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THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF "NEW DAY"

By H. P. Jacobs

II

THE FICTIONAL FAMILY

Most readers of "New Day" identify some of the figures of Part III with living persons. The criticisms of this part of the book are based on these identifications.

The reader assumes that Garth Campbell is N. W. Manley. There is not wanting some evidence in favour of this view. Garth takes a lead in the unionisation of labour, just as Manley did; like Manley, he founds a political party. Both are barristers.

Much more remarkable is the fact that Garth has a cousin with a Spanish name, Carlos Fernandez, who has lived mostly in Cuba, comes to Jamaica, in the 'thirties, as a tall, white-haired man (p. 349), sets up in business, founds a union which is apparently called the Fernandez Union (p. 261), and is interned during the war. Certainly

this sounds like Manley's cousin Bustamante.

Moreover, Fernandez is arrested in the 1938 disturbances, as Bustamante was, and bail refused (p. 349); it is Garth who gets Fernandez out of prison, but has a difference with him later, which turns partly on the name of the Union (p. 361); on the second release of Fernandez from internment an open quarrel flazes up (p. 365). This correspondence reasonably well to points in the careers of Manley and Bustamante.

Furthermore, Garth is engaged to a girl called May Smith-Evors, who is descended from the German settlers of Part I (p. 358). It appears that she is a sculptor (p. 356) and she is therefore identified with Mrs. Manley.

Finally, Sir Stafford Cripps appears as Sir Balfour Briggs. Here the name is decidedly an echo; while Sir Balfour Briggs is called an "eminent British jurist and

politician," who visits Jamaica and takes an interest in Garth's party, which is actually "launched" in his presence.

This is the most striking of the identifications. While Cripps came to Jamaica in 1938, Briggs arrives during the war. Garth's Party has already been "launched", and it has to have an "official" launching, for prestige purposes, in order to make its launching resemble that of the P.N.P. in 1938, when Cripps spoke at the inaugural meeting.

There must be some special significance in this. The history has been altered to conform to some pattern, and it is then changed again to make it conform to another.

Is there any other indication of important time-changes?

Yes. Garth Campbell is born in 1913 (p. 262), about the time that Manley was thinking of leaving school; as a matter of fact, in the year when Mr. Reid himself was born.

Perhaps it is now possible to see why Garth differs from Manley in more ways than he resembles him.

For the differences are extraordinary. Garth does not pursue his profession and become a brilliant King's Counsel; he turns his back on the capital, and becomes a country business man identified with the agricultural interest; not to put too fine a point on it, he becomes a sugar manufacturer, and starts something which sounds rather like a "company union".

All this requires another reversal of the order of events, for Garth has to make his first effort at organisation of the workers (before his change in way of life), at same time before 1938.

Otherwise, Mr. Reid must abolish 1938 as a year of creative change, and make it what it actually was—a year of experiment like the earlier year of the novel.

Now it is absurd to suppose that Mr. Reid does not know the discrepancies between his narrative and historical fact: that he is unaware, for example, that Sir Stafford Cripps came to Jamaica in 1938. It is preferable to accept Mr. Reid's own statement that "The entire Campbell family of my narrative is fictional." In that case, everything falls into an intelligible pattern. The story of Part III, is not history, it is fiction attempting to create a true impression of the strains and conflicts of the pre-1944 period, but aiming at an artistically complete picture instead of an accurate photograph.

The moment one begins to modify the facts of history, as you might modify the outline of a hill or a tree in painting it, you begin to be influenced by something which does not affect you as a landscape painter. In deciding that a protuberance should be smoothed off the hill, or a branch added to the

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tr. You are guided only by your taste, your aesthetic sense. In modifying the facts of history, we inevitably apply a moral judgment, and we produce something which is more satisfactory to our sense of right than are the real events of the past. Mr. Reid has in fact produced, in Part I and in Part III alike, something more rounded off than the facts, and morally more satisfying.

Accordingly, Mr. Reid has used Manley and Bustamante only as sources of his characters. The country would have been saved, he feels, if someone younger than Manley had appeared before 1938, identified himself with the countryside, converted the big agrarian interests to a sympathetic attitude towards unionism, and whipped up an island-wide demand for self-government and adult suffrage. Such a man "will be leader of the new Government after the General Elections" (p. 5), not hopelessly beaten at the polls a month after achieving the triumph of the new constitution; and such a man (to pursue the thought for ourselves, since it is not expressed in the book) will make a great ruler.

The characters of Garth and Fernandez, therefore, are no more "real" than those of "Aldenburg" and "Humphrey" in Part I. Just as Aldenburg is not von Ketelhodt, but the symbol of the planters and their 19th century political domination, just as Humphrey is not Cooke, but the symbol of an Established Church in alliance with

the planters, so Garth and Fernandez are not Manley and Bustamante, but symbols of the new liberating forces of the 20th century.

Is there anything in common between the struggle in 1865 and that beginning a few years ago? In the novel, the whole idea is that there is continuity, and this continuity is represented by the Campbell family. And the warcries of the liberating movements bear some resemblance. Only, Mr. Reid suggests, the men of 1865 were too extreme and too much in a hurry. Bogle wanted secession. Garth asks for self-government inside the Empire. Bogle is represented as wanting adult suffrage, though it is Davis who makes the plea for it (p. 213); Mr. Reid's prefatory remarks making it clear that he thinks there was "clamour of the unenfranchised for universal adult suffrage", and Bogle's revolutionary action is therefore meant to be contrasted with the prudent agitation of Garth (p. 362).

Here the facts have everywhere been sacrificed to the theory of continuity. Bogle and his contemporaries never dreamed of secession, whereas the 20th century did produce an "independence" movement. The men of 1865 were not thinking of adult suffrage, nor even, specially, of a more "advanced" constitution; in so far as they did, von Ketelhodt was one of the few people of the time who thought some kind of responsible government feasible.

The enemies of progress in Part I, are the "rich planter-men", the buckra overlords, who are able to fare stumptuously in spite of a three-year drought. Most of the planters in 1865 were poor; they had, in fact, no time to give to public service, as a rule, because they lived "from hand to mouth", as was once remarked. To this unhistorical class there corresponds another unhistorical class in Part III: "English aristocrats who have never been in the island in their lives." Garth assures us, own "most of the sugar factories."

The weakness of the book, then lies in the second part, not in the third. Too much is left unexplained. If the country has steadily gained in national feeling during seventy years, why does Garth have to fight the same forces as Bogle?

Mr. Reid is conscious of the difficulty. He makes David's son wave his hand "like Baron Aldenburg" (p. 283), which symbolises the complacency of the money-making success-worshippers of the intermediate generation to whom national feeling meant progressively less. And he gives no account of the collapse of the old oppressive system. He is interested only in the end of the House of Assembly; whereas the real strongholds of reaction were the Vestries and the law courts, so that the abolition of the one and the reform of the other after the rebellion ended the worst features of class domination.

To stress this, however, would make the intermediate generation of money-makers still more puzzling and incongruous.

Instead of this, Mr. Reid makes Davie skulk on a cay and develop a complex, while his son returns to Jamaica, but is in fact in spiritual banishment from it. The weakness of the book lies in the indecisive impression left by Part II which deals with the cay episode.

We have still to consider what in fact Mr. Reid has produced. It is not an historical novel in the common sense. What is its special significance?

(To be concluded.)

