

# Framing Black Communist Labour Union Activism in the Atlantic World: James W. Ford and the Establishment of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1928–1931

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**ABSTRACT:** The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) was a radical trans-Atlantic network for the propagation of black proletarian internationalism, established by the Red International of Labour Unions in 1928. Its key mastermind was James W. Ford, an African American communist labour union activist who was in charge of the organization and its operations until the autumn of 1931. This article critically highlights Ford's ambitions as well as the early phase of the organization. Both in terms of its agenda and objective as well as in its outreach among black workers in the Black Atlantic, the ITUCNW and its main propagators stressed the "class-before-race" argument of the Comintern rather than the pan-Africanist "race-before-class" approach. This is not surprising as the ITUCNW was one of the organizations that had been established when the Comintern and the RILU had started to apply the "class-against-class" doctrine, which left no room for cooperation between communists and radical pan-Africanists.

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James W. Ford (1893–1957) was the first African American to run for a presidential ticket in the history of the USA. In the 1930s and early 1940s, he was the most prominent black communist and symbolized the efforts of the Communist Party (CPUSA) to build a united front between the black and the white working class. He is remembered for being the vice presidential candidate of the party's presidential nominees William Z. Foster in 1932 and Earl Browder in 1936 and 1940 as well as being the head of the so-called Negro Department of the Trade Union Unity League and organizer of the party's section in Harlem in the 1930s. Researchers who have written about his activities in the interwar period tend to highlight his national career

in the United States.<sup>1</sup> However, a neglected phase in Ford's life is his career as a trans-Atlantic radical, which took him to Moscow in 1928 and to Hamburg in 1930, where he headed the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) before he returned to the USA in 1932.

The ITUCNW belonged to a group of new committees and organizations that saw their light during the so-called Third Period (1928–1935), when the Communist (Third) International or Comintern inaugurated its new policy of “class-against-class”. This ultra-left turn also affected the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), which had been established by the Comintern in 1921. Starting in 1928, the RILU and communist labour union activists launched a broadside attack against socialist and social democratic trade union leaders, targeting them as “social fascist” betrayers of the workers and collaborators with capitalists. The goal of the confrontation was to replace the socialist/social democratic leadership of the labour unions or, if this turned out to be beyond reach, to formalize the existing so-called revolutionary opposition groups within the unions and to establish communist-led revolutionary trade unions.<sup>2</sup>

The “class-against-class” tactics were to be applied in full in those countries where communist parties existed and/or where communists were members of trade unions. While this was the case throughout Europe as well as in the Americas and in Asia, a different situation prevailed in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> Apart from South Africa, there hardly existed

1. See, for example, Mark Naison, “Historical Notes on Blacks and American Communism: The Harlem Experience”, *Science & Society*, 42:3 (1978), pp. 324–343; *idem*, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana, IL, [1983] 2005); Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York, 1984); Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917–1936* (Jackson, MS, 1998); Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at Its Grassroots, 1928–35* (Urbana and Chicago, IL, 2007); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (New York, 2008); Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012); Jacob A. Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* (Leiden, 2014). For short entries about Ford, see Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford, CA, 1986), p. 121; Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* (New York [etc.], 1986), pp. 135–136; Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (eds), *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (New York, 1999), p. 769; “James W. Ford”, in Walter T. Howard, *We Shall Be Free! Black Communist Protests in Seven Voices* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), pp. 57–74.

2. On the Third Period, see Matthew Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London and New York, 2004). On the RILU, see Reiner Tosstorff, *The Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) 1920–1937* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016).

3. Marika Sherwood, “The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920–1938”, *Science & Society*, 60:2 (1996), pp. 137–163; John Callaghan, “Storm Over Asia: Comintern

any African working-class movement in West, Central, or East African colonies.<sup>4</sup> In the Caribbean, in contrast, there existed some embryonic labour unions and associations.<sup>5</sup>

The early phase of the ITUCNW cannot be properly understood unless Ford's activities and ambitions are considered, and this will therefore be the objective of this article. Inspired by recent research on transnational actors as connectors and producers of diverse socio-spatial relations,<sup>6</sup> this article outlines Ford's "trans-Atlantic phase" and his engagement in the formation and establishment of the ITUCNW and its transnational activities and networks in the Atlantic world from 1928 to 1931 by making use of material filed in the Comintern Archives in Moscow.<sup>7</sup> Although most of Ford's correspondence when he was running the ITUCNW Secretariat in Hamburg is lost, reference to it is found in his reports to Moscow.<sup>8</sup> A critical evaluation of the material filed in Moscow therefore enables a reconstruction of his activities and demonstrates the outreach of his Atlantic network at the time when he handed over the Secretariat to George Padmore in October/November 1931. Previous studies on the ITUCNW have tended to emphasize its radical pan-African discourse and tend to downplay its position as an integral part of the RILU. In addition, most presentations focus on Padmore rather than Ford, and the latter is usually portrayed as the mastermind of the

Colonial Policy in the Third Period", in Worley, *In Search of Revolution*, pp. 18–37; Josephine Fowler, "From East to West and West to East: Ties of Solidarity in the Pan-Pacific Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, 1923–1934", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 66 (2004), pp. 99–117; Carolien Stolte, "Bringing Asia to the World: Indian Trade Unionism and the Long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–37", *Journal of Global History*, 7:2 (2012), pp. 257–278; Klaas Stutje, "To Maintain an Independent Course: Inter-war Indonesian Nationalism and International Communism on a Dutch-European Stage", *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies*, 39:3 (2015), pp. 204–220; Aruã Silva de Lima, "Comunismo contra o racismo: autodeterminação e vieses de integração de classe no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos (1919–1939)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of São Paulo, 2015).

4. See further P.C.W. Gutkind, R. Cohen, and J. Copans (eds), *African Labor History* (Beverly Hills, CA, 1978); Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's "Agitators": Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (London, 2008); Irina Filatova and Apollon Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era* (Johannesburg, 2013).

5. Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919–1939* (London, 2017).

6. Antje Dietze and Katja Naumann, "Revisiting Transnational Actors from a Spatial Perspective", *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 25:3–4 (2018), pp. 415–430.

7. The Comintern Archives are part of the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), filed as Fond/Delo/Opis.

8. See further Holger Weiss, "The Road to Moscow: On Archival Sources Concerning the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers in the Comintern Archive", *History in Africa*, 39 (2012), pp. 361–393; *idem*, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2014), pp. 14–28.

organization.<sup>9</sup> As will be highlighted in this article, the “class-against-class” policies as well as the “class-before-race” doctrine of the Comintern and the RILU rather than radical pan-African visions formed the framework for Ford’s attempt to reach out to the Black Atlantic.

Uneven power relations and geographies reflected the relationship between Moscow and the Black Atlantic during the interwar period.<sup>10</sup> Radical black workers and intellectuals in the Black Atlantic were disappointed by the unfulfilled promises of Wilsonian internationalism and the prospects for the self-determination of colonial people in 1919.<sup>11</sup> Inspired by the Bolshevik revolution, black intellectuals and workers turned to the communist alternative, the radical agenda of racial justice and equality and national independence.<sup>12</sup> However, the “race-first” perspective of black internationalism and radical political pan-Africanism was at odds with the “class-first” interpretations of revolutionary socialism, class struggle, and class-against-class of the Comintern and the communists.<sup>13</sup> Although the communists in American, British, and French labour unions tried to fuse red and black radical agendas, most black workers remained lukewarm to the communist call and most black “fellow travellers” turned their back on the communists during the latter half of the 1930s.<sup>14</sup> The turning point for the communist thrust into the Black Atlantic was the Italo-Ethiopian crisis in 1935, when the Comintern remained inactive and paved the way for black internationalism and political pan-Africanism.<sup>15</sup>

9. On the activities of the Comintern, RILU, and ITUCNW in the Black Atlantic, see Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011); Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton, NJ, 2013); Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*; and Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean*.

10. David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London, 2012).

11. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007).

12. Barbara Keys, “An African-American Worker in Stalin’s Soviet Union: Race and the Soviet Experiment in International Perspective”, *The Historian*, 71:1 (2009), pp. 31–54; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, p. 5; Joy Gleason Carew, “Translating Whose Vision? Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Paul Robeson and the Soviet Experiment”, *Intercultural Communication*, XXIII:2 (2014), pp. 1–16.

13. Roderick Bush, *The End of White World Supremacy: Black Internationalism and the Problem of the Color Line* (Philadelphia, PA, 2009), pp. 88–131; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, pp. 135–136.

14. Hakim Adi, “The Comintern and Black Workers in Britain and France 1919–37”, *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, 28:2–3 (2010), pp. 224–245.

15. Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919–1945* (London and New York, 1999); Joseph Fronczak, “Local People’s Global Politics: A Transnational History of the Hands Off Ethiopia Movement of 1935”, *Diplomatic History*, 39:2 (2015), pp. 245–274; Tom Buchanan, “The Dark Millions in the Colonies are Unavenged’:

Paraphrasing Robin Cohen's observations some forty years ago, a critical examination of the ITUCNW and its activities enables a reinterpretation of the class character of the nationalist, anticolonial struggles and the global outreach and impact of proletarian internationalism.<sup>16</sup> Both in the context of global labour history as well as in the history of interwar anticolonialism and communist trade union activities, the ITUCNW and its outreach in the Atlantic world during the first part of the 1930s is little known and thus adds a further dimension to how ideas of political activism and solidarity were transmitted transnationally.<sup>17</sup> Most notably, the ITUCNW was an attempt by the RILU and its leading propagandists to sensitize and radicalize black workers in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean and, ultimately, to promote a class-conscious proletarian solidarity and support the anticolonial aspirations of black urban and rural workers. The Comintern, and especially the Negro Bureau/Secretariat of the Eastern Secretariat, on the other hand, focused on matters concerning the radicalization and organization of black workers in the USA and in South Africa as well as on the anticolonial agenda and outreach of the Belgian, British, and French communist parties. Consequently, communist activities in the Atlantic world took a dual direction during the interwar period. While the Negro Bureau and its main propagandist, the African American communist Harry Haywood, focused on the "American Atlantic" by promoting the so-called Black Belt thesis, the ITUCNW and James Ford attempted to encompass a larger radical "African Atlantic". Together with various other political and intellectual networks, such as Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association

Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s", *Contemporary European History*, 25:4 (2016), pp. 645–665; Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970* (London, 2018); Holger Weiss, "Against Japanese and Italian Imperialism: The Anti-War Campaigns of Communist International Trade Union Organizations, 1931–1936", *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements*, 60 (2018), pp. 121–146. 16. Robin Cohen, "Michael Imoudu and the Nigerian Labour Movement", *Race & Class*, 18:4 (1977), pp. 345–362.

