liberation. *White Man's Duty* contained almost no discussion of the necessity of socialism in the metropole and the role of the British and colonial proletariats in achieving the transformations sought by Padmore.

We can speculate why *White Man's Duty* contained so little about the Soviet Union or why it was more moderate than the rest of Padmore's output. Perhaps Padmore had to moderate his views in order to get the book published, particularly at a time when paper was rationed. After all, the first draft of *How Russia Transformed* was rejected by publishers in 1942.<sup>57</sup> Leslie James has argued that Padmore tailored his output for specific audiences; Padmore, writing during the Second World War and unlikely to achieve a wide circulation, addressed his arguments to British elites more so than in other works.<sup>58</sup> He was less hamstrung by these factors when writing for publications with wide circulations or in the postwar *How Russia Transformed*. Maybe Padmore simply wished to utilise *White Man's Duty* as a rhetorical exercise to expose the hypocrisy of British liberals and therefore had little to say about the proletariat as the agent of change. Regardless of the reason, his other writing during the Second World War displayed a continuation of his interwar militancy. Having concluded in the late 1920s that the Soviet Union had solved the "national question," he continued to propagate this view. He argued that it was the role of the international proletariat to defend the Soviet Union during the war because, as the Soviet Union was not run by private capitalist interests, it could have no "imperialist aims" to seek sources of raw materials or spheres for capital

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<sup>57</sup> Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*, 63-4.

<sup>58</sup> James, *George Padmore*.

investment.<sup>59</sup> While Padmore had not yet set out in detail the ways in which the Soviet Union could provide a model for the transformation of the British Empire, he had clearly been wrestling with these ideas for years before the publication of *How Russia Transformed*.

### **British socialism, F.A. Ridley and the United Socialist States of Europe**

The end of the Second World War offered the prospect of a radically reconstituted world. Even conservatives and liberals, whose complacency in the face of imperialist rivalry during the 1930s had frustrated left-wing activists, began to embrace forms of internationalism as embodied by the UN. It is therefore no surprise that Padmore was not the only socialist or pan-Africanist to offer a vision of the postwar peace as the Left attempted to shift the new internationalism into more radical channels. Padmore's closest British allies were the ILP. Although never a member, Padmore frequently wrote for their publications, attended conferences with them and even edited their journal in the early 1940s. The ILP was founded in 1893 and affiliated to the newly-formed Labour Party in 1900. It disaffiliated in 1932 in order to pursue increasingly left-wing politics and called for a socialist revolution in Britain during the Second World War. Limited understandings of the British Left, and particularly the ILP, have often been a weakness of otherwise masterful works on race politics in Britain. For instance, Makalani, Matera and Susan Pennybacker all repeat the narrative of ILP pacifism being a decisive factor in the decision to oppose workers' sanctions during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War of 1935-36, despite the

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<sup>59</sup> George Padmore, "The Socialist Attitude to the Invasion of the U.S.S.R.," *Left*, September 1941, 193-9, at 198.



ILP's unequivocal support for armed conflict in Spain months later.<sup>60</sup> Matera's argument that while "European communists and socialists attributed war and economic exploitation to capitalism, of which imperialism was but an epiphenomenon, black intellectuals centred empire in their analyses as the driving force behind an increasingly monopolistic form of capitalism" is a broad brushstroke that, while true of many individuals and organisations, fails to capture the centrality of imperialism to the ILP's political theory by the late 1930s.<sup>61</sup> This centrality was in part due to the influence of the IASB. In the 1980s, Fenner Brockway, who, along with James Maxton, was one of the two dominant figures of the post-disaffiliation ILP, would cite Padmore as one of his major influences in shaping his understanding of imperialism.<sup>62</sup> A discussion of the ILP allows us to see how the relationship between black radicalism and Western socialism was one of dialogue, including black influence on Western socialism, rather than a simple black importation of European ideas.

As soon as war began, the ILP asserted that the war must be followed by the creation of the United Socialist States of Europe, seeing, in Leninist terms, capitalist-imperialist rivalry as the main cause of the war. Following this logic, the internationalism of the nascent UN would be insufficient to achieve lasting peace. The ILP therefore sought, to use Winkiel's phrase, another alternative modernism. No one embraced the idea of the USSE as enthusiastically as F.A. Ridley. Ridley was born in 1897 and, after flirting with Trotskyism and anarchism, joined the ILP in 1938 and was elected to its National Administrative Council (NAC) in 1943. He linked the need for a USSE to his theory of a crumbling British Empire no longer able to support a labour

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<sup>60</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 201; Matera, *Black London*, 79; Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Woodstock, Oxfordshire, 2009), 88.

