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Other Songs of Liberty
A Critique of "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook"

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DEBATES/DÉBATS

Other Songs of Liberty:

A Critique of "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook"

Robert Sweeny

Mother Country

(. . .)

He looked for work
but somehow it was always gone
from his Brixton bed
walk in circles from break of dawn,
wondering where oh where in this city
he touched the hand of his mother country
thinking soon,
very soon now she must find me.

They let him sweep all the floors he could sweep for them
there was no cane
in their land he could cut for them,
and sometimes when he was weary
they look at him and called him lazy
four hundred years,
was not enough time to make them see.

David Campbell
Through Arawak Eyes
(Toronto: DEC 1975)

INSIGHTFUL, INCISIVE, ALMOST breathtaking in its breadth of vision and seeming command of the material, the recent article by Peter Linebaugh in *L/LT*, 10 is history written on the grand scale. A skillful blend of theory, fact, and literature, the article, preceded as it was by the typical fare of English Canadian labour historiography, appeared all the more impressive. It is clearly the product of an exceptional historian dedicated to a critical study of the past

Robert Sweeny, "Other Songs of Liberty: A Critique of 'All the Atlantic Mountains Shook,' " with a reply by Peter Linebaugh, *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), 161-81

in order to better understand how to transform the present. It is a most laudable aim, one which I share. Shared aims do not however necessarily mean either shared method or analysis. Indeed, I think "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook" is both wrong and dangerous. These are harsh words, not often used in the polite discourse of academic debate. I have chosen to use them precisely because this is not an academic debate, but a political one. The epistemological, and to a lesser degree, methodological debates that have taken such a prominent place in progressive historical reviews over the past half dozen years, are fundamentally political debates. How, after the years of Cold War history, followed by the infantile outpourings of the early new left, can we as historians ensure that the renewal of Marxist historical analysis in the advanced capitalist countries does, in fact, further fundamental social change?

This is not a finite, nor even a new debate. For if the history of socialism in the twentieth century has taught us one dialectical lesson, it must be the importance of a constant, ongoing, critical re-evaluation of praxis and the ever-present danger of degenerating into sectarianism. Furthermore, we have a rich, if uneven, tradition of progressive scholarship and debate to both learn from and build upon. Indeed it is one of the merits of Linebaugh's article that he in part attempted to bridge the gap between the work of Third and Fourth International intellectuals. The issues are therefore not new, as Linebaugh's beautiful quotation from Morris made clear. But the ever-expanding pillage of the Third World and the increasing danger of nuclear armageddon, if anything, have heightened our responsibility to face up to them.

I

BEFORE ENTERING INTO the body of my critique, I think it would be best to summarize my own understanding of the structure, theory, and method used by Linebaugh in his article. For it is on these levels that I find the work most dangerous, simply because it is from these levels that other historians are most likely to draw inspiration for their own work. The historical question which is the ostensible raison d'être of the article (whether or not the tradition of the Putney debates can be traced through a diaspora and then boomerang homecoming — where I think Linebaugh is wrong) can only be addressed after understanding how he posed the question.

The structure of the article is a constant interplay between two levels of discourse. The first, both in presentation and importance, is literary, indeed poetic. The second is historiographical. The primacy of the poetic voice, as symbolized by Blake, serves a number of purposes in the unfolding structure of the argument. But it is not for utilitarian reasons that it is primary. The poetic leap into the imaginary is a surrogate for a new non-exploitive social order and as such it is endowed with moral and explanatory powers that Linebaugh can evoke against the twin devils of imperialism and empiricism. Armed with such a weapon one can, and Linebaugh frequently does, take the high road of

universality and from the heights look down on the lower levels of historical specificity of time and place. Of course, the high road can be a place of refuge when the mundane problems of specificity cloud the broader picture, or simply get in the way. The primacy of the poetic voice also prepares the reader for the major structural leap of faith in the argument: the primacy of language, in this case pidgin English, as proof of the commonality of interest and experience that permitted the transmission of a revolutionary tradition.