17. See further Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); *idem*, "African Labour History", in Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History: A State of the Art* (Bern, 2006); Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden, 2008); Joachim C. Häberlen, "Between Global Aspirations and Local Realities: The Global Dimensions of Interwar Communism", *Journal of Global History*, 7:3 (2012), pp. 415–437; Nicholas Alexander Bernards, "Actors and Entanglements in Global Governance: The ILO in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 2016); Andreas Eckert (ed.), *Global Histories of Work* (Berlin and Boston, MA, 2016); Fredrik Pettersson, "Imperialism and the Communist International", *Journal of Labor and Society*, 20:1 (2017), pp. 23–42; Bill Freund, "Sub-Saharan Africa", in Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Handbook Global History of Work* (Berlin and Boston, MA, 2017), pp. 63–82; Andreas Eckert, "Social Movements in Africa", in Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring (eds), *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey* (London, 2017), pp. 211–224.

(UNIA) and other pan-African movements, they formed the “Black Atlantic” of the interwar period.<sup>18</sup>

James W. Ford belonged to a group of black communists who sojourned in Moscow during the Third Period. Most of them were members of the CPUSA or the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and had been sent by the party to study in Moscow.<sup>19</sup> This was the case with African American communists Harry Haywood and William Lorenzo Patterson, among others. Others, such as Ford, the Trinidad-born CPUSA member George Padmore, as well as the Surinamese-born CPUSA member Otto Huiswoud had been members of party delegations to Moscow and thereafter been engaged at the Comintern and RILU headquarters. Haywood was the architect and propagator of the so-called Black Belt thesis: the Comintern’s support for African American self-determination in the US South; Patterson was a leading member of the International Labor Defence, the US section of the International Red Aid; both published autobiographies.<sup>20</sup>

18. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 144–145; Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London, 2018), pp. 61–88.

19. See further Woodford McClellan, “Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools, 1925–1934”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 26:2 (1993), pp. 371–390; John L. Garder, “African Americans in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s: The Development of Transcontinental Protest”, *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 23:3 (1999), pp. 190–201; Woodford McClellan, “Black Hajj to ‘Red Mecca’: Africans and Afro-Americans at KUTV, 1925–1938”, in Maxim Matusevich (ed.), *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters* (Trenton, NJ, 2007), pp. 61–83; Maxim Matusevich, “Black in the U.S.S.R.: Africans, African Americans, and the Soviet Society”, *Transition: An International Review*, 100:1 (2009), pp. 56–75; Maxim Matusevich, “‘Harlem Globe-Trotters’: Black Sojourners in Stalin’s Soviet Union”, in Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (ed.), *The Harlem Renaissance Revisited: Politics, Arts, and Letters* (Baltimore, MD, 2010), pp. 211–244.

20. William L. Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide: An Autobiography* (New York, 1971); Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, IL, 1978). See further Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, foreword by Robin D.G. Kelley (Chapel Hill, NC, [1984] 2000); Susan Campbell, “‘Black Bolsheviks’ and Recognition of African-America’s Right to Self-Determination by the Communist Party USA”, *Science & Society*, 58:4 (1994/1995), pp. 440–470; Charles H. Martin, “The International Labor Defense and Black America”, *Labor History*, 26:2 (1995), pp. 165–194; Oscar Berland, “The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the ‘Negro Question’ in America: 1919–1931. Part One”, *Science & Society*, 63:4 (1999–2000), pp. 411–432; Oscar Berland, “The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the ‘Negro Question’ in America: 1919–1931. Part Two”, *Science & Society*, 64:2 (2000), pp. 194–217; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights 1919–1950* (New York, 2008); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *A Black Communist in the Freedom Struggle: The Life of Harry Haywood* (Minneapolis, MN, and London, 2012); Beverly Tomek, “The Communist International and the Dilemma of the American ‘Negro Problem’: Limitations of the Black Belt Self-Determination Thesis”, *Journal of Labor and Society*, 15:4 (2012), pp. 549–576.

Huiswoud, in turn, was put in charge of the ITUCNW from 1934 until its liquidation in 1937.<sup>21</sup>

Padmore, on the other hand, is remembered as the leading propagator of radical political and anticolonial pan-Africanism from the 1930s to his death in Ghana in 1958.<sup>22</sup> However, Padmore was distinctively critical of pan-Africanism and voiced communist anticolonial rhetoric when he arrived in Moscow in late 1929. Together with Ford he orchestrated the reorganization of the ITUCNW in 1930.<sup>23</sup> Some accounts of the establishment of the ITUCNW and the communist push into the Black Atlantic in the early 1930s either credit Padmore as the key architect for the new policy or downplay Ford's role and activities.<sup>24</sup> In addition, studies of the ITUCNW tend to focus on the period when Padmore was running the operations of the organization from its headquarters in Hamburg and Paris from November 1932 to the autumn of 1933. Padmore claimed that the Comintern had liquidated the ITUCNW in August 1933, leading to a rift between him and the communists and eventually resulting in his expulsion from the CPUSA and the Comintern in spring 1934. Padmore, in turn, linked up with radical pan-Africanists and non-communist anticolonial activists in the African Atlantic, which set a pan-African rather than a communist blueprint for the liberation of the African and Caribbean colonies. Not surprisingly, therefore, the ITUCNW became part of the historiography of radical pan-Africanism rather than of the Comintern and RILU.<sup>25</sup>

21. Maria Gertrudis van Enckevort, "The Life and Work of Otto Huiswoud: Professional Revolutionary and Internationalist (1893–1961)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of the West Indies, Mona, 2000); Joyce Moore Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana and Chicago, IL, 2005); Maria van Enckevort, "Otto Huiswoud: Political Praxis and Anti-Imperialism", *St. Martin Studies*, 1–2 (2006), pp. 243–252.

22. James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (New York, 1967); Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke, 2015).

23. See further Holger Weiss, "Global Ambitions, Structural Constraints and Marginality as a Choice: The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers", in *idem* (ed.), *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Radical Networks, Mass Movements and Global Politics, 1919–1939* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 318–362.

24. This is the case of Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2009); Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, and Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean*.

25. See further Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2003); Andreas Eckert, "Bringing the 'Black Atlantic' into Global History: The Project of Pan-Africanism", in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds), *Competing Visions of World Order* (New York, 2007), pp. 237–257; Carol Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* (Manchester, 2009); Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*; Jerome Teelucksingh, *Ideology, Politics, and Radicalism of the Afro-Caribbean* (New York, 2016), pp. 69–90.

## THE PUSH OF THE RILU INTO THE BLACK ATLANTIC

The communists were the only political movement on the left in the 1920s and 1930s to place racial justice and equality at the top of their agenda. In contrast to the social democrats and the Second (Socialist) International, the rhetoric of the Comintern and the communists was essentially anti-imperial and anticolonial, calling for the national independence of the colonies and fully backing the struggle against capitalist and colonial exploitation. On the other hand, the agents of the anticolonial struggle in the African and Caribbean colonies were not workers but intellectuals. This was a dilemma for the communists; in their eyes, black intellectuals were but “petty-bourgeois anticolonial nationalists”.<sup>26</sup> Before 1928, Moscow’s tactical considerations included an alliance between the communists and the anticolonial nationalists. However, the “class-against-class” policies of the Comintern and the RILU called for a new approach to the radicalization of black workers throughout the Atlantic world. The key propagator of the new approach was James W. Ford.<sup>27</sup>

Ford’s sojourn in Moscow opened a new chapter in his own life as well as in communist engagement with black workers throughout the Atlantic world. The engagement of the RILU with the Black Atlantic had hitherto oscillated between non-existence (sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean) and, at most, a lukewarm attitude (USA and South Africa). For the RILU, its Fourth World Congress, which convened in Moscow in March–April 1928, marked the beginning of a new era in the approach towards the Black Atlantic. This was due mainly to the intervention of Ford at the congress. Ford highlighted the need for revolutionary work in Africa and criticized the RILU and its sections for underestimating, if not totally neglecting, work among the black workers throughout the Black Atlantic. However, his main attack was on the white chauvinism that existed among the working class. He charged the RILU to change its policy towards the so-called Negro Question: the suppression of the black population in the USA and South Africa and their struggle for political rights and self-determination.<sup>28</sup>

26. Edward T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa Before World War II* (New York, 1974); Heinz Deutschland, “Zu den Beziehungen zwischen der RGI und den sich formierenden Gewerkschaften in Tropisch-Afrika”, in Helmut Konrad (ed.), *Die internationale Gewerkschaftsbewegung zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen. Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung. 16. Linzer Konferenz 1980* (Vienna, 1982), pp. 138–147.

27. Ford’s key role in the establishment of the ITUCNW and the formation of its policies is highlighted in Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, and Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*.

