days, I now realise on looking back, he had always wanted me to be more than just Dorothy's tenant. It was a form of control; and it worked for the best part of eight years.

The newspaper of the British Communist Party was *The Daily Worker* and at some point my work at Central Books took me to the paper and I met their respected Columnist, Walter Holmes, who struck me as a warm, friendly and naturally kind person. He had read *Dark Testament* and the Russian wife of the editor of the paper had told Holmes the style and content had reminded her of some famous Russian short stories. So Holmes put me in his column. A reviewer of another paper was not as kind. He said to see a dog dancing would be a noticeable event and people would not be too concerned about the quality of the dancing; the mere fact of the dog dancing would be remarkable. For a while I was known as the dancing dog among my friends.

But then they called the London-based Indian writer, Mulk Raj Anand, a *Baboo* writer because his novels were written in the English spoken by Indians. The competition to be published was fierce; fiercer, if anything, than the competition for certain jobs. And any means to put down the competition was fair. Racial prejudice, sex discrimination, belittling and sneering at each other's work were all fair game. Book reviews were means for cutting down some and promoting others. The homegrown kept out the expatriate; the white claimed preference over the black. It was so in the job market; it was so at finding a place to live - the two most critical needs for the shaping of a good life. I could not get a full time job on a paper or magazine because I was not a member of the National Union of Journalists; and I could not become a member of that union because I did not have a job on a paper. I had not been apprenticed and brought into the fold . Was it just the 'closed shop'? And why

UWI LIBRARIES

was it always possible for South Africans who were white, or for Australians and Canadians, or for 'white Africans' from East and Central Africa, or for white West Indians - or even for foreign Americans - to break into that 'closed shop'? Why not for the blacks?

The English Working Men's Clubs are among the most exclusive groups I came to know in London. The West End Clubs of the high and the mighty have nothing on them when it comes to exclusivity. I have been invited to West End Clubs for a meal or drinks; never to a Working Man's Club. The only time I entered one was to go and make a speech about South Africa because a section of the Afrikaaner population supported the Nazis and they wanted to know why. How could anybody, anywhere in the Empire, side with the Nazis? I tried to explain. I do not think I succeeded. I was supposed to speak for half an hour, with another half an hour for questions and answers; then I would be escorted out and the Brothers would get on with their business. In the event, we argued stubbornly, sometimes harshly, for something like three hours. That man Smuts had it right. The Boers should follow him. The war with the Boers was in the past and Britain had treated them well since; as well as the Canadian, Australians and New Zealanders, all of whom were fighting for Britain. Everybody, even the Indians and the blacks, were rallying around the flag.

When I talked about racism, a curtain came down. You cannot sweep aside the fact of the differences between black and white: different ways, different habits, different culture. Nothing you can do about it. Treat each other 'proper' and go back to your countries when the war is over and be friends. But we'll always be different. It was not said but the Boer 'will of God' justification for the 'colour bar' was a strong undertone to my one and only formal encounter with a body of English working men in an English Working Men's Club in

UWI LIBRARIES

London in the 1940s. It left me depressed for days. If this was the outlook of ordinary decent English working men, what hope for a future free of prejudice? Perhaps the communists were right, Perhaps the whole structure had to first be torn down and then completely rebuilt. Perhaps that was the only way to create a world free of racism and prejudice.

Then Bill Rust, the editor of *The Daily Worker*, put a dent into that idea. I do not remember the details of how it happened but I found myself in his office one day. It was the holy-of-holies to which only the most senior people at the paper were admitted. I might have been sent to deliver some copy or special article. It was not one of those days when he worked on the daily editorial and his door was firmly shut and his secretary kept even the most senior staff at bay. His door was wide open and the great man leaned back in his big chair. He ordered me to sit.

Out of nothing and nowhere he started talking about colour. He had nothing against coloured people, but he did not see why he had to like them. Coloured people did not like all white people, did they? I was too startled and surprised to respond. People are people and you should treat them as people but I don't see why I should have to like or approve of black people. I wanted to talk back, to ask what was behind these remarks, but he *was* the editor of *The Daily Worker*, possibly the most important communist after the party leader, Harry Politt, and the party theoretician, R. Palme Dutt, an Indian or part-Indian intellectual recluse whom I never met. Dutt occasionally published an article in the *Worker* but his main works appeared in more weighty party journals. So there was I, lectured, out of the blue, on Bill Rust's views on colour, without knowing why or what had brought it on, and too intimidated to talk back.