<sup>61</sup> Matera, *Black London*, 77.

<sup>62</sup> Howe, *Anticolonialism*, 171.

aristocracy: "Socialism in Britain must, necessarily, presuppose one of two things; either a socialist Britain is supported by the tribute of the (non-socialist) Empire throughout the transition, or it goes into Socialism as part of a socialist Europe."<sup>63</sup> What is especially noteworthy about this passage is not Ridley's combination of Europeanism and anti-colonialism, but rather his assumption that Britain could only otherwise be supported by the tribute of a non-socialist empire. He implied that socialism in the colonies, and therefore a socialist commonwealth, were impossibilities. Ridley's dismissiveness was not lost on other members of the ILP, who occasionally challenged him. In 1943 Brockway wrote a comment on Ridley's plans for a new socialist international. Ridley suggested that any new international should be limited to socialists in countries which had industrialised, to which Brockway responded:

I recognise that Europe is likely to be the scene of the next mass movement towards Socialism and that one cannot step from primitive conditions [...] into full Socialism. Nevertheless, any New International must also represent the socialist forces in India and the Colonial countries.<sup>64</sup>

Brockway believed that industrialisation and proletarianisation were powerful currents of revolutionary potential, but rejected Ridley's dismissal of the socialist potential of colonial liberation movements. In the event, the ILP delayed the decision and the new international did not materialise.

Ridley's agitation for a USSE continued as he coauthored a book with fellow ILP member Bob Edwards in 1944. Ridley wrote the first half of the book and stated in his foreword

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<sup>63</sup> F.A. Ridley, "The Socialist Attitude to an United States of Europe," *Left*, October 1939, 263-7, at 267.

<sup>64</sup> "Comment by Fenner Brockway," ILP/3/31, British Library of Political and Economic Science.

that “World-Socialism - the United States of the World - is our majestic goal.”<sup>65</sup> This goal was consistent with Padmore’s aspiration in *How Russia Transformed*, which was partway through its lengthy gestation process when Ridley and Edwards’s book was published. Both texts took as their starting point the Leninist explanation of war and the need for socialist revolution to achieve meaningful peace.

Similarly, both Padmore and Ridley accepted a Marxist idea of the stages of history, that societies progressed from feudalism to capitalism and eventually to socialism. They therefore agreed that most of the world outside Europe was, to a greater or lesser extent, “backward.” Padmore argued that imperialist powers were guilty of preserving this backwardness by using colonies primarily to extract raw materials to be processed in the metropole.<sup>66</sup> For Padmore, “backwardness” was an economic category, though one with cultural implications. Colonial peoples were not innately inferior, but, as a result of imperialism creating intentionally undiversified agrarian economies with limited educational opportunities, they lived in conditions in which ignorance abounded and national cultures were poorly developed. The role played by capitalist-imperialism in this underdevelopment meant that in Padmore’s formulation a socialist commonwealth, which united metropole and colonies in a federal structure, could overcome these problems. Padmore used the Soviet Union to illustrate the possibility of achieving economic development through unity, stating that the USSR was “a political federation of multi-national Republics in which all peoples, *irrespective of their degree of civilisation and social development*, enjoy equal political, economic and social status.”<sup>67</sup> For Padmore, then, it was crucial to use *How Russia Transformed* to document the Soviet Union’s efficacy in combating

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<sup>65</sup> F.A. Ridley and Bob Edwards, *The United Socialist States of Europe* (London, 1944), 8.