The evocative power of the poetic voice is further heightened by the weakness of the truncated version of the historiography presented by Linebaugh as the second level of discourse. The opening chapter of Thompson's *The Making* . . . and Hobsbawm's "Crisis of the 17th Century" are discussed as proof of the Communist Party of Great Britain's (CPGB) weak understanding of the arrested development in England between the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[1] The first work is seen to be ideological, the second as circulationist and both as euro-centric. What is required, therefore, is an analysis rooted in its international and productive context. In the unfolding of the argument this becomes very important. For it allows England to be reduced to a port of departure and subsequently a port of entry. The essentials of both ideological and economic development are considered as happening elsewhere. Thus the important contributions of Dobb and Rudé — also of the CPGB — to the understanding of internal developments on the economic and ideological levels can be safely ignored. Since it might well be argued that the single most important contribution of the CPGB to the historical sciences was the launching of the debate on the transition, this might be taken as negligence.

Several excellent theoretical points are made in the article, points that are made all the more interesting by the skill Linebaugh uses in escaping from having to apply the theory in practice. Citing Marx with reference to the primacy of establishing the physical organization of production and reproduction, Linebaugh stresses the importance of conceiving of producers as living labour, and later develops the idea of four simultaneously existing modes of organizing living labour in the period — plantations, petty producers, putting out, and intriguingly enough ships. Thus the basis is laid for an analysis which stresses the complexity of social relations of production and opens the way for a detailed class analysis. But the promise is never fulfilled. First we are informed that producers of social wealth and the working class are interchangeable, since "it is not necessary to be pedantic in our choice of words." Henceforth the journeyman artisan, peasant producer, and sugar plantation slave are conceived as being all part of the same social class. This rather astonishing reductionism is defended by the examination of paupers in seventeenth-century England. Presented as victims of primary capitalist

[1] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1963) and E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," *Past and Present*, 5 and 6 (1954).

accumulation who had previously had settled occupations, the fluidity and social dynamics of these people was so great that "the attempt proves vain which fixes a man or woman in one or other social category in that fast-moving and turbulent stream." Thus within two pages the pauper makes the transition from being the other side of the coin of primary accumulation from the proletarian, to being the cutting edge of the proletariat, through whom is retained the proletariat's independence, intractability, and wits.

As we shall later see this abandonment of class analysis was necessary for the successful arguing of the article's main thesis. While obviously compromising the theoretical promise of the analysis, there still remained the possibility of an enriching discussion of the interaction and dialectical oppositions inherent in the varying modes of organizing living labour. Alas, such was not to be. Only the last of the aforementioned modes, that of ships, is retained for anything like a serious examination. Drawing perhaps from the "proletarian" romany practice of palm reading we are treated to the metaphor of the "hand of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cooperation," wherein the fingers represent the continents and the ships the thumb. The interaction is not between modes, but between geographic regions and thus we presumably steer clear of the charge of euro-centrism. We definitely steer far clear of historical materialism.

Judging by the typical fare of our history journals, creative writing is not part of the syllabus of graduate methodology courses. Nevertheless it can be an important technique in historical exposition. And in this article it clearly is a key element of the method used. Linebaugh has an unquestionable mastery of the English language. No turgid prose or plodding paragraphs here; the man can really write. Swept up in the pleasure of reading such writing, one is quite far down the garden path before one realizes that there is something wrong with what is in fact being said. The method is aided by his skillful blending of cant and period quotations into the text, adding just the right ring of authenticity. One is left with the impression, almost independent of what is said, that the author knows his subject intimately; that he is at home in the seventeenth century of dunakers, rufflers, and bawdy-baskets, whatever they may be.

But when push comes to shove the method used in this article is the oldest in the book. Linebaugh proceeds by illustration. No boring figures, tiresome tables, or complicated graphs are allowed to get in the way of a good story being told. A century in the life of the various black communities in London is analyzed as being of four distinct phases: integration, consolidation, abolitionist, and working-class reform. All on the basis of very brief thumbnail biographies of six individual males. We used to write political history like that.

II

IT IS NOT BEYOND the realm of possibility that an historical argument that had structural, theoretical, and methodological problems, could still be in some

sense correct. Such is not the case with "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook." The ostensible central argument of the article is historically wrong. Linebaugh takes us on an entertaining, but unsubstantiated, wild goose chase, into a mythical world and, by so doing, I would argue, does considerable damage to the real history of the people with whom he is most concerned.