UWI LIBRARIES

What came across clearly to me was that communists, leading communists, no less than the members of the Working Men's Clubs, saw a difference between black and white, because they were black and white. The brave new communist world of the future, if it ever came, would not necessarily be a world free of race and colour. This was the first of many encounters with colour consciousness among communists, socialists and other leftwing radicals. The movement, as a movement, said it did not recognise colour; but the people in it, those who led and controlled it, as well as those who followed it, were as colour-conscious as were the empire-builders. Marxism, communism, socialism - the ideologies - did not have the automatic answers to the problem of the relations between the lighter and darker races of mankind. Was there an answer, and if there was, what was it?

I asked George Padmore and he said it was a matter of power. The world only respected power. The moment the Africans and Asians had political power the world would respect them. Kwame Nkrumah with his great gift for sloganeering turned it into *Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else will follow.* Pan Africanism was to be the way to that political power.

We started planning for the Fifth Pan-African Congress. Once the decision was agreed on Padmore, the master planner, was in his element. We were each assigned specific tasks and had to make written reports at our regular meeting. The planning organisation was the Pan-African Federation. A room in Makonnen's restaurant in Manchester, was the head office. We also had a small place in London. Padmore's network of contacts throughout the Commonwealth and empire was alerted, fact sheets, newsletters, bulletins went out in a steady stream. I was put in charge of publicity. Nkrumah, recently arrived from the United States, and burning with impatience, set up a West African Secretariat.

UWI LIBRARIES

When things moved too slowly for him, he went off on his own for a time. Azikiwe visited from Nigeria; Wallace Johnson came in from Sierra Leone. A very young Julius Nyrere from what was then Tanganiyka came; so did Tom Mboya from Kenya. Then the great man, W.E.B. DuBois himself, descended on us. And in 1945, in the city of Manchester, he opened the Fifth Pan-African Congress. Nominally, the Mayor of Manchester did it; but that was simply a doffing our hats to the host city. The real opening was DuBois' and we all knew we were in the presence of great moment in black history.

DuBois had been there since the beginning of the Pan=African idea he was there in 1919, the year I was born, for the first Pan-African Congress. He was there for the second Pan-African Congress in 1921; for the third in 1923, and for the fourth in 1927. Those had all been Congresses called by individuals representing the hope and ideals of individuals. The African people had not yet found their voice. These individuals were the forerunners, like John the Baptist, for our Fifth Pan-African Congress with its delegates and representatives from all over Africa and the African *Diaspora.* The Fifth Pan-African Congress was the first truly representative one. W.E.B. Dubois, standing on that platform in the Manchester City Hall and tracing the long and difficult journey of the mind and spirit by which we had come to this point was one of the most moving moments of my adult life. And if it was of such importance to me, what must it have been for DuBois? What were his feelings that night? Had he thought this day would ever come when he would be speaking to a group of Pan-African delegates from all the regions of Africa? That he would live to see the dream handed over from a small group of expatriate black men to Africa itself? And that he would be the agent of that transfer? All his life, from way back before I was born, he had been at it:

UWI LIBRARIES

dreaming about it; talking about it; writing about it. On this one, for all their many differences, for all the harsh words they had written and spoken about and against each other, Garvey and DuBois, the dead and the living, were at one.

It was a moment of great hope for me. I was sure, now, that one day, no matter how far in the future, Africa will be free. Up to then I had not dared think about that possibility. The imperial European stranglehold seemed too strong to break. Those who controlled us were too skilled, too determined to hold on. Their confidence had undermined mine. But that night the West Indian *Time Longer than Rope* became part of my mental and spiritual baggage and I had no more doubts. Africa, all of Africa, will be free one day, whether I lived to see it or not. This new certainty gave me a sense of inner peace such as I had never known before.