28. James Ford, Life and activities, dated 20.4.1932, p. 6, RGASPI 495/261/6747, fo. 67 [hereafter, Ford, Life and activities (1932)]; “Antrag zur Organisierung der Neger”, in *Protokoll über den 4. Kongress der Roten Gewerkschafts-Internationale abgehalten in Moskau vom 17. März bis 3. April 1928* (Moscow, 1928), p. 479; James W. Ford, Negro Work in America, 11.5.1928, RGASPI 495/155/59, fos 1–14.



Ford repeated his criticism at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in August 1928, where he attacked the Comintern and the metropolitan communist parties for neglecting the plight of the oppressed masses in the Black Atlantic. Even worse, Ford claimed that neither the Comintern leadership, nor the metropolitan parties had fully understood the global importance of activating the oppressed masses throughout the Black Atlantic.<sup>29</sup>

Ford's criticism at the RILU World Congress started a process that culminated in the foundation of a new radical organization for black workers a few months later. Concurrent with the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, the Executive Committee of the RILU summoned a separate meeting in July 1928 and decided to establish the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU (ITUCNW). The objective of the ITUCNW was to reach out and agitate among black workers throughout the Black Atlantic so that they would join the labour unions. The goal was either to open the unions for black workers, or, if this was not possible due to racial discrimination and barriers within the unions, to establish independent black ("Negro") trade unions. Equally important was the establishment of a global network, i.e. "the work of setting up connections with the Negro workers of the whole world and the unification of the wide masses of Negro workers on the basis of class struggle".<sup>30</sup>

The ITUCNW was the "Negro Bureau" of the RILU and vehemently articulated a class-against-class rhetoric in its mouthpiece, *The Negro Worker* (Figure 1)<sup>31</sup> The leading figure of both the bureau in Moscow and the journal was James W. Ford. The first issue of *The Negro Worker* publicized the RILU resolution on the establishment of the ITUCNW, including the aims and tasks of the organization. The black workers were warned of the Amsterdam (Second or Socialist) International, "which adheres to a policy of collaboration with the capitalists' exploitation of the colonial and oppressed Negro toilers". Little help was to be received from socialist/social democratic ("reformist") unions, where black members either had to face white chauvinism and open racism or were forbidden to join at all. The RILU and its

29. Extract from Ford's speech at the Sixth Congress, published in the *International Press Correspondence*, 3 August 1928, reproduced in Philip S. Foner and James S. Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1919–1929* (Philadelphia, PA, 1987), p. 182.

30. Resolution of the Executive Bureau of the RILU on the Organisation of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 31.7.1928, RGASPI 534/3/359, fos 1–6; On the RILU International Bureau of Negro Workers, copy, no date [handwritten add: 1928], RGASPI 495/155/53, fo. 1. See further Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, p. 151; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, pp. 42–46; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 130–133.

31. See further Susan Campbell, "The Negro Worker: A Comintern Publication of 1928–37. An Introduction", available at: <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/negro-worker/index.htm>; last accessed 4 May 2019.

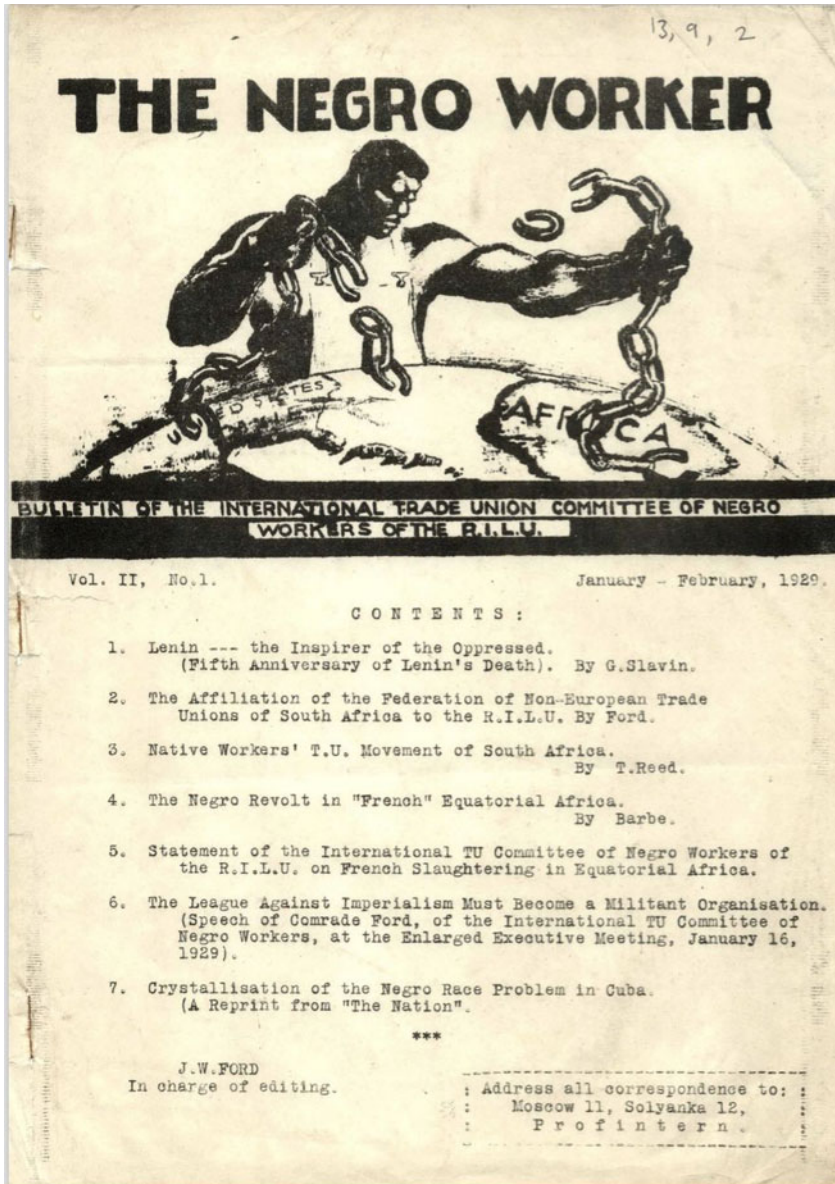


Figure 1 *The Negro Worker* – the mouthpiece of the radical Black Atlantic. James W. Ford edited the journal in Moscow in 1928–1929. George Padmore took over as editor when Ford returned to the USA in late 1929. In March 1931, the journal was merged with *The International Negro Workers' Review* and was published in Hamburg with Ford as editor-in-chief. Cover of *The Negro Worker*, January 1929.

*Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.*

sections, in contrast, were presented as colour blind: “The RILU includes in its ranks workers of all races. It takes steps to combat all forms of reformism and all white chauvinism”.<sup>32</sup>

However, the main enemy of the ITUCNW were the “Negro bourgeois leaders”, who were the traitors of the black workers. Branded as the “tools of the bourgeoisie imperialists”,<sup>33</sup> Marcus Garvey and “Garveyism” were singled out as promoting reactionary utopias among the black workers.<sup>34</sup> Padmore was very frank when he declared that “Negro reformism”, most notably Garveyism, was the biggest obstacle to sensitizing the class struggle among the black working class in the Black Atlantic: “Reformism among the Negroes has its social basis in certain sections of the Negro middle class and intelligentsia. [...] In the struggle between the imperialist ruling classes, and the oppressed Negro workers and peasants there can be no middle road, but only the road of class struggle”.<sup>35</sup>

Ford’s political vision was at this point a radical pan-African one as it embraced the total Black Atlantic. He underlined the fact that the ITUCNW supported the struggle of oppressed black workers against capitalist and colonial exploitation. Nevertheless, the objective of the ITUCNW was primarily to combine radical black trade union activism with international proletarian solidarity: “The struggle of the Negro workers for liberation is indissolubly bound up with the wider struggle of the international proletariat and the Negro workers must line up in the revolutionary class organisations the world over, by organising their forces for joint struggle”.<sup>36</sup> Echoing official Comintern anticolonial doctrine, Ford further pointed out that the ITUCNW propagated national independence and self-rule for the African and Caribbean colonies as well as the establishment of an independent “Native South African Republic” based upon workers’ and peasants’ organizations with full safeguards and equal rights for all national,

32. “Organisation of an International Negro Trade Union Committee by the R.I.L.U.”, *The Negro Worker [Bulletin of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the R.I.L.U.]*, 1:2 (August-September 1929), p. 1.

33. J. Reed, “Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the Negro Workers”, *The Negro Worker*, 2:5 (December 1929), pp. 1–2.

34. H. Haywood, “Forward to the London Conference of Negro Toilers”, *The Negro Worker*, 3:6 (April 1930), p. 3.

35. George Padmore, “Report & Resolution on the Economic Struggles and Task of Negro Workers”, *The Negro Worker* 3. *Special Number: The Hamburg Conference* (15 October 1930), p. 7.

36. International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU, A Trade Union Programme of Action for Negro Workers [no date], R1501/20441 Reichsministerium des Inneren KPD – Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsbewegung, Jan. 1932 – May 1932, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. Interestingly, the ITUCNW programme was published by another RILU affiliate, the International Propaganda and Action Committee of Transport Workers. According to Adi (*Pan-Africanism and Communism*, p. 89), Ford drafted the ITUCNW programme in early 1929.

including white, minorities and for the self-determination of the black population in the Black Belt of the US South. Finally, he called for full and complete political, economic, and social rights of “Negro subjects” in “Central American” countries.<sup>37</sup> However, whether his mental map also included Brazil and other Latin American countries is unclear.