The central argument of the article is that the revolutionary tradition of the Putney debates was carried overseas to the coast of Africa and the colonies in the "new" world in the decades after 1649 by the early victims of the policy of shovelling out the paupers. This "dispersal of the active part of the English proletariat" was presented as an attempt to people the plantations. Once in the colonies the tradition underwent some transformations but, mole-like, is presented as having a long life, repeatedly appearing in various forms to bedevil the dominant classes. Both on the plantations, and more importantly for Linebaugh, aboard the slave ships, a new language was created through which was transmitted the revolutionary tradition of the Putney debates. Linebaugh's pidgin English becomes the repository of this tradition, which was kept alive in the various black communities, all of which are treated as having shared this language. Both by their partial integration into the British merchant marine and through their substantial land-based communities, particularly in London, these blacks succeed in recharging the English labour movement with its own revolutionary tradition. Thus the history is told of revolt, repression, dispersal, transferral, and subsequent revitalization. In Linebaugh's terms, the diaspora boomeranged back on the dominant classes, but with a black face.

The principal problems with this argument are historical, linguistic, and conceptual. Although there is an important overlap between these fields, I will treat them in that order. The historical problems flow from the absence of an analysis of the competing modes of organizing living labour in the colonies. This disregard for the specificity of time and place is, however, clearest in the discussion of the language that Linebaugh claims was the *lingua franca* which permitted the transmission of the tradition of the Putney debates. I will conclude with a discussion of the inadequacy of "tradition" as a conceptual tool and some comments on what I perceive to be the purpose of the article.

III

CHRONOLOGICALLY THE FIRST, and by no means the least serious historical problem of this argument is the continuation of an antinomian tradition in what Linebaugh mistakes for the "edge of the map." One man's "strange ecology" was another people's home. We are not simply dealing with a land whose resources English capitalism could ravish, as Linebaugh would have us believe. The process involved is the invasion of America, to borrow from the title of a stimulating discussion of the impact on the Quaker world view of their

role in the destruction of Amerindian civilizations.[2] Furthermore, after the initial shock and carnage of the European invasion of America, the world's largest putting out system of organizing human labour in geographic terms, was established. Linebaugh's independent, intractable, and clever Englishmen, who rejected the discipline of the European strategic hamlets, played an important intermediary role in the establishment of the fur trade. When they ventured out into "a continent of game to be had for the taking," they went armed with more than a jug and a fiddle. While they may no longer have cropped a white man's share, they did not escape the ramifications of capital's modes of organizing living labour just because the labour was indigenous.

Nor was this the only problem stemming from the failure to follow through in analyzing the colonies in terms of modes of organizing living labour. The plantation was not a "shared" experience, but one of several competing modes which in the Caribbean and most of the southern American colonies succeeded in establishing its dominance. Barbados is an interesting example because it was such an early case of this transformation of the colonial economy. In 1645 the colony had 11,200 small white farmers — not all of whom were independent petty producers — and 5,680 black slaves. Within a generation there were 745 plantations on the island employing the labour of 82,000 black slaves. This proved a profitable system for English capitalism and by 1697 this tiny colony exported to Britain five times the combined export value of Pennsylvania, New York, and Delaware.[3] Linebaugh states that the diaspora was not "successful in producing a stable basis of capitalist accumulation" in the Caribbean. He is right, but for the wrong reasons. It did not succeed precisely because it was not their labour that was to be exploited. To the extent that the paupers set up permanent residence in the colonies it was in large measure in other modes and other colonies. Their contribution to the development of capitalist accumulation within the evolving class structures of the thirteen colonies, although uneven, was substantial.

I suspect that Linebaugh was cognisant of the weakness of his line of reasoning here. For while appearing perhaps close on the edges of his maps, the distances in experience and space between the colonies and indeed within the colonies were self-evident. Thus it becomes important to bridge the gap, and the argument quickly leaves the land-based modes to concentrate on the ships. In fact we were probably not dealing on the whole with ships but rather an assortment of snows, barques, and other vessels, requiring different organization of the work process due to the differences in rigging. But here of course I'm being pedantic, something one cannot accuse Linebaugh of being, for he operates on the literary level of simile. Sailors are like factory workers:

> The large capital outlay, the division of labour, the regimentation and repetition, the

[2] Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill 1975).