When the great conference was over the mood of tension, of high excitement, gradually evaporated. We returned to our daily routine. The glitter, the only sign of his excitement, went from Padmore's eyes. Delegates spent a few days then left for their homelands. Azikiwe, one of the biggest financial supporters of the conference, went back to Nigeria to look after his newspapers and continue the struggle for Nigerian independence. Trade Unionist Wallace Johnson returned to Sierra Leone. Kwame Nkrumah decided it was time to go home to the Gold Coast and start making things happen. After taking afternoon tea and wholewheat biscuits with me at our flat in Belsize Park DuBois slipped out of England as quietly as he had slipped in.

Under their wartime regulations the British Government could have found some way of stopping us having that Congress. It did not.

The struggle against colonialism was entering a new phase. Within two

UWI LIBRARIES

years, the Indian National Congress, which had expressed its solidarity with our Fifth Pane-African Congress, moved towards independence for India. Kenyatta returned to Kenya to prepare for what became known as the *Mau Mau* war.The African and Asian freedom fighters were going home. London was gradually ceasing to be the centre of our struggle. World War Two was coming to an end. The extraordinary alliance of convenience between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers from the very outset did not look like lasting. Even as they prepared to bring the defeated Nazis to trial at Nuremburg the fissures in the alliance were showing. When Churchill went to America to make his famous speech about an *Iron Curtain* coming down over Europe we entered the long years of *The Cold War*. The world was changing. The position of black folk in that changing world surely had to change as well. Many of us saw the opportunities offered by the *Cold War*. Few of us recognised the dangers.

4. The Cold War Years

The end of the second world war in 1945 till the end of the *Cold War* in 1991 were the most dangerous years of the twentieth century. Several times, during that period, any major mistake or miscalculation by either the Soviet Union and its allies or the United States and its allies, could result in a nuclear war of mutual and, perhaps worldwide, destruction. Toward the end of the war, on August 6,th, 1945, a single American airforce plane dropped the first atom bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. One hundred thousand people were killed in one massive flash. Three days later the Japanese city of Nagasaki became the second city to be destroyed by an atom bomb dropped by the Americans. Forty thousand people were killed in that fireball flash. Those who

UWI LIBRARIES

were not killed suffered the most horrible radiation burns; endured years of lingering pain. The shock reverberated throughout the world. We saw, suddenly and clearly, the possibility of the end life on earth at the hands of man A number of people, writers and artists, one or two of whom I knew, were so overwhelmed by the horror they committed suicide. It was a stark and chilling vision of how time could end for all of us. And one man, in one country had made the decision and given the order. What price the long and difficult centuries of human effort, of the creation of great works of art and literature, the vast body of human scholarship stored in museums and libraries, if all could be wiped out in a blinding flash on the order of one human being? If Hitler's Germany had been the first to produce the atom bomb would the London I had come to love still be standing? Would the Paris I was preparing to visit for the first time since its liberation, still be standing? How much of the stored treasures of human history, stored in both London and Paris, would survive such an atomic fire-stor?. Try as I would, I could not, for days and weeks, banish these nightmare thoughts. They lingered with me, throughout the *Cold War* years, just below the surface of consciousness. Nothing was sure, nothing was secure, not even human history. Or our sense of that history. All could be cancelled as though it never existed. It made real for me Bertrand Russell's view of the smallness, the unimportance, of our species in the bigger scheme of things. We can turn our earth into a barren, lifeless little star spinning in space; waterless, with little or no atmosphere; with not even cockroaches left on it. To face this possibility and still to behave with decency; to still create beautiful things, as though they will last forever; to still make music and poetry and paint pictures; to still consciously cultivate the gentler, tender side, of our lives is, I think, aspiring to a grace which makes us more than the animals we surely are. It raises us to near the level of the Godhood our species seems to need

UWI LIBRARIES

still behave with decency; to still create beautiful things as though they will last forever; to still make music and poetry and paint pictures; to still consciously cultivate the gentler, tender side of our lives is to aspire to a grace which makes us more than the animals we surely are. It raises us to a level near the Godhood our species seems to need. To have the ability to destroy all and not to do it was one of the hard tests humanity passed - but only just - in the middle of the twentieth century.

That first summer after the end of the war was beautiful. Perhaps we wanted it to be so after the years of horror. I still remember the warm friendliness of everyone on the long train journey to the south of France. Somebody we knew - a woman artist, I seem to remember - had a little peasant cottage up in the high mountains near the French-Italian border. She had not seen it throughout the war years and was eager to go and see if it was still there and in what state. We were among a group she invited to join her and 'rough it' in sleeping bags or tents or whatever - if the place was still standing. At the last minute Dorothy could not make it - something special had come up in her trade union. She urged me to go anyway.