Ford’s initial plan for work among black industrial and agricultural workers in the Black Atlantic rested heavily on the cooperation of the communist parties and the backing of the Comintern. However, “Negro work” had been neglected and ignored by the communist parties during the 1920s. Although the Comintern had issued special theses on the “Negro Question” in 1922 and 1924, work among the black proletariat played a marginal role at best before 1928. This was to change at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, where “Negro work” in the USA and South Africa was put on the agenda of a special Negro Commission, which listed, among others, Harry Haywood and James Ford as its members. The Negro Commission is best remembered for its policy documents on the “Negro Question”, especially the fierce debate concerning Haywood’s Black Belt thesis, which Ford and most other black delegates initially rejected.<sup>38</sup> After months of drafting the “Resolution on the Negro Question in the USA”, the Black Belt thesis was finally accepted by the Comintern in late October 1928.<sup>39</sup> In addition, to strengthen the capacity of monitoring and supervising “Negro work”, the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) established a special Negro Bureau (in September 1929 renamed the Negro Secretariat) at the Eastern Secretariat in December 1928.<sup>40</sup>

However, Ford’s main concern in 1928 was future cooperation between the ITUCNW and the communist parties, and he sent a proposal for guidelines to the Negro Commission to be presented at the Comintern Congress. According to his plan, special colonial and “Negro” sections and/or trade union centres were to be set up by the British, French, Portuguese, South

37. [James W.] Ford, “The Negro Question. Report to the 2nd World Congress of the League Against Imperialism”, *The Negro Worker*, 2:4 (August 1929), pp. 8–9; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, pp. 62–63.

38. Meeting of Negro Commission, 2-4.8.1928, RGASPI 495/155/56, fos 46–53, 54–55 [Ford’s statement], 82–93, 102 [Ford’s second statement]. According to Ford, the whole issue of whether the “Negro masses” in the USA were an “oppressed nation or race” was an academic one.

39. Resolution on the Negro Question in the USA of the Political Secretariat, final draft, 26.10.1928, RGASPI 495/155/51.

40. Draft Resolution on the Organisation of a Negro Bureau attached to the Eastern Secretariat, 22.11.1928, RGASPI 495/155/56, fos 6–7; Auszug aus dem Protokoll Nr 18 der Sitzung des Politsekretariats des EKKI, 10.12.1928, RGASPI 495/155/48, fo. 5. During the autumn of 1928, there were also plans to establish a Negro Bureau of the Peasants’ International or Krestintern; see Protokoll der Sitzung der Kommission der Krestintern für die Arbeit unter den Negern, 2.8.1928, RGASPI 495/155/56, fos 39–40. Both Ford and Haywood attended the preparatory meeting at the Krestintern, but no further details are known about the existence of such a bureau.

African, and US American Party and were to be organized through RILU adherents such as the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). The immediate task of the ITUCNW, on the other hand, was to make preparations for a World Conference of Negro Workers in 1929.<sup>41</sup> Already in his critique of Haywood's Black Belt thesis, Ford called for specific measures rather than theoretical discussions for future work among the black proletariat – what specific steps were to be taken to get black workers into the party, to create a mass organization, and to eliminate race chauvinism within the party?<sup>42</sup> While his critical comments in 1928 were initially directed at the CPUSA, the same quest became his trademark when he embarked on building up the ITUCNW.

#### FORD, THE LEAGUE AGAINST IMPERIALISM, AND THE “NEGRO TRADE UNION CONFERENCE”

Lacking contacts in any part of the African Atlantic other than the USA, one of the first tasks of the two Negro units in Moscow was to establish close links with the communist parties and anticolonial groups, especially the League Against Imperialism, in the colonial metropolises. The League Against Imperialism (LAI) had been established as an outcome of the First Anti-Colonial Congress in Brussels in February 1927. Although the LAI had been established as a non-partisan platform to rally radical bourgeois and left-wing critical intellectuals, anticolonial activists, and organizations, its core group – and most influential – was its “communist faction”, led by the German communist Willi Münzenberg. Due to the class-against-class tactics adopted in Moscow in 1928, the LAI's “United Front” approach had become obsolete. If Moscow had remained in the background before 1928 by only indirectly trying to influence the tactics and strategies of the LAI, a new approach was taken in 1929. Its culmination was the clash between the hard-line Moscow delegation and the socialist and “reformist-nationalist bourgeois” delegates at the Second Conference of the LAI at Frankfurt and the ultimate purge of the latter ones from the LAI.<sup>43</sup>

Much of Ford's engagement during the first half of 1929 concerned the revitalization of the anti-imperialist struggle of the League Against Imperialism and the reorientation of anticolonial work of the Belgian, British, and French parties according to “class-against-class” tactics and in

41. Ford, Resolution on Trade Union Work among Negroes for the Negro Commission of the 6th Congress of the CI, 21.8.1929, RGASPI 495/155/53, fo. 2. See further Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, pp. 70–76, 90–91, and Weiss, *Framing an African Atlantic*, pp. 114–130.

42. Statement by Ford at Negro Commission, 3.8.1928, RGASPI 495/155/56, fos 54–55.

43. See further Fredrik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (Lewiston, ID, 2013); *idem*, “Imperialism and the Communist International”, *Journal of Labor and Society*, 20:1 (2017), pp. 23–42.

line with the Colonial Theses of the Comintern. Already at the meeting of the LAI Executive Committee in Cologne, Ford had criticized the LAI for having failed to emerge as a mass organization and to support the anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggle in the world. Above all, the LAI was warned against flirting with various black organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the United Negro Improvement Association, the Pan-African Congress, and African American intellectuals. As the League was dominated by “reformists”, the task of the communists was to mobilize workers and farmers.<sup>44</sup>

By mid-March 1929, even the ECCI started to call for a critical assessment of the colonial work of the metropolitan parties and a special Colonial Commission under Robin Page Arnott was established by the Eastern Secretariat. The task of Arnott’s commission was to organize a colonial conference to critically discuss the colonial work of the Western European parties. Members of the Negro Bureau, including Haywood and Ford, were commissioned by Arnott to produce material on Africa for the conference.<sup>45</sup> The first plan was to organize a closed-door conference in Berlin in May 1929, but it had twice to be postponed and eventually never materialized. Instead, the colonial work of the metropolitan parties was discussed at the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI, which commenced in July 1929. A few days later, the Second World Congress of the LAI convened in Frankfurt am Main.<sup>46</sup>

The Second World Congress of the LAI was a turning point in Ford’s engagement in the Negro Bureau. Work with the projected ITUCNW congress had to be postponed due to his other tasks in Moscow, and he was able only to edit and publish *The Negro Worker* at monthly intervals as well as to publish a call to black workers to join the rallies on the International Day of Struggle Against Imperialist War on 1 August.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, when he left for Frankfurt, his plan was to focus on the ITUCNW’s activities and he had therefore been in contact with Sabin Ducadosse, a communist trade union activist in Guadeloupe, and Otto Huiswoud on pushing into the Caribbean.<sup>48</sup> The key idea was to organize an “informal conference” in

44. Speech of Comrade Ford at the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism, Cologne, Germany, 16 January 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450, fos 39–41; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 154–155.

45. Memo on Negro Work for Month of May, 3.5.1929, RGASPI 495/155/74, fo. 17; Minutes of meeting of Negro Bureau, 6.5.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fo. 14.

46. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 156–160. See further Fredrik Petersson, “The ‘Colonial Conference’ and Dilemma of the Comintern’s Colonial Work, 1928–29”, in Vijay Prashad (ed.), *Communist Histories. Volume 1* (New Delhi, 2016), pp. 72–127.

47. ITUCNW, Appeal to Negro Toilers to Join the International Struggle Against Imperialist War, no date [1929], RGASPI 495/155/76, fos 5–7.

48. Chairman International T.U. Committee of the Negro Workers [Ford] to Comrade Ducadosse, Moscow 31.3.1929, RGASPI 534/6/39, fo. 3; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, p. 138.

connection with the LAI Congress.<sup>49</sup> In Frankfurt, he joined with the West African radical and trade union organizer Garan Kouyaté, whom he had met six months earlier in Paris. Münzenberg recognized the two black delegates as key figures for the global anticolonial movement as they delivered militant anti-imperialist speeches. Their main argument was that all past rebellions in Africa against European rule were but a “prelude” to the clashes to come and called for the complete national independence for all colonies in West Africa (Figure 2).<sup>50</sup>

The LAI Congress provided Ford an opportunity to gather the black delegates for a shadow conference. Termed the “First Negro Trade Union Conference”, the group held a meeting on 25 July, and on the next day the “Second Negro Trade Union Conference” convened. Ford’s main agenda for the conference was to discuss Moscow’s plans for a projected “World Conference of Negro Workers”. As an outcome of the discussions, London was selected as the site for the conference and a Provisional Committee was elected with Ford as its chairman. Typically for communist smoke-screening tactics, the Provisional Committee was officially referred to as the Provisional International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, or the “Provisional ITUCNW”, indicating that the ITUCNW did not yet exist.<sup>51</sup>

Ford returned to Moscow after the Frankfurt Congress and started preparations for the forthcoming world conference. The members of the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat, including Ford, Haywood, and Patterson, devoted their time to criticizing the French and British parties for inactivity and a lukewarm attitude towards “Negro work”.<sup>52</sup> Haywood, especially, was highly critical of the weak performance of the communists on both sides of the Atlantic – while the CPUSA had so far failed in fighting white chauvinism within the party and did not pay any

49. G.B[jittelman] to Ford, Moscow 7.6.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fo. 28.

50. “Speech of Comrade Kouyaté (of French West Africa) at the Congress of the League against Imperialism”, and Comrade Ford, “Report to the Second World Congress of the LAI”, both published in *The Negro Worker*, II:4 (August 1929). A summary of Ford’s speech was printed in the *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz*, 66 (1929), p. 1546. Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté (1902–1942) was born in Segou in French Sudan and had worked as a schoolteacher in the Ivory Coast during the early 1920s. In 1923, he moved to France for further education. In 1927, he founded the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre, an anticolonial organization funded by the communists. Kouyaté was a member of the French Communist Party. See further P. Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France, 1919–1939* (Paris, 1985).