[3] Although old it remains necessary reading: Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill 1944).

close supervision, the working in groups, and the removal from home are the characteristics sailoring had with the factory.

I might hazard the opinion that the Spartans in the Persian Wars also shared these characteristics, but I fail to see the relevance of the parallel in either case. Surely if we are to talk about an "international sea-faring proletariat" in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, some evidence of a capitalist wage relationship must be presented. After all a vessel is a machine, which creates value through the labour of the crew in the harnessing of nature. How that value is divied up is a fundamental, if admittedly complex, historical question. The proletarianization of sailors, like that of other occupations, is a process that must be studied, not an *a priori* assumption that one can take as a given in the seventeenth century.

It is important for the logical progression of Linebaugh's argument that the sailors, particularly those on the slavers, be proletarians. Otherwise the baton of revolutionary tradition in his relay race might be allowed to drop. Lest it be forgotten, the rebels of the Parliamentary army hand off to the paupers, who hand off in a dynamic and active manner to the sailors, who hand it off in turn to the slaves in the holds, whose descendants cross the finish line just in time for the final march past of the Industrial Revolution. That the sailors might be on a different team and have little or no interest in passing on a revolutionary, egalitarian tradition to the men and women chained up in their holds does not occur to Linebaugh. In short his argument here hangs on the questionable assumption that not only are the sailors objectively proletarianized, but that they are class-conscious proletarians.

But the best is yet to come. From this shaky ground, Linebaugh takes the major structural leap of faith in the article and concludes:

> It created a new speech. A combination of first, nautical English, second, the "sabir" of the Mediterranean, third the hermetic-like cant talk of the "underworld," and fourth, West African grammatical construction, produced the "pidgin English" that became in the tumultuous years of the slave trade the language of the African coast. . . . Where people had to understand each other pidgin English was the lingua franca of the sea and of the frontier. Inasmuch as all who came to the New World did so after months at sea, pidgin or its maritime and popular cognates became the medium of transmission for expressing the new social realities. By the mid-eighteenth century there were pidgin speaking communities in Philadelphia, New York, and Halifax.

From the heights of his poetic voice, Linebaugh looked down and saw phonetic particularities to ships' logs, a "dialect" among pirates in 1722, a "dialect" noted in the *Critical Review* of 1757, and a large number of blacks in the British Navy by the end of the eighteenth century. Presumably on the assumption that a picture is worth a thousand words of historical evidence, he presents us with the "language lesson." Were it not so demeaning of the monumental, real achievement of the slaves in terms of the history of languages in the western world, this argument would be laughable. The lesson is a drawing showing 418 slaves chained down in the hold of a vessel of some 250 tons.

Since we have been informed that "people will talk" and of the importance of the months at sea in the creation of "the medium of transmission for expressing the new social realities," one can only conclude that Linebaugh honestly *thinks that in such conditions a language can be created and/or learned.*

Imagine yourself chained to a rough-hewn piece of wood, with only seven square feet of total floor space, poorly fed, living in the excrement of some 400 other people jammed in around you for two to three months, having been forcibly separated from your family, village and livelihood, and being at sea for the first time in your life. Would you be able to either learn or create a language rich enough to express the poetry of the Bible or the political concepts *of Winstanley? Well neither were the victims of the Middle Passage.*

IV

THE FIELD OF SOCIO-LINGUISTICS and the history of languages is far more complex than Linebaugh's Berlitz of the High Seas or his occasional dialect allows for. There is absolutely no evidence for the existence of a "pidgin *English" as defined by Linebaugh. Furthermore there are decades of research* into the complex questions of the nature of pidgins and creoles that are diametrically opposed to Linebaugh's simplistic vision.[4] There are well in excess of 100 known pidgins and creoles that are or have been spoken in the world. Only one of these can be considered to have had as its primary component the variant of standard English that Linebaugh has chosen to call nautical English. This language, known as Pitcairnese Creole, is still spoken by the descendants of the *mutineers of HMS Bounty on the island their forefathers settled in 1790.*[5]