<sup>66</sup> Padmore, *How Russia*, 25.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, x (emphasis in original).

illiteracy, promoting national languages and cultures and achieving industrialisation in formerly “backward” territories, as this demonstrated the possibility of achieving similar results in the British Empire.<sup>68</sup>

Ridley, conversely, stated that it would be “a great exaggeration to state that all traces of pre-capitalist barbarism have been already abolished, and that the whole world is equally ripe for the social transformation,” instead claiming that socialism “must proceed in stages.”<sup>69</sup> He deemed Africa and Polynesia in particular to be “still more primitive” than “the nations of the East.”<sup>70</sup> Ridley, like Padmore, argued that “backwardness” was the result of imperialism, but did not propose a basis for a socialist partnership between Europe and its former colonies. Instead, Ridley argued that the means of production must be sufficiently sophisticated to be socialised, before asserting that “[o]ne cannot profitably socialise a dust-bin, nor divide a desert!”<sup>71</sup>

The differences between Ridley’s Europeanist socialism and Padmore’s pan-Africanist socialism related mainly to emphases, priorities and timeframes. Peter Abrahams, a South African writer and Padmore’s pan-Africanist colleague, emphasised in 1946 that “the Socialist Federation of Europe, right and intelligent as it is,” would not be possible so long as Europe

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<sup>68</sup> For an illuminating debate within the IASB about “backwardness” and modernisation, see Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London, 1938) and the review by C.L.R. James in *International African Opinion*, August 1938, 3. James accused Kenyatta of seeking a return to a pre-colonial way of life, whereas James advocated modernisation of industry, which, as a Marxist, he argued would inevitably lead to cultural changes.

<sup>69</sup> Ridley and Edwards, *USSE*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

maintained its empires.<sup>72</sup> Ridley would not dispute the incompatibility of colonialism and socialism. Likewise, none of Ridley, Padmore or Abrahams would argue against world federation, though this was further in the horizon in Ridley's programme. Despite their varying degrees of optimism as to how quickly colonial peoples would overcome their "backwardness," their Marxism meant that they shared a definition of "backwardness."

There was, though, a more important programmatic and theoretical distinction. As mentioned above, for Padmore the key to understanding the Russian Revolution, as well as the coming world socialist transformation, was the mutual dependency of metropolitan and colonial revolutions. Locating this interdependency as part of the Leninist political tradition, Padmore therefore argued in *How Russia Transformed*:

The strengthening of the nationalist aspirations of the component parts of the Empire strategically undermines the imperial foundations. The open and successful revolt of the colonial countries against the imperial country decides its break-up. The metropolitan masses and the masses of the colonial countries have, therefore, an identical objective which indissolubly links their fate: the overthrow of the common imperialist oppressor.<sup>73</sup>

Ridley, conversely, concluded that "the *primary* aim of the coming Revolution, and of the International that will lead it to ultimate victory, must be confined to European soil." This belief also explains his clash with Brockway about the forces that should be represented in the proposed socialist international.<sup>74</sup> For Ridley, the European proletariat was more than capable of achieving socialism by itself and did not require a relationship with national liberation

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Abrahams, "Imperialists Cannot Make Peace," *Socialist Leader*, 7 September 1946, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Padmore, *How Russia*, 37.

<sup>74</sup> Ridley and Edwards, *USSE*, 56 (emphasis in original).

movements; instead it would simply divest itself of colonial possessions once power was achieved.

Ridley did not speak for the entire ILP. Brockway also wrestled with the nature of the postcolonial state in *The Way Out*, published in 1942. He positioned himself closer to Padmore than to Ridley. When theorising about the relationship between a socialist Britain and newly-liberated colonies, he suggested that “[i]n many cases the liberated colonies would wish to remain in close association with a Socialist Britain, but that would be for them to decide.”<sup>75</sup> He further stated:

*A Socialist Britain would go beyond extending political liberty to the colonial peoples. It would restore the land and the natural resources which have been appropriated by British capitalists. [...] Within a generation the “backward” races would have disappeared. The advance in material welfare and education among the subject peoples of the old Czarist Empire since the Soviet Government was established shows what the possibilities are.*<sup>76</sup>

These ideas of consensual federation, a materialist definition of “backwardness” and even a reference to Soviet colonial transformation illustrate the ways in which Brockway was in this period, barring Pizer and perhaps Cunard, Padmore’s closest white political and intellectual ally. Indeed, Brockway’s citation of Padmore as one of the major influences in shaping his understanding of imperialism suggests that Padmore may have been responsible for these ideas.

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<sup>75</sup> Fenner Brockway, *The Way Out* (London, 1942), 17.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 17-18 (emphasis in original).