51. Ford, Report on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, RGASPI 534/3/450, fo. 51; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, pp. 156–157; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, p. 94; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 162–169.

52. Negro work of the French party (no author), 30.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fos 51–56; Minutes of Meeting of Negro Section of Eastern Secretariat, 4.10.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fo. 27; Proposals for the Negro work of the French Party, 7.10.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fos 57–58; Work of the CPGB in the Negro Colonies (no author), 21.11.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fo. 59.



Figure 2 Two black radicals in Frankfurt: James W. Ford (left), Willi Münzenberg (middle), and Garan Kouyaté (right) at the 1929 Second LAI Congress.

*Adolf Ebri*, *Der Weltbolschewismus. Ein internationales Gemeinschaftswerk über die bolschewistische Wählerarbeit und die Umsturzversuche der Komintern in allen Ländern* (Berlin, 1936).

attention to the black workers (and, subsequently, was one of the reasons for Ford's transfer back to the USA), the French and British parties had no connections to Africa at all.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, the Negro Section was not in charge of organizing the "World Conference of Negro Workers". The division of work in Moscow is evident from late 1929/early 1930: whereas the Negro Section continued to address (and criticize) the work of the communist parties, the ITUCNW was to focus on the "internationalization of the Negro Problem" and to articulate the conditions of the "Negro working class" as part of the global struggle against capitalist and colonial exploitation.<sup>54</sup> Ford travelled to the USA in November 1929 and George Padmore, who arrived in Moscow in late 1929, took over Ford's position at the RILU Negro Bureau.<sup>55</sup> This move must be interpreted as a strategic one, namely to "neutralize" the Provisional ITUCNW in the eyes of the colonial

53. Harry Haywood, *The Work of the Comintern among Negroes*, 24.10.1929, RGASPI 495/155/77, fos 187–192. See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 186–192.

54. William Wilson [aka William L. Patterson], *Some significant features of the coming Negro worker's conference*, 20.1.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fos 28–31.

55. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, pp. 157–158; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, p. 102.



governments by locating the official headquarters of the organization in New York.<sup>56</sup>

Officially, Ford's main mission in the USA was to build up the "Negro Department" of the TUUL. Not surprisingly, there was not much time left for the preparations for the forthcoming world conference.<sup>57</sup> The main problem, he explained, was that he had not received any information about how preparations were proceeding in London. He had tried several times to get in touch with comrades in Britain, but with little success. Even worse, as he had no information from London, he could not send any directives to the delegates.<sup>58</sup>

#### HAMBURG AND THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION COMMITTEE OF NEGRO WORKERS

Ford's original plan had been to organize the "World Conference of Negro Workers" in London.<sup>59</sup> However, due to the rather cryptic response from the British government, i.e. not an outright rejection but neither an acceptance, Hamburg was chosen as the new venue for the conference.<sup>60</sup> In addition to Ford and Padmore, approximately seventeen participants from the USA, the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>61</sup> gathered in early July 1930 at the premises of the International Seaman's Club at 8, Rothesoodstrasse, close to the Hamburg harbour. This was also the site of the Port Bureau of the International Propaganda and Action Committee of Transport Workers, which together with the West European Bureau of the Comintern in Berlin had been taking care of the practical organization of the conference.<sup>62</sup>

56. Ford to Slavin, New York, 23.12.1929, RGASPI 534/3/450, fos 89–90; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 196–197.

57. Ford, Life and activities (1932), p. 7, RGASPI 495/261/6747, fo. 68.

58. Ford, Report on the Preparations for the London Conference, 12.5.1930, RGASPI 534/3/546, fos 55–58. The report was enclosed in a lengthy letter from him to Slavin, dated 14.5.1930. This letter is filed in RGASPI 534/7/491, fo. 136.

59. "An Appeal to Negro Workers of the World", *The Negro Worker*, 3:1 (1930), p. 1.

60. Minutes of Meeting of the Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU, 29.5.1930, RGASPI 495/155/63, fo. 96. See further Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, pp. 107–110; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 229–239.

61. The actual number of participants is somewhat mysterious, if not confusing. According to the report Ford had prepared in July 1930, there were nineteen delegates and three fraternal delegates. See Ford, The international conference of Negro workers, 29.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 246. Most authors, on the other hand, follow the "official" version of seventeen delegates as stated in the published account of the Hamburg Conference.

62. Internationales Hafengebäude der Seefahrer Hamburg, Monatsbericht August 1930, RGASPI 534/5/216, fos 67–69; Protokoll des WEB Nr 77, 11.4.1930, Nr 79, 14.4.1930, Nr 105, 7.7.1930, all filed in RGASPI 499/1/17; [ITUCNW,] *Report of Proceedings and Decisions of the First International Conference of Negro Workers* (Hamburg, 1930), p. 40; Weiss, *Framing*

The Hamburg Conference resulted in the official establishment of the ITUCNW. The most notable outcome of the Hamburg Conference was the reorganization of work at the RILU headquarters. As the ITUCNW was to be presented as a “new” organization, the unit in Moscow was renamed the Negro Bureau of the RILU (and claimed to have existed since 1928), with George Padmore in charge of the unit. The (new) RILU Negro Bureau, not the ITUCNW, was to be the “ideological leader of the international work among the Negro masses for stimulating the trade union work”; its geographical outreach was the total Black Atlantic, including the USA and Latin America, and it was to be composed of representatives from the USA, South Africa, West Africa, and the Caribbean. (These objectives were never realized.)<sup>63</sup> The objective of the ITUCNW, in turn, was to assist and organize black workers’ and peasants’ organizations and to connect them with the RILU and the Krestintern.<sup>64</sup> The consequence of the reorganization was a hierarchical relationship between the two organizations, with the ITUCNW being subordinate to the RILU Negro Bureau. The ITUCNW was to publish its own journal, whereas *The Negro Worker* remained the official organ of the RILU Negro Bureau.<sup>65</sup>

The headquarters of the ITUCNW, in turn, were moved to Hamburg. Ford was nominated as its secretary and moved to Hamburg in November 1930. The main task of the ITUCNW, or Hamburg Committee as it was referred to in Moscow, was to establish and maintain contact with trade union organizations in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean and to coordinate their activities. Of equal importance was the objective to stimulate the organization of trade unions in the African Atlantic where none existed. Its official organ was *The International Negro Workers’ Review*. Like the RILU Negro Bureau’s mouthpiece, the ITUCNW journal was to denounce the “reactionary principles of Negro bourgeois nationalism” and black trade union reformism in the USA and in South Africa as well as that of the Amsterdam International and the International Labour Office.<sup>66</sup> The specified guidelines in January 1931 dictated further that the new organization was to comply with the “class-before-race” approach of the Comintern

*a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 240–246. The preparations in Germany are not discussed in Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*.

63. ECCI, Resolution on Negro work, 30.8.1930, RGASPI 495/18/810, fo. 75.

64. ECCI, On the Organisation of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 5.9.1930, RGASPI 495/18/810, fo. 77. See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 286–288. The two resolutions of the ECCI are not discussed in Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*.

65. “Statement to our readers”, *The Negro Worker: Special Number on the Fifth Congress of the R.I.L.U.* (1 November 1930), p. 1.

66. “Tasks of the ITUCNW”, *The Negro Worker 3. Special Number: The Hamburg Conference* (15 October 1930), p. 17; ECCI, The organisation and functions of the International Trade Union Committee of Negroes in Hamburg, 16.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fos 432–433.

and RILU: “No initiation or affiliation fees shall be collected by the Committee from the different organisations that will come into relations with it as this might create the impression that the ITUC of NW is a Black International conducted on racial lines and not based on the class struggle”.<sup>67</sup>

Initially, and in contrast to the guidelines of January 1931, Ford’s ambition seems to have been to engage the ITUCNW in the agitation and propaganda work among black workers in the USA and Latin America.<sup>68</sup> However, these ideas were heavily criticized in Moscow, not least by Padmore, who reminded him that the ITUCNW was not allowed to engage or interfere in American labour union affairs, as this was the duty of the TUUL and the Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana.<sup>69</sup> What followed was a lengthy debate in Moscow at the RILU headquarters about the geographical outreach of the ITUCNW. In October 1931, the ECCI finally intervened and decided that the activities of the ITUCNW were to be limited to the British, French, Belgian, Dutch, and Portuguese colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, i.e. the “African Atlantic”.<sup>70</sup> Already in spring 1931, the RILU Negro Bureau had decided to stop the publication of its journal and thus to camouflage its links to the African Atlantic. Instead, the ITUCNW journal was renamed *The Negro Worker* and became the sole vehicle for communist agitation and propaganda. The ITUCNW, Padmore highlighted, was to promote the programme of “militant class struggle”.<sup>71</sup>

Equally fundamental was the verbal onslaught on black bourgeois intellectuals and leaders. When Padmore replaced Ford as secretary for the Hamburg Committee in November 1931, the objectives of the ITUCNW remained unchanged, namely to promote the class struggle and organization of black workers in Africa and the Caribbean as well as to fight against “white chauvinism, social-reformism and the reformist programmes of Negro capitalist misleaders” in the USA, South Africa, and the Caribbean.<sup>72</sup> The task of the ITUCNW was to expose and denounce the “Negro reformists”, underlined Otto Huiswoud, who had replaced Padmore at the RILU Negro

67. Resolution of the Organisation and Functions of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 24.1.1931, RGASPI 495/155/96, fos 10–13.