Rather than a single *lingua franca* of the sea and of the frontier, whatever that may be, the complex variety of new social realities created a number of languages, both pidgins and creoles. Linebaugh does not appear to realize that

[4] This is an enormous field: perhaps the best summaries of the contending points of view can be obtained through the published proceedings of the number of international *conferences that have been held in the field since the late 1960s. Pidginization and Creolization of Languages: Proceedings of a Conference held at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, April 1968*, Dell Hymes, ed. (Cambridge 1971). David DeCamp and Ian Hancock, eds., *Pidgins and Creoles: Current Trends and Prospects* (Washington 1974). *Language and Linguistic Problems in Africa: Proceedings of the 7th Conference of African Linguistics*, Paul Kotey and Haig Der-Houssikian, eds. (Columbia, SC 1977). Kenneth C. Hill, ed., *The Genesis of Language, the First Michigan Colloquium, 1979* (Ann Arbor 1979). Albert Valdman and Arnold Highfield, eds., *The International Conference on Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies* (New York 1980). A good one-volume general introduction is Albert Valdman, *Le Créole: structure statut et origine* (Paris 1978). The standard bibliography in the field is now a bit dated but very detailed: John E. Reineke, *Bibliography of Pidgin and Creole Languages* (Honolulu 1975).

[5] For more on this language spoken by some 150 descendants of the notorious crew of Captain Bligh, see Ross and Moverly, *The Pitcairnese Language* (London 1964).

there is an important distinction to be made between pidgins and creoles. In terms of function, usage, and structure they are different and most importantly for the argument at hand they are historically and socially distinct. Slave traders on the African coast used pidgins, while slaves in the colonies created creoles. Before briefly outlining the contending hypotheses in socio-linguistics concerning the origins of creoles, let me clarify the elementary distinctions between pidgins and creoles.

The basic distinction is that pidgins are no one's mother tongue. The product of a meeting of diverse peoples, sharing no common language, pidgins were developed to permit commerce and trade. As long as their function remained that of facilitating commercial transactions, they required only the most simple structures.[6] No tenses, absence of articles, greatly reduced vocabulary, and a rigid, simple sentence structure of subject, verb, and object were the characteristics of pidgins. These linguistic codes played an historically important role in the creation of a world market. However, it is important to stress that there were a variety of different pidgins developed in the different trades and regions of the world, depending on who was involved in the commerce. Although long denied their place in the academic sun, creoles are qualitatively different from pidgins in that they are complete languages. People live, love, work, and die in creoles. They are the mother tongues of the majority of the descendants of the slaves brought to the Caribbean colonies of the English, Dutch, and French.

There are in socio-linguistics three contending hypotheses concerning the origins of creoles, none of which support in any way the simplistic conjecture of Linebaugh's article. The monogenetic, relexification, and social determinant theses all address themselves to the dual question of the relationship between pidgin and the creation of creoles and the remarkable similarities between certain creoles spoken in different societies. The monogenetic thesis holds that a pidgin Portuguese, itself a relexification of the Mediterranean "sabir," had widespread currency in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With important geographic variations, it is posited as having been one of the pidgins used in as diverse trades as the Chinese tea trade, the Indonesian spice trade, the West African slave trade, and the South American precious metal trades. A development of the early stages of the creation of a European-dominated world market, the supporters of this thesis contend that this pidgin Portuguese provided the initial structure upon which subsequent creoles in the colonies could build. Unless Winstanley, *et al.*, were Portuguese in Englishmen's clothing, there is

[6] The importance given to whether or not the language is a mother tongue in deciding whether it is a creole or a pidgin can give rise to certain problems. For example the recent urbanization of parts of the population of New Guinea has resulted in the intermarriage between peoples without a common language. A language has been created, which when spoken by the parents is considered a pidgin, since it is neither the parents' mother tongue but when spoken by their children is considered a creole! For more on this see the ongoing research of Gillian Sankoff at the Université de Montréal.

no support here for the argument that pidgin English was the *lingua franca* of any of the seven seas.