It would be a mistake to characterise the political relationship between Padmore and Ridley as conflictual. As mentioned above, Ridley wrote a positive review of *How Russia Transformed*, though, of course, his focus on the book as an analysis of the Soviet Union rather than as a manifesto for the British Empire allowed him to ignore some fundamental political differences. Padmore, for his part, in the 1956 book *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*, listed Ridley among a select group of British activists who had championed African freedom struggles - high praise indeed when one considers that Padmore pulled few punches in the book.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, their differing theories led them to advocate different routes to their shared goal of world socialist federation.

### **W.E.B. Du Bois, pan-Africanism and an anti-colonial United Nations**

The Fifth Pan-African Congress was held in Manchester in October 1945. In the official report, Padmore, who was one of the congress's organisers, lauded W.E.B. Du Bois, who served as chair for much of the congress, as the "Father of Pan-Africanism."<sup>78</sup> Du Bois, after attending the 1900 Pan-African Conference, organised the first four pan-African meetings to be dubbed "congresses" between 1919 and 1927. These meetings were more moderate than their 1940s successor, which had a larger emphasis on colonial labour organisations. When organising these earlier congresses Du Bois espoused the idea that the "Talented Tenth" of black men would advance the entire race. This idea was anathema to Padmore's Marxism, but by the

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<sup>77</sup> Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 365.

<sup>78</sup> George Padmore, *Colonial and... Coloured Unity: A Programme of Action: History of the Pan-African Congress* (1947), repr. in Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, eds., *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited* (London, 1995), 51-124, at 54.

1930s Du Bois was more consistently employing a Marxist-inspired historical methodology and espousing the role of masses as agents of change.<sup>79</sup> He began a regular correspondence with Padmore in the mid-1930s, and Mullen describes Padmore as “perhaps Du Bois’s most companionate member of the diasporic international.”<sup>80</sup> Du Bois’s increasing radicalisation in the 1930s and 1940s and his esteemed reputation within pan-Africanist circles make his postwar manifesto a fitting comparison to Padmore’s.

Du Bois’s movement to Marxism was gradual. He was briefly a member of the Socialist Party in the early 1910s, before supporting Woodrow Wilson in the 1912 presidential election and resigning his membership. Mullen has identified the contradictions in Du Bois’s political thought in this period through treatments of two essays: “The African Roots of War” (1915), which partly prefigured Lenin by arguing that the First World War had been caused by imperialism, and “Close Ranks” (1918), which called for African American support for US participation in the war.<sup>81</sup> Mullen makes the case for Du Bois’s most significant reorientation, leading to a greater sympathy for the Comintern, happening in the period 1926-28.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Mullen acknowledges that this reorientation did not immediately resolve the tensions in Du Bois’s Marxism; while Du Bois publicly jettisoned the Talented Tenth thesis in

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<sup>79</sup> This methodology is best exemplified in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York, 1935). Padmore had previously derided Du Bois as a bourgeois reformist in ITUCNW writing; see George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931; Rockville, MD, 2007).

<sup>80</sup> Mullen, *Un-American*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 34-5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 42.



1933, he called for an un-Marxist black cooperative economic strategy during the 1930s Depression.<sup>83</sup>

Like Padmore and Ridley in their manifestos, Du Bois in *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* was responding to the need to avoid another world war. Du Bois proposed the book to his publishers in November 1944 and returned a corrected manuscript by January 1945, facilitating the publication of the book by the summer.<sup>84</sup> While Padmore was implicitly responding to the transition to the Commonwealth of Nations, Du Bois was explicitly responding to the incipient formation of the UN, and attempting to reconcile the organisation's professed internationalism with the continued colonialism of many of its founding members.<sup>85</sup> Du Bois pointed to the hypocrisy of the Allied powers, who claimed to follow the "democratic method of government" but "own colonies with some 750,000,000 inhabitants."<sup>86</sup> For Du Bois, any UN which allowed Europeans to represent their colonial subjects would be illegitimate. Importantly, he also believed that colonial rivalry between European powers had been "a partial cause of endless wars in the past," situating his argument close to the Marxist analyses of Padmore and Ridley.<sup>87</sup> While this belief did not lead him to reject the proposed UN outright, he criticised plans

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 72-3.

<sup>84</sup> Du Bois to Harcourt, Brace, 20 November 1944 and W.E.B. Du Bois to Viking Press, 17 January 1945, in *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois: Volume III: Selections, 1944-63*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst, MA, 1978), 25 & 29.

<sup>85</sup> The UN was formally established in October 1945 after a founding conference in San Francisco in April-June 1945.