68. “Our Aims”, *The International Negro Workers’ Review*, 1:1 (January 1931), p. 1.

69. Padmore to Ford, 13.2.1931 and 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fo. 57 and fo. 60.

70. Protokoll Nr 187 der Sitzung der Politischen Kommission des Pol. Sekr am 13.10.1931, RGASPI 495/4/145, fos 1–2. See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 292–298. The debates in Moscow concerning the outreach of the ITUCNW are not discussed by Adi Makalani argues that the ITUCNW had been a product of “(t)he black radical vision of a diasporic international” and that black communists, including Ford and Padmore, saw the ITUCNW as a means to build a black international (*In the Cause of Freedom*, pp. 163 and 173).

71. G[eorge] P[admore], “Editor’s Note”, *The Negro Worker*, 1:8 (August 1931).

72. “What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers?”, *The Negro Worker*, 1:10–11 (October–November 1931), p. 45.

Bureau,<sup>73</sup> denouncing them for joining the imperialists and white capitalists “in their attempt to suppress the revolts of the Negro masses”, particularly in West Africa, Belgian Congo, South Africa, and on Haiti.<sup>74</sup>

#### FORD IN HAMBURG, NOVEMBER 1930 TO SEPTEMBER 1931

The RILU never envisioned the Hamburg Committee establishing itself as an independent actor in the African Atlantic. Instead, it was to be supervised by the European Secretariat of the RILU and adhere to instructions prepared in Moscow by the RILU Secretariat, the RILU Negro Bureau, or the ECCI. In addition, the Hamburg Committee was to closely cooperate with the Secretariat of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) and the International Secretariat of the LAI.<sup>75</sup>

Initially, the cooperation with the LAI was given top priority in Moscow. Sub-Saharan Africa had been a blank spot for the LAI and the organization had few direct links to the continent. Ford's activities in 1929 had engaged Garan Kouyaté and the Kenyan Johnstone Kamau (Jomo Kenyatta) in the LAI. One year later a promising opening for work in West Africa occurred. Most of the delegates at the Hamburg Conference had travelled to Moscow, where they attended the Fifth World Congress of the RILU in August 1930. On their return, the West African delegates Edward Francis Small from The Gambia and Frank Macaulay from Nigeria as well as the Berlin-resident Cameroonian Joseph Bilé and Garan Kouyaté stopped over in Berlin, where they were invited for a meeting at the LAI International Secretariat in October 1930.<sup>76</sup> However, much to the dismay of LAI Secretary Bohumir Smeral, the outcome of the discussions was conflicting. Although the West Africans were in favour of the anticolonial approach of the LAI, Bilé and Small criticized the “class-before-race” perception of the African American communists (Ford and Padmore) they had met in Moscow, arguing that racial oppression could not be subsumed into class oppression.<sup>77</sup> Most disappointing, however, was the refusal of the West Africans to sign

73. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 298–299.

74. O.E. Huiswoud, “The Economic Crisis and the Negro Workers”, *The Negro Worker*, 2:4 (April 1932), pp. 25–27.

75. Plan of Work and Immediate Tasks of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers at Hamburg, undated and no author, RGASPI 534/3/668, fos 6–7. On Ford's cooperation with the ISH, see further Holger Weiss, “‘Vereinigt in der internationalen Solidarität!’ Der Aufruf der Internationale der Seeleute und Hafentarbeiter an die ‘Kolonial’- und ‘Neger’-Seeleute in den frühen 1930er-Jahren”, *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung* 2019 (Berlin, 2019), pp. 15–34.

76. Smeral, Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.II.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fos 78–81.

77. Beitrag II. Zweite Sitzung am 15. Oktober [1930], RGASPI 542/1/40, fos 85–86.

the LAI outline for future anti-imperialist struggle in West Africa, and the West African ambitions of the LAI ended in a cul-de-sac.<sup>78</sup>

Still, the LAI International Secretariat continued to push for an African agenda and produced an outline for its future activities in December 1930.<sup>79</sup> Initially, the reaction at the Comintern headquarters was positive.<sup>80</sup> Soon, however, the plan was deemed by the Comintern officials to be unrealistic. An internal memorandum highlighted the negative attitude of the West Africans at the Berlin meeting as the major weakness of the LAI approach: if it were ever published, the West Africans would never circulate it locally.<sup>81</sup> A new attempt to revitalize the African agenda of the LAI was made during the first half of 1931, when the LAI International Secretariat supported the cocoa hold-up in the Gold Coast,<sup>82</sup> and sent Ford to attend the African Children Congress in Geneva in June 1931. Africa was still on the LAI's agenda at a meeting of the LAI Executive Committee in Berlin. Kouyaté delivered a report on the anti-imperialist movement and its development in the French colonies; Ford made a presentation about the situation of and potential for work among black workers in the African Atlantic. Both called for concrete and active engagement of the LAI in the African Atlantic.<sup>83</sup> However, much to the dismay of the two black radicals, the Executive Committee made only a vague declaration in the form of a resolution about the "Growing Anti-Imperialist Revolt of the Colonial Masses". The text itself no longer made any reference to LAI activities in Africa.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, Ford's main task was to create a global network for the ITUCNW. As the ITUCNW had not been projected to emerge as a membership organization of black trade union groups or movements confined

78. The Anti-Imperialist Struggle of West African People, RGASPI 495/64/166, fos 76–78. See further Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, pp. 341–343; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 271–276.

79. The Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the West African People, 6.12.1930, RGASPI 495/64/166, fos 76–78.

80. Protokoll Nr 107 der Sitzung der Politischen Kommission des Pol. Sekr. des EKKI, 23.12.1930, RGASPI 495/4/75, fos 1–6.

81. Proposals Relative to Activities of Anti-Imperialist League in West Africa, 15.2.1931, RGASPI 495/64/166, fos 79–80.

82. Proposals Relative to Activities of Anti-Imperialist League in West Africa, 15.2.1931, RGASPI 542/1/47, fos 10–11.

83. Protocol of the LAI Executive Meeting, Berlin 31.5.1931, RGASPI 542/1/48, fo. 204; Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fo. 81.

84. The Colonies and Oppressed Nations in the Struggle for Freedom: Resolutions adopted by the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence, Berlin, 2.6.1931, RGASPI 542/1/49, fo. 217. See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 398–403; Fredrik Petersson, "Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement: The League against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 16:1 (2014), pp. 49–71. The fate of the (West) African ambitions of the LAI is not discussed by Adi.

to sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, Ford's sole objective was to establish a network through which he could get in touch and communicate with radicals throughout the African Atlantic and to edit, publish, and distribute its mouthpiece, *The Negro Worker*. A critical examination of the existing correspondence and reports Ford sent to the RILU Negro Bureau refutes Makalani's claim that "there is no evidence that Ford made any contacts in Africa or the Caribbean".<sup>85</sup> Instead, both Hakim Adi and I highlight Ford's key role in establishing the trans-Atlantic connections of the ITUCNW.

Ford's earliest associates were Garan Kouyaté, Jomo Kenyatta, and the South African labour union activist Albert Nzula. All of them had been prevented from participating at the Hamburg Conference and only Kouyaté managed to attend the 1930 RILU Congress in Moscow. In June 1931, Kouyaté stayed in Hamburg for two weeks, assisted Ford in his agitation and propaganda work among black seamen, and delivered a report on work among colonial seamen in France. Not surprisingly, the ISH leadership recognized him as a promising functionary and decided to send him to reorganize the Marseilles Interclub.<sup>86</sup>

Ford's links to the West Africans whom he met in Hamburg and Moscow in 1930 turned out to be more problematic. After he had relocated to Hamburg in November 1930, Ford was initially in contact with Macaulay and Small as well as the Sierra Leonean trade union activists Ernest Alfonso Richards and Ernest Foster Jones. Macaulay, whom Ford believed had returned to Lagos, turned out to reside in London, where he had organized a "Welfare Association" in Liverpool.<sup>87</sup> Soon, however, he lost contact with Macaulay and neither Ford nor Padmore had any clues about his whereabouts.<sup>88</sup> Ford's attempts to contact Small were even less fruitful. Although Small was listed among the associated editors of *The Negro Worker*, neither Ford, nor Padmore were ever able to reconnect with him. Initially, Ford had asked Small to organize a West African subcommittee of the ITUCNW, but he never received a reply from him.<sup>89</sup> By April 1932, Padmore regarded the Small connection as lost.<sup>90</sup>

Ford's two connections to Sierra Leone were at first more promising. Richards, who was a leader of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers' Union,

85. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, p. 173.

86. NN [probably Adolf Shelley] to Pechmann [head of the RILU European Bureau in Berlin], Vorschläge zur organisatorischen Arbeit der ISH, Hamburg, 13.6.1931, 534/5/221, fos 155–161, RGASPI.

87. Ford to Padmore, Hamburg 7.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fo. 52; Ford, ITUCNW January 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fo. 96.

88. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 523–529.