Neither the relexification nor the social determinant hypotheses posit a link between pidgin and creole for the Caribbean. The relexificationists argue that the slave populations spoke, on their arrival in the colonies, a variety of different African languages and that under the influence of the dominant cultures of the slaveholders, borrowed vocabulary from the Dutch, English, or French while developing a synthesis, in structural terms, of the African languages. The social determinists agree in large measure with this analysis, but go on to argue that the nature and function of a language is the product of particular social and historical circumstances. The similarities in the lived experience of slaves on the sugar plantations would, according to this school, explain in large measure the similarities noted between different French creoles or the English creoles of Jamaica and Trinidad.[7] Since both of these schools of thought stress the primacy of the experience once in the colonies, it is self-evident that they offer no support for Linebaugh's argument. Substantial additional historical research will be necessary in order to clarify the numerous questions raised by these contending theses. The complexity of the historical problems involved are perhaps best illustrated by the creoles spoken in the former English and then Dutch colony of Surinam.

Reconnoitered rather than settled by the Spanish, Surinam's first European settlement was established by the Dutch in 1551. Under Raleigh, the English organized several forays at the turn of the century and from 1630 ruled parts of the country. From 1651 to 1667, when it was traded for New York at Breda, the country was an English colony. Few English planters remained after 1678, those who left were allowed to take their pre-1667 slaves with them. There are two separate creoles spoken in Surinam. Mutually unintelligible, both drew lexically from English, but structurally from differing African languages. Sranan was the creole of the plantations along the coast and it had a sufficiently rich vocabulary and structure to permit the Moravian missionaries to translate the Bible into Sranan in the late eighteenth century. Back from the coast, the creole developed was Saramaccan. It appears to have been created by the runaway slaves. It had several regional variants, all of which drew lexically from Portuguese to a significantly greater extent than Sranan. Djuka, one of these variants, developed a syllabic writing system with strong parallels to certain West African systems. Here as elsewhere the variety of "new social realities" meant a variety of "medium[s] of transmission."

[7] They consider the response to given situations as likely to be nearly identical, due to the influence of universal language structures, which they argue are at the basis of all languages.

V

THE HISTORICAL DISTORTIONS in Linebaugh's argument stem in no small measure from a conceptual poverty. Popular ideology in general and the ideology of protest in particular are complex phenomena. For Linebaugh, the central concept in the understanding of these questions is tradition. *Fiddler on the Roof* notwithstanding, I do not think that tradition is an adequate conceptual tool for the task at hand. Building on certain of the insights of George Rudé,[8] I would argue that one should analyze popular ideology in terms of the dialectical relationship between inherent and derived aspects of popular ideology. By inherent I mean those ideas and beliefs that come from the lived experience of a particular historical situation. With Marx, I would accord analytical primacy to the inherent, in particular the role of social relations of production and reproduction. By derived I mean both the ideological inheritance of a particular popular social class or group and those ideas and beliefs coming from outside the popular classes' tradition, most notably from the various fractions of the dominant classes. Linebaugh's romany influence would be an example derived from a non-hegemonic source. The class-specific nature of the derived must not be ignored; my point here is merely to stress that the viability of a derived aspect depends on the nature of the inherent.

This contrasts quite sharply with the conceptual framework of Linebaugh. It would appear that he believes the responsibility of the historian is to trace the threads of the derived popular tradition amidst the richness of the inherent. This results in a distortion of historical reality, wherein separate statements are presented as being connected in a "tradition," simply because they share a basic content or perception. The image of the "World Turned Upside Down" is a case in point. This is described as a "profound tradition" stretching from Merlin's prophecy, through Shakespeare, the Geneva Bible, the English Civil War, the American War of Independence, and the writings of Ottobah Cugoano. My point here is a simple one. In highly stratified societies the idea of a reversal of roles can be arrived at by a number of people in a variety of different specific historical situations. Not because the idea is derived from a cultural tradition, but because the existing class relations are so clearly inequitable to those at the bottom. People will dream.

When applied to Linebaugh's central argument, this criticism is most telling. The antinomian tradition had no monopoly on democratic theory or practice and the attempt to force radical ideas or concepts in the colonies into a specific tradition deprives them of their objective basis. As the Cold War gathered momentum following the establishment of NATO, a number of historians attempted to redefine western history in terms of the Atlantic Revolution. In this article Locke and Rousseau have been replaced by Winstanley and

[8] A précis of his reflections on the nature of popular ideology is available in *Ideology and Popular Protest* (New York 1980).