<sup>86</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (New York, 1945), 100.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 101. Padmore and Ridley would likely only have disputed the word "partial."

for “a peace based on force” and said that peace must instead be based on “consent and agreement.”<sup>88</sup>

Du Bois was pitting himself against the likes of Smuts, who advocated white “trusteeship” in Africa. Mark Mazower, in his study of the intellectual origins of the UN, has highlighted the ambiguity of many of the organisation’s foundational charters and declarations. While many see the UN as a force for anti-colonialism, Mazower has asked what to make of Smuts’s involvement in drafting the UN’s preamble, noting that almost no one in attendance felt any awkwardness with this.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the UN was seen by many, including Smuts, as a vehicle to defend empire. Mazower notes that at the San Francisco Conference of April-June 1945, which led to formation of the UN, the “Americans sat on the Philippines delegation when it tried to get a commitment to independence written into the Charter; an Ecuadorian proposal to allow a vote by two-thirds of the UN members to lead a colony to independence was also squashed.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, Du Bois did not offer the only anti-imperialist critique of the UN at this time. Von Eschen has noted that with “the imminent independence of India and the promise of new Asian and African states in the near future, the possibility of winning political and economic rights through international strategies looked very hopeful in this period.”<sup>91</sup>

For Du Bois, the most important element of a meaningful postwar peace was a global break from colonialism. He concluded *Color and Democracy* with his recommendations for the structure of the UN. He argued for the UN Assembly to be composed of representatives of both

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>89</sup> Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 19-20.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>91</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 70.

independent and colonial nations, for a Mandates Commission to be established to investigate conditions in the colonies, and for

a clear statement of the intentions of each imperial power to take, gradually but definitely, all measures designed to raise the peoples of colonies to a condition of complete political and economic equality with the peoples of the master nations, and eventually either to incorporate them into the polity of the master nations or to allow them to become independent free peoples.<sup>92</sup>

This final recommendation was extremely gradualist compared to the simultaneous metropolitan and colonial revolution suggested by Padmore. Du Bois's insistence on self-determination leading to either complete independence or incorporation into a larger polity bears some resemblance to Padmore's ideas about the socialist transformation of the British Commonwealth, but this similarity is limited. Padmore believed that free unions between nations were impossible under capitalism.<sup>93</sup> Du Bois, conversely, in a passage aimed at Western leaders, said that there was "still a chance for the capitalist nations to set their houses in order, and to show that neither Socialism nor its extreme, Communism, is necessary for human happiness and progress."<sup>94</sup> This may have been a tactical gambit from Du Bois, and his subsequent involvement with the Pan-African Congress suggests that he thought a socialist transformation from below to have a greater chance of success. Padmore employed similar tactics when writing for a Western elite audience, as can be seen partially in *The White Man's Duty* and most explicitly *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, discussed below. But Du Bois's proposals are also symptomatic of his gradual transition to socialism; Mullen has commented on

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<sup>92</sup> Du Bois, *Color and Democracy*, 140-1.

<sup>93</sup> Padmore, *How Russia*, 59.

<sup>94</sup> Du Bois, *Color and Democracy*, 120.

what he calls Du Bois's "staggered and incomplete understandings of Marxism."<sup>95</sup> Du Bois eschewed what he considered to be the uniform models of dogmatic Marxism.

Padmore did not share the belief that colonialism could be neatly removed from capitalism, like a pit from an olive, keeping in place the humane elements of the global system while removing the unsavoury ones. Lenin, in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), had argued that under capitalism "surplus capital will never be utilised for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists; it will be used for the purpose of increasing those profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries."<sup>96</sup> Following this logic, Padmore could see no hope for the type of reconciliation envisaged by Du Bois.

Incidentally, Du Bois offered much praise for the Soviet transformation of society in language similar to Padmore's, citing the huge increase in literacy and Soviet industrial efficiency. However, Du Bois did not ascribe this transformation to "Marxian Communism" but rather to "racial tolerance," which had created "an extraordinary unity of effort and enthusiasm for its ideal."<sup>97</sup> It was this emphasis on racial tolerance rather than Marxism that allowed him to hold hope for the capitalist powers to reform themselves along anti-colonial lines. Of course, Padmore would not dispute that the Soviet Union's racial tolerance was a key element of its success, but would disagree that this tolerance could be disentangled from communism. In *Socialism and War*, referenced with reverence in *How Russia Transformed*, Lenin and Zinoviev had argued that the "economic basis of opportunism and social-chauvinism is the same: the

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<sup>95</sup> Mullen, *Un-American*, 11.