89. Ford, ITUCNW January 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fos 95, 97.

90. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 496–498.

had been in contact with the LAI and the RILU already in 1927.<sup>91</sup> Ford managed to correspond with Richards, who informed him that he was going to organize a rally to report about the Hamburg Conference. Soon, however, Richards ran into trouble with the colonial government, which strictly prohibited any mail being passed between Richards and the Hamburg Committee. Communication slowed down but was never cut. Instead, the clandestine communication networks of the ISH via the black seamen Ford had organized in Hamburg were used to disseminate the publications of the ITUCNW in Sierra Leone. Ford's, and later Padmore's, most trusted emissary was Foster Jones, a seaman from Freetown, who – probably – opened Ford's connections with the Kroomen's or United Seamen's Club in Freetown. In his September 1931 Report, Ford was positive about the prospects to link the Club and its branches in West Africa to the ITUCNW. He even believed that the Club in Freetown could be reorganized as an International Seamen's Club under the ISH. However, these plans, too, never materialized. In April 1932, Padmore had to admit that the Sierra Leone connection was defunct.<sup>92</sup>

Similar setbacks characterized Ford's connections with the Gold Coast. While he managed to correspond with J.A. Akrong and T.S. Morton, the two delegates at the Hamburg Conference, it turned out that their capacity to radicalize their local trade unions in Accra, the Drivers' Association and the Carpenters' Association, were minimal due to police persecution and internal restrictions on their activities.<sup>93</sup> Whereas it proved more or less impossible for the ITUCNW to instigate trade union agitation, Ford was rather successful in disseminating *The Negro Worker* through legal or illegal individual contacts on the Gold Coast.<sup>94</sup>

Ford's most promising contact in sub-Saharan Africa was his South African connection. The key person was Albert Nzula, who headed the African Federation of Trade Unions and organized the South African subcommittee of the ITUCNW. Padmore instructed Ford to inform Nzula that the subcommittee should refrain from working in the South African Union but to focus on agitation in the British and Portuguese colonies in Southern and Eastern Africa.<sup>95</sup> In August 1931, Nzula arrived in Moscow and enrolled at the International Lenin School.

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–99. The Sierra Leone Railway Workers' Union became an affiliated member of the RILU in 1928.

92. (Ford), Report on the Work of International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (Hamburg), Covering the Period from December 1930 to September 1931, 8.10.1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fo. 234 [hereafter (Ford), ITUCNW Report 1930–1931]; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 498–504.

93. (Ford), ITUCNW Report 1930–1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fo. 229.

94. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 507–510.

95. Padmore to Ford, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fo. 60.

Ford's connections to individuals in the Caribbean and Latin America are more difficult to reconstruct as the correspondence is missing from the Comintern Archives. His initial contact persons were Sabin Ducadosse in Guadeloupe and Henry Rosemond in Haiti. Huiswoud's tours in the Caribbean in 1929 and 1930 must have added some further contacts, among others to the British Guyana Labour Union. Although Ford at one time lamented that he had no good contacts in the West Indies, he established contacts with activists in British Guyana, Panama, and even Brazil. Several contact persons existed in British Honduras, Panama, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and in the British and French Caribbean colonies who enabled the local dissemination of *The Negro Worker*. Nevertheless, as Adi highlights, the Hamburg Committee's work in the Caribbean was curtailed by the fact that Latin America, Haiti, and the Spanish-speaking islands were under the jurisdiction of the RILU unit Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana, established in 1929, and its Caribbean subcommittee in New York. Also, it is likely that to a large extent the Caribbean contacts were managed by Otto Huiswoud, who had moved to Moscow in late 1930.<sup>96</sup> Finally, Ford managed to establish contact with local black communities and organizations in Britain, such as the black seamen's associations headed by Chris Jones in Liverpool and Harry O'Connell in Cardiff, as well as the Negro Welfare Association headed by Arnold Ward in London.<sup>97</sup>

#### EXIT FORD

The change in the functions and tasks of the ITUCNW by the ECCI in October 1931 resulted in a change of personnel in both Hamburg and Moscow. In Hamburg, George Padmore replaced James Ford as secretary of the Hamburg Committee in November 1931. Back in Moscow, Otto Huiswoud was put in charge of the RILU Negro Bureau. Ford, on the other hand, relocated to Moscow in September 1931,<sup>98</sup> remained there and

96. See further Adi, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, pp. 296–310. Margaret Stevens (*Red International and Black Caribbean*) rightly underlines the crucial role of the CPUSA and communist organizations in the USA for the radicalization among black workers in the Caribbean, although her assumption regarding the part played by the ITUCNW is problematic. A main challenge for future research is to unearth Otto Huiswoud's original correspondence in his personal file in the Comintern Archives; I was able to get a glimpse of it, but I have so far been denied access to it.

97. See further Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, pp. 259–261; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 463–464.

98. Ford had been in Moscow since at least 28 September, when he and Padmore participated at the meeting of the Political Commission of the ECCI. See Protokoll Nr. 118 der Sitzung des Politsekretariats EKKI, 28.9.1931, RGASPI 495/3/271, fo. 1.



worked at the RILU headquarters before he eventually returned to the USA in spring 1932.

The reshuffling of persons in autumn 1931 has led to a great variation in explanations for what had happened. Some researchers have interpreted Ford's disappearance from Hamburg as a sign of him falling in disgrace in Moscow and that he had been dismissed from his post,<sup>99</sup> others that he had been assigned back to the USA.<sup>100</sup> That said, the following sequences are known. Ford participated at the Second Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the ISH that convened in Hamburg from 10 to 12 September 1931 and presented an overview on the colonial work – clearly an indication that at this point he was not an ostracized comrade.<sup>101</sup>

Padmore arrived at the ITUCNW office in Hamburg in the middle of the ISH-led strike among German seamen in October 1931. Conditions at Rothesoodstrasse were chaotic as the police raided the premises daily. When Padmore finally entered the office of the Hamburg Committee, he found it to be in a total mess.<sup>102</sup> His description of the chaotic situation at the ITUCNW office has led some researchers to draw the conclusion that this was much because of Ford's failure to get things properly done – and could have been a reason for his dismissal. However, a close analysis of Padmore's letter reveals the contrary. Padmore did find the office "in a perfect mess", but this was mainly a result of the daily police raids. To his surprise, however, he discovered that Ford had not distributed the September issue of *The Negro Worker* – probably as it had arrived from the printer after Ford had left Hamburg – and that there were some 2,000 copies of the *Open Letter to Guiana* and 2,500 copies of the proceedings of the 1930 Hamburg Conference lying around. Padmore's description of the conditions in the office is more an expression of surprise about the actual state of affairs than an accusation of Ford's inability or shortcomings.<sup>103</sup>

From the above discussion, the assumption that Ford had been dismissed or recalled to Moscow due to his shortcomings in Hamburg is dubious. That said, Ford remained in Moscow until early February 1932. Back in the USA, he resumed his position as head of the Negro Department of the TUUL. The reason for sending Ford to the USA was obvious: the "Negro work" of the CPUSA and the TUUL had been neglected and was malfunctioning.<sup>104</sup> It is

99. For example, van Enckevort, "The Life and Work of Otto Huiswoud", p. 105.

100. Moore Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders*, p. 195. Harry Haywood even argued in his autobiography (*Black Bolshevik*, p. 380) that Ford was called back to the USA.

101. Zweite Plenartagung der Exekutive der ISH, 10–12.9.1931, RGASPI 534/5/224, fos 55, 140–153.

102. Padmore to "Dear Comrades", 16.11.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fo. 120r.

103. *Ibid.*

104. See Harry Haywood, Head of TUUL Negro Department to George Padmore, New York, 8.5.1931, RGASPI 534/7/496, fo. 24.

likely that Ford's return to the USA was a combined effort by the RILU, the Comintern, as well as the CPUSA to reorganize "Negro work" in the USA. Perhaps the leading comrades in Moscow regarded Ford as best suited to reorganize the activities of the Negro Department of the TUUL and he was therefore more needed in the USA than in Hamburg. Another possible reason for his return to the USA was that the CPUSA was planning to replace the more independent-minded black leaders of the party, such as Cyril Briggs and Richard B. Moore, with the more "orthodox" Ford as he was a staunch supporter of the official class-against-class policy of the Comintern.<sup>105</sup> In May 1932, he was nominated as a candidate for Vice President in the upcoming presidential election in the USA, running together with William Z. Foster on the CPUSA's presidential ticket. This event, at least officially, brought Ford back into the spotlight in the USA. Ford remained linked to the ITUCNW after his return to the USA as he was listed among the contributing editors of *The Negro Worker* from 1932 onwards. However, Ford's connections with the ITUCNW were symbolic rather than effective and he did not contribute any texts to the journal. Instead, he was busy in party activities in the USA, not least in organizing and running the CPUSA section in Harlem.

#### POSTSCRIPT: TOWARDS A BLACK INTERNATIONAL?

The interwar period witnessed a radicalization of the Black Atlantic, not least through the establishment of various anti-racial, anticolonial, and anti-imperialist organizations. Pan-Africanist historiography tends to include the ITUCNW among the radical pan-Africanist organizations that saw their light during this period. However, as this article has outlined, it is far-fetched to define the ITUCNW as a pan-Africanist organization. Instead, the Red International of Labour Unions had established the ITUCNW as an organization to counteract the influence of existing pan-African organizations. Both its agenda and objective as well as in its outreach to the black workers in the Black Atlantic, the ITUCNW and its main propagators James W. Ford and George Padmore stressed the "class-before-race" of the Comintern rather than the pan-Africanist "race-before-class" approach. This is not surprising as the ITUCNW was one of the organizations that had been established when the Comintern and the RILU had started to apply the "class-against-class" doctrine, which left no room for cooperation between communists and radical pan-Africanists.

Starting with the Nazi takeover and the crushing of communist organizations and structures in Germany in 1933, the political changes in Europe

105. See further Naison, *Communists in Harlem*; Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*; Moore Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders*.

promoted a re-evaluation of the uncompromising stands of the communists towards the social democrats and paved the way for experimenting with the popular front between left-wing and liberal bourgeois parties in France and Spain in 1934. Officially, however, Comintern policy had not changed and the CPUSA followed the directives of Moscow. Finally, at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in August–September 1935, the class-against-class policy was scrapped and replaced by the popular front tactics.