Blake, while Paine and Cugoano now stand in place of Jefferson and Franklin. The end result is little different. Both rely on an euro-centric legitimization process that denies agency and importance to the peoples of the colonies.

"All the Atlantic Mountains Shook" addressed itself to an historical problem, in order, I think, to better understand a problem in present-day British society. And since similar problems exist in all of the advanced capitalist countries, by extension Linebaugh is speaking to a wide audience. The problem is the treatment of the Third World immigrant in his or her "mother country." Playing on prejudice, fear, and the structural crisis of capitalism, both racist and neo-fascist political movements have made significant inroads into the working classes of the advanced capitalist countries. Were the problems limited to the National Front, Ku Klux Klan, and Western Guard type movements, it would be serious enough. However it is much broader than that, as the xenophobic irrationalisms of the PCF and the internment camps for Haitians in Florida all too vividly show. Some academics would condemn such "present-mindedness;" I commend it. And it is because of the importance of the political problem that Linebaugh has courageously introduced into the halls of the academy, that I respond.

The article invited us all to reconsider and indeed reject narrowly-defined national history. It furthermore stressed the importance of the role played in English, and by extension European, working-class history of non-Europeans. These are two points I willingly accept. But the manner in which the second was made in the article not only compromised the first, but impedes the analysis necessary for an adequate political response to the real problem being addressed. The new form of working-class internationalism that Linebaugh calls for can only be achieved if the civilizations of the Caribbean are understood in their richness and vitality. They and not the plantations were the outstanding historic achievement of the age. As the Sranan poet Trefossa wrote in his poem of a conversation upon returning from Europe:

mi go — m'e kon

(...)

te dreeten winti sa trotji
na kankantri:
—krioro fa?
m'sa pitji:
—dja mi de,
—*Eifeltoren hee pasa*
—m'a n'a jorka, a n'a jorka...

I've gone — I come

(...)

if the dry season winds starts singing
in the cotton-tree:

—Creole, how?
I'll answer:
—here am I
—Eiffel Tower is much higher,
—but has no spirits, has no spirits . . .[9]

I would like to express my appreciation to Joanne Burgess, Christiane Malet and Michel Prairie of UQAM, as well as to my colleagues at the MBHP, for their criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper.

Reply

Peter Linebaugh

SWEENY'S CRITIQUE OF "Atlantic Mountains" is to be welcomed because that essay introduced many historical hypotheses about the movement of people and ideas among four continents during two centuries whose epic importance cannot be established in the space of a short essay, but perhaps may be tested as a result of the discussion that Sweeny has begun, and which hopefully others will be stimulated to pursue. "Atlantic Mountains" was intended to do no more. He finds the essay "both wrong and dangerous." He does not convince me that it is dangerous, and nor am I yet persuaded that it is "wrong." In this reply I shall take up only a few of his points in order to introduce some new evidence which, I believe, encourages us to pursue some of the leads indicated in "Atlantic Mountains."

That the human societies of all four corners of the Atlantic became linked during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through international trade is well-known. That the historical development of each area — Europe, Africa, North and South America — became irrevocably transformed as a result of enlarging trans-oceanic trade is scarcely less well-known. To these known truths, "Atlantic Mountains" introduced two hypotheses for discussion. First, it argued that the international cooperation suggested by trade statistics is an incomplete description, though for some purposes useful, because it ignores the human relations that become fetishized when exclusively presented in terms of trade or the value of trade. With the oceanic transportation of sugar, tobacco, gold, silver, cochineal, logwood, pitch, tar, woollens, iron, swords, muskets, rum, and molasses there occurred necessary connections among the many different modes of production and civilizations of the Atlantic. The means of communication among them, the oceanic sailing vessel, ought also to be regarded as a "mode of production," connecting the continents by trade, and by means of that trade bringing the peoples of the continents together by

[9] As cited and translated by J. Voorhoeve in "The Art of Reading Creole Poetry" in Hymes, *Pidginization*, 325.