<sup>96</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917; London, 1996), 62.

<sup>97</sup> Du Bois, *Color and Democracy*, 115-17.

interests of an insignificant layer of privileged workers and petty bourgeoisie who are defending their privileged positions, their 'right' to the crumbs of profits which 'their' national bourgeoisie receives from robbing other nations."<sup>98</sup> To Padmore, then, even if racial tolerance was the primary objective, revolutionary socialism was a *sine qua non* of this. Du Bois would eventually reach similar conclusions. In his 1961 application to join the CPUSA, Du Bois acknowledged that during his earlier radicalisation he had believed that socialism could be reached through different means, including a Scandinavian-style mixed economy, but had now reached the conclusion: "Capitalism cannot reform itself; it is doomed to self-destruction."<sup>99</sup>

After attending the San Francisco Conference, Du Bois became more disillusioned about the progressive potential of the UN. He planned to add a chapter to *Color and Democracy* that would argue that "while the San Francisco Conference took steps to prevent further wars in certain emergencies they did not go nearly far enough in facing realistically the greatest potential cause of war, the colonial system."<sup>100</sup> Anderson has detailed how Du Bois continued to devote much of his energy to lobbying the UN after 1945, despite being warned about the "impotence" of the organisation by colleagues such as Rayford Logan.<sup>101</sup> Padmore, never having placed much faith in the UN to begin with, bluntly stated in *How Russia Transformed* that "the fundamental economic and political conflicts between the British and American capitalists

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<sup>98</sup> Zinoviev and Lenin, *Socialism and War*, 19-20.

<sup>99</sup> Du Bois to Gus Hall, 1 October 1961, in *Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois: Volume III*, 440.

<sup>100</sup> Du Bois to Hamilton Fish Armstrong, 9 July 1945, in *Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois: Volume III*, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*, 94-5.

on the one hand, and between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union on the other, broke into the open at San Francisco.”<sup>102</sup>

It was in this context that the 1945 Pan-African Congress was held. A memorandum to the UN reaffirmed the demand, made by Du Bois in *Color and Democracy*, that Africans should be represented at the UN, but this approach was generally eschewed throughout the congress.<sup>103</sup> Instead, the congress focused on the self-organisation, particularly through labour organisations, of Africans and people of African descent. A Subject People’s Conference had been held in London earlier in 1945, while at the same time there were movements among France’s black subjects to transform the French Empire into a multinational federation. The Pan-African Congress, organised by Padmore and with Du Bois as its figurehead, was part of this global mood of colonial transformation. Solidarity was expressed with liberation struggles in India, Indonesia and Vietnam, and Peter Abrahams underlined the significance of the Subject Peoples’ Conference by saying it had contributed to “the closer establishment of fraternal contacts between the African and Asiatic liberation movements.”<sup>104</sup>

It is necessary to interrogate what “pan-Africanism” means in this context. While Padmore continuously identified as a pan-Africanist after his break from the Comintern in the mid-1930s and until his death in 1959, in *How Russia Transformed* he advocated a socialist federation based on the territories of the British Empire, encompassing regions of not only Africa, but also Europe and Asia - there was no overt advocacy of “pan-Africanism.” This has prompted Leslie James to observe that it is “perhaps the book where Padmore ‘the anti-

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<sup>102</sup> Padmore, *How Russia*, 175.

<sup>103</sup> Padmore, *Colonial and... Coloured Unity*, 57-9.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

imperialist' is most clearly evident."<sup>105</sup> The 1945 congress demanded the complete independence and federation of West Africa, self-government and federation in the British West Indies and racial equality in South Africa, with an eye to the eventual "Socialist United States of Africa."<sup>106</sup> Unlike in *How Russia Transformed*, the role of the European proletariat was barely discussed at the congress. The idea that self-determination might lead to a voluntary federation with a socialist former metropole was absent from the resolutions. But although the Soviet Union was mentioned infrequently at the congress, it was spoken about positively by delegates, who praised Soviet policies regarding the formerly colonised peoples. F.O.B. Blaize of the West African Students' Union, while not explicitly advocating a Soviet-style commonwealth, stated that "Britain left to herself without the resources of the Colonies would not live six months. We have seen the remarkable rise of the Soviet Union. This can be done for the Colonies, and we demand that it shall be done."<sup>107</sup>

Duncan Bell, in his study of the national-racial idea of "Greater Britain" which emerged in the nineteenth century, observes that the "history of modern political thought is partly the history of the attempt to confront increasing global interdependence and competition."<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have charted the spread of "whiteness" as a "transnational form of racial identification" which began in the nineteenth century, also observing that this led

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<sup>105</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 109.