The ITUCNW was directly affected by the changes in tactics in Moscow. Padmore, who had moved the ITUCNW headquarters from Hamburg to Paris in March 1933, wanted to scrap the class-against-class approach and apply his version of a “united front” approach. He started to cooperate with black activists and, together with Garan Kouyaté, planned to call for a “Negro World Unity Congress” and the formation of a universal organization “destined to direct the future of the Negro movement in all countries”, i.e. a Black International.<sup>106</sup> However, the plan did not receive any backing in Moscow. Instead, Padmore was accused of sidestepping official policies and replaced by Otto Huiswoud as secretary of the ITUCNW in spring 1934. He was finally expelled from the CPUSA and the Comintern in March 1934, accused by the International Control Commission of having defied Moscow’s order as well as of undermining the “class unity of Negro toilers”.<sup>107</sup>

In the United States, the old policy was to remain as the official guidelines throughout 1934. The denunciation of so-called nationalist tendencies within the Harlem section of the CPUSA reached its climax during the Eighth National Convention in April 1934. In his keynote speech, Harry Haywood, the head of the CPUSA Negro Department, declared the struggle against black nationalism a major priority and condemned any rapprochement with “Negro reformists”.<sup>108</sup> Padmore, in turn, was publicly discredited by black communists in the USA for being a renegade and having sided with the enemies of the black working class.<sup>109</sup> Ford was among them and authored a pamphlet where he denounced him.<sup>110</sup> Huiswoud, too, attacked Padmore for having betrayed the black working class.<sup>111</sup> Padmore, in turn, accused his former comrades of being “Little Red Uncle Toms” and

106. See further Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, pp. 269, 275–282.

107. Statement of the International Control Commission, 20.3.1934, RGASPI 495/261/4718, fo. 3. See further Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, pp. 155–161; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 589–610.

108. Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, pp. 108–109.

109. *Ibid.*

110. James W. Ford, *World Problems of the Negro People: A Refutation of George Padmore* (New York, n.d. [1934]).

111. [Otto Huiswoud,] “A Betrayer of the Negro Liberation Struggle”, *The Negro Worker*, IV:3 (1934), pp. 6–10.

condemned the Comintern and the Soviet Union for having sold out the workers in the African Atlantic.<sup>112</sup>

However, the cause of the ITUCNW and communist engagement in the African Atlantic received a decisive blow in 1935. Padmore's radical political pan-Africanist approach was to triumph over the inability of Huiswoud and the Comintern to launch a global campaign against Italian imperialism in Ethiopia.<sup>113</sup> Ford, who participated at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern, had, together with other black delegates, called for the establishment of a new platform, termed the International Negro Liberation Committee. In accordance with the new Popular Front policies of the Comintern, the black delegates envisioned a kind of "broad united people's front among the Negro people".<sup>114</sup> In their mind, the ITUCNW had lost its role in the African Atlantic. Nevertheless, the plan was rejected by the Comintern. Huiswoud, in turn, wanted to transform the ITUCNW into a Black International, but this plan, too, was scrapped.<sup>115</sup> Ford made a final appeal for the communist agenda for black self-determination and national independence when he published his speeches and presentation as ITUCNW secretary as well as leader of the CPUSA section in Harlem in 1936.<sup>116</sup> All in vain. By 1936, the ITUCNW barely existed and it was quietly dissolved by the ECCI in 1937.

While Padmore in his post-1933 publications and equally the Comintern in its assessment in 1937 downplayed the role and impact of the ITUCNW,<sup>117</sup> Ford made an attempt in 1947 to underline the positive legacy of the organization and his role as principal organizer of the 1930 Hamburg Conference. In his view, the ITUCNW had played a vital role in the struggles by Africans and people of African descent to establish trade unions and to support their anticolonial fight in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Trade unions of white workers never raised the question of African workers", he claimed, and further stressed that "(t)he adherents of the Amsterdam International (IFTU) similarly ignored the problems of African labor [...] The International Trade Union Conference of Negro Workers performed a memorable task. It stimulated trade union organization in countries of Africa. It prepared Negro workers for the struggle against

112. George Padmore, Open letter to Earl Browder, no date [c. 1934], RGASPI 495/155/102, fos 123–125.

113. See further Weiss, "Against Japanese and Italian Imperialism".

114. (Declaration,) The International Negro Liberation Committee, no author, no date [c. 1935], RGASPI 495/155/102, fos 25–26.

115. See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 698–699.

116. See James W. Ford, *The Communists and the Struggle for Negro Liberation* (New York, 1936)

117. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism: The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London, 1956).

Nazism and fascism”.<sup>118</sup> Not a word about Padmore and the impact of radical political pan-Africanism. Instead, Ford regarded the World Federation of Trade Unions, established in 1945, to be the new champion of international proletarian solidarity and of the right of self-determination for colonial and dependent peoples. However, at this point Ford was no longer engaged in the radicalization of the workers and colonial subjects in the African Atlantic. Stalin had quietly dissolved the Comintern in 1943 and had no blueprint for a Soviet anticolonial policy. The major nexus for anticolonial resistance was Padmore, who organized the Sixth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in September 1945. The Manchester Congress rather than the Hamburg Conference was to become the starting point for the fight for national independence by the African colonies. Many former members and associates of the ITUCNW participated at the congress apart from two: James W. Ford and Otto Huiswoud.

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS  
FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Holger Weiss. *En définissant l'activisme du syndicalisme communiste noir dans le monde atlantique: James W. Ford et la fondation du Comité syndical international des travailleurs noirs, 1928–1931.*

Le Comité Syndical International des Travailleurs Noirs (ITUCNW) fut un réseau transatlantique pour la propagation de l'internationalisme prolétarien noir, créé par l'Internationale Syndicale Rouge (RILU) en 1928. Son principal cerveau fut James W. Ford, activiste syndical communiste afro-américain qui fut chargé de l'organisation et de ses activités jusqu'à l'automne 1931. Cet article examine dans une perspective critique les ambitions de Ford et la phase précoce de cette organisation. Tant en ce qui concerne son ordre du jour et son objectif que son champ d'action parmi les travailleurs noirs dans l'Atlantique noir, l'ITUCNW et ses principaux propagateurs prônèrent l'argument de la «classe-avant-la-race» du Comintern plutôt que l'approche panafricaine de la «race-avant-la-classe». Cela n'est pas étonnant, car l'ITUCNW fut l'une des organisations qui avait été créée lorsque le Comintern et la RILU avaient commencé à appliquer la doctrine de la «classe-avant-la-classe», qui ne laissait aucune place à la collaboration entre les communistes et les panafricains radicaux.

Traduction: *Christine Plard*

Holger Weiss. *Der Kontext des schwarzen kommunistischen Gewerkschaftsaktivismus in der atlantischen Welt: James W. Ford und die Gründung des International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1928–1931.*

118. James W. Ford, “The Vital Problem of the Right of Trade Unions in Countries of Africa”, *The Journal of Negro Education*, 16:2 (1947), pp. 251–256, quotation from p. 255.

Das International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (»Internationale Gewerkschaftskomitee schwarzer Arbeiter«, ITUCNW) war ein radikales transatlantisches Netzwerk für die Propagierung eines schwarzen proletarischen Internationalismus, 1928 gegründet von der Red International of Labor Unions (»Roten Internationale der Gewerkschaften«, RILU). Der zentrale Vordenker war James W. Ford, ein afroamerikanischer kommunistischer Gewerkschaftsaktivist, der die Organisation und ihre Unternehmungen bis zum Herbst 1931 leitete. Der Beitrag ist eine kritische Untersuchung sowohl von Fords Bestrebungen als auch der Frühphase der Organisation. Hinsichtlich sowohl ihrer Agenda und Ziele als auch ihrer an schwarze Arbeiter im »schwarzen Atlantik« gerichteten Öffentlichkeitsarbeit betonten das ITUCNW und seine wichtigsten Exponenten eher das »Klasse-vor-Rasse«-Argument der Komintern als den panafrikanischen »Rasse-vor-Klasse«-Ansatz. Das überrascht nicht, denn das ITUCNW war eine der Organisationen, die gegründet wurden, als die Komintern und die RILU mit der Umsetzung der »Klasse-gegen-Klasse«-Doktrin begonnen hatten, was keinen Spielraum für die Zusammenarbeit von Kommunisten und radikalen Panafrikanisten ließ.

Übersetzung: *Max Henninger*

Holger Weiss. *Aproximación al activismo sindical comunista de los trabajadores negros en el mundo atlántico: James W. Ford y el establecimiento del Comité Internacional de Sindicatos de Trabajadores Negros, 1928–1931.*

El Comité Internacional de Sindicatos de Trabajadores Negros (International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers-ITUCNW) fue una red sindical transnacional que tenía por objeto la difusión del internacionalismo proletario entre los trabajadores negros. Se estableció en 1928 impulsado por la Internacional Roja de Sindicatos. Su líder más importante fue James W. Ford, un activista sindical comunista afroamericano que se encargó de esta organización y de sus operaciones hasta el otoño de 1931. En este artículo se presta atención desde una perspectiva crítica tanto a las ambiciones de Ford como a las primeras fases de la organización. Ya sea en términos de planificación como de objetivos, al que igual que respecto al compromiso a alcanzar entre los trabajadores negros en el Atlántico Negro, la ITUCNW y sus principales propagandistas hicieron más hincapié en el argumento de “la clase antes que la raza”, planteado por la Comintern, que en la aproximación pan-africanista de “la raza antes que la clase”. Esto no resulta sorprendente dado que la ITUCNW fue una de las organizaciones que se habían establecido en el momento en que la Comintern y la Internacional Roja de Sindicatos comenzaron a desplegar la doctrina de “clase contra clase” que no dejaba espacio alguno para la cooperación entre los comunistas y los pan-africanistas radicales.

Traducción: *Vicent Sanz Rozalén*