<sup>106</sup> Padmore, *Colonial and... Coloured Unity*, 61.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>108</sup> Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton, 2007), 1.

to “transnational expressions of counter solidarity.”<sup>109</sup> We can see from the writings of Padmore and Du Bois, as well as the resolutions of the Pan-African Congress, the ways in which black radicals also attempted to confront the increasing global interdependence and competition cited by Bell, in a process which, as suggested by Lake and Reynolds, began to gather steam around 1900. With global white supremacy forged during the nineteenth century, people of colour responded with their own transnational identities and movements in the twentieth century.

As we have seen, there were innumerable ideas within pan-Africanist and socialist circles about just what the postwar order should be. But what all of these proposals have in common are materialist and practical strategies of liberation, with the ultimate goal of world federation or, at least, peaceful cooperation between continental federations. The solidarity expressed at the 1945 congress to Asian liberation struggles demonstrates that there is no neat distinction between the pan-Africanism of the congress and the more encompassing anti-colonialism of *How Russia Transformed*. Similarly, Nico Slate has observed how for Du Bois, “the race’ meant not just African Americans but ‘negroes’ and other colored people throughout the world” as part of a global solidarity.<sup>110</sup> For Padmore’s comrades, pan-Africanism was a vehicle through which the new world could begin to take shape, a natural first step based on a shared culture, history and economic position.

*How Russia Transformed* may appear to be a deviation from pan-Africanism in that it advocated a postcolonial socialist commonwealth rather than African political unity. Yet *How*

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<sup>109</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Inequality* (Cambridge, 2008), 2 & 245.

<sup>110</sup> Nico Slate, *The Prism of Race: W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, and the Colored World of Cedric Dover* (New York, 2014), 35.



*Russia Transformed* was consistent with Padmore's internationalist, socialist and anti-imperialist philosophies; these were the most important functions of pan-Africanism to Padmore. His methodology was flexible, and, for a few years in the 1940s, influenced by a materialist analysis of a world in turmoil, he espoused the socialist transformation of European empires as the means through which socialism and colonial liberation could be achieved in Africa. His continued focus on the agency and futures of all African peoples displayed an unbroken pan-Africanist spirit. Any prescriptive definition of "pan-Africanism" which reduces it to a project of African political unification, rather than a broader project of liberation which can be pursued through varied methods, is therefore inadequate.

### **Cold War endings**

This moment of postwar expectation was brief; the idea that the world could be reorganised into a single bloc with a lasting peace did not survive the early years of the Cold War. Hakim Adi, writing about the 1945 Pan-African Congress, has observed that Padmore was "influenced by prevailing political conditions," and felt the "near euphoria and great expectations of the victory over Fascism in 1945."<sup>111</sup> This euphoria was followed by the failure to achieve socialist revolution in Europe, desperate attempts to maintain hegemony by the colonial powers, and the fragmentation, repression and demoralisation of the Left that occurred as a result of the Cold War. Leslie James has argued that before the Cold War, Padmore had clung to the prospect of a metropolitan political revolution. When this revolution was not forthcoming, there was a

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<sup>111</sup> Hakim Adi, "George Padmore and the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress," in Baptiste and Lewis, *George Padmore*, 66-96, at 89.

strategic realignment to place less emphasis on the European proletariat.<sup>112</sup> The cracks were beginning to show as early as the Congress of the Peoples of Europe, Asia and Africa in Puteaux in 1948. Anne-Isabelle Richard has highlighted the “limits of solidarity” between the congress’s European socialist delegates (including representatives of the ILP) and the colonial delegates.<sup>113</sup> With most of the European delegates hoping to steer a course between the US and the USSR, colonial delegates instead looked upon Europe as the main perpetrator of colonial oppression and believed alliances with the Soviet Union and even the US to be more attractive than a continued relationship with a European labour movement which held the paternalistic views espoused by the likes of Ridley.<sup>114</sup> The prospects of a British socialist commonwealth seemed increasingly remote.

Even this moment was short-lived. In the 1950s, the Cold War entrenched geopolitical power struggles between East and West, strengthening the hands of colonial leaders and making non-alignment a more attractive prospect for Padmore. The new mood reached its apogee with the Bandung Conference of 1955, the spirit of which permeates Padmore’s 1956 book *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*. Padmore’s historical analysis of the Russian Revolution had not changed in this time. He still upheld the validity of Lenin’s colonial policy, stating that during the Russian Civil War the “reactionaries failed largely because Lenin’s bold anti-colonial strategy paid such rich dividends.”<sup>115</sup> However, while he maintained that the Soviet Union had

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<sup>112</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 123.

<sup>113</sup> Anne-Isabelle Richard, “The limits of solidarity: Europeanism, anti-colonialism and socialism at the Congress of the Peoples of Europe, Asia and Africa in Puteaux, 1948,” *European Review of History*, 21/4 (2014), 519-537.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

<sup>115</sup> Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 292.

eliminated racism within its borders, he argued that Communist Party members in Britain and the US had retained their “racial prejudices,” and in doing so “destroyed much of the Negro’s instinctive sympathy for Russia.”<sup>116</sup> Instead of advocating that the British Empire transform into a Soviet-style commonwealth, he now advocated an independent and united Africa which would remain neutral in the conflict between Western capitalism and Soviet communism. Padmore stated that pan-Africanist leaders like his mentee Kwame Nkrumah, who led Ghana to independence the following year, would not threaten Western powers as long as they were left independent to build their own brand of African socialism. Padmore was aware of Western fears of national liberation movements falling under Soviet influence. With a new strategy to achieve African independence and little prospect of significant aid from European socialists, the plans for a socialist British commonwealth were completely abandoned.

### **Conclusion: Marxist Pan-Africanism and the Socialist Commonwealth**

Padmore wrote the preface to *How Russia Transformed* in June 1945, a month after bombs and bullets ceased scarring Europe’s cities, bodies and psyches, as four great powers occupied Germany in an uneasy but greatly appreciated peace, and as the great and the good gathered in San Francisco to discuss what shape the new world would take. Following two world wars in three decades, it was clear that any reconstitution would need to take place on a global scale, and Padmore used this opportunity to set out his vision for the postwar order. He believed that the solution did not lie simply in appealing to diplomats and politicians, but in creating mass labour and colonial liberation movements. Padmore reminded his audience that the “Soviet

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 314.

Union is no utopia; it is a new civilisation in the making.”<sup>117</sup> He maintained that the positive aspects of this civilisation, most notably its anti-colonialism and economic development, had been achieved through the organisation of workers and peasants.

A crucial element of Padmore’s proposed postwar reconstitution was therefore the transformation of the British Empire into a socialist commonwealth based on the model provided by the Soviet Union. This proposal can be understood through the lens of Padmore’s Marxist pan-Africanism. As a pan-Africanist, Padmore’s primary concern was the liberation of Africa and its diaspora peoples. His Marxism shaped his definition of liberation and his ideas about how this could be achieved. His ideas of Africa’s “backwardness” sprang from a Marxist view of the stages of history, and Marxism also allowed him to see this “backwardness” as the product of imperialism. Developing Lenin’s ideas as contained in the national and colonial theses, Padmore believed in the mutual dependency of revolutions - that the European proletarian and colonial liberation movements could buoy each other as they both attacked the shared enemy of capitalist-imperialism. An alliance between a workers’ Britain and a workers’ and peasants’ Empire could then be formed as the first step towards world socialist federation. Modern audiences might consider this proposal fancifully optimistic and eccentric, but two hundred copies of *How Russia Transformed* were seized by customs in Nigeria, and British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin considered the book to be Soviet propaganda; the book was clearly considered to be dangerous and its manifesto far from impossible to achieve.<sup>118</sup> *How Russia Transformed* presents us with one route to a bold political horizon viewed by an optimistic internationalist Left in the postwar period - a vantage point which has since been obscured by the Cold War and its aftermath.

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<sup>117</sup> Padmore, *How Russia*, x.

<sup>118</sup> James, *George Padmore*, 104-5.