At the change of trains at Paris' *Gard St. Lazare* I noticed a young English couple. The man carried an artist's easel and both had rucksacks on their backs. I took a chance and accosted them. They were on their way to the same place. They told me the owner of the cottage should be at the place already, and another couple who were supposed to join us had dropped out. The man had been given a small part in a West End play. So it was just the three of us.

UWI LIBRARIES

My new companions - I had a mental block about their names from the outset - soon turned out to be what we now call hustlers or scufflers. I remember the young man as about my own age, perhaps an inch or two shorter, round-faced, with an unruly mop of thick black hair. He smiled often but it never reached his eyes; they were always calculating what he could or could not get way with. His girlfriend had the physical grace and freshness of a healthy, strong young woman at her peak. They could have been the same age or he could have been a little older. They seemed well matched that summer as we left the train at *Menton*.

We bought a huge dry salami and half a dozen freshly baked long thin loaves of bread, all struffed into a large brown paperback, two big bottles of red wine and started the long climb. After I had been manipulated into paying for the cushions we rented on the long train journey (we could not afford the sleeping car cost) and for most of the snacks we had, I decided firmly to stop being had. When my friend cocked his head and smiled at me, eyes calculating, almost invisibly rubbing his hands, I shook my head.

"Fifty-fifty."

There was a long pause. He turned to his girlfriend. She opened her handbag, took his wallet from it and handed it to him. He counted out his half of the bill and stuffed the wallet into his hip-pocket. It was visibly there for the first time. He could no longer pat his empty pockets, tilt his head, smile and make me pay the whole bill. It was fifty-fifty from then on. He was still getting the better of the deal. She was his, not my, girlfriend. It stayed fifty-fifty whenever we shopped together. In the two weeks that followed I did as much of my shopping as I could on my own. Apart from that they were pleasant

UWI LIBRARIES

enough and I enjoyed their company. The only embarrassment I experienced with them was their open, almost exhibitionist brand of having sex. Sex was a private thing for me.

It took us all day and many stops, and many a snack and many swigs along the ancient mountain track before the land levelled off. All day long we met mountain folk leading their laden donkeys turning off the main track into sidetracks taking them to settlements and houses that were scattered all about. Everybody greeted us; we returned everybody's greeting. We could not speak each other's language but we knew we were all friends. These mountains had been fierce partisan country not so long ago. Now they were all peaceful and the stranger was not the enemy.

Then, at about fourteen or fifteen thousand feet we began to see the Saracen architecture. My friend surprised me with his sudden enthusiasm. He had studied this stuff at art school and the rest of the way up he gave me an absorbing lesson on the Saracens and their mountaintop fortifications as they conquered this part of southern Europe. The Africans had been here, I smiled.

"What you smiling at? What'd I say so amusing?"

"I was just impressed by your knowledge."

He looked appeased.

It was dark when we reached the cottage, The moon was up. The land was bathed in the shadowy light that makes for fantasy and dreaming; for seeing visions and ghosts and silhouettes. We were so high up we could not see the twinkling lights of the coastal strip its gambling houses. Only the pale sky above; only the rolling, undulating mountains in every direction.

UWI LIBRARIES

A small light, as from an oil lamp, appeared and filtered through cracks in the wooden building. A voice, vaguely familiar to me, but more so to my companions, shouted from the cottage. My friend, call him Joey, screamed back and dashed for the door. We had grown anxious as night approached and we were alone on the high mountain. Now it was over; Joey's scream was pure relief. Two women were on the only bed in the far corner of the large room. The embers in the fireplace near the bed glowed faintly. The room was at least twice as warm as the chilly outside night air. The woman who sat up in bed, the owner of the cottage, was naked, her bare breasts, big and round, exposed. She ordered Joey to shut the door. made no attempt to cover her breasts. Just like an African mother, I thought. Her companion stayed deep under the bed covers, seemingly anxious to hide from our eyes. The Earth Mother got out of bed. wrapped herself in a thick dressing gown and welcomed us by reviving the fire and bringing out a flagon of wine. The one in bed rolled over, face to the wall, pulled the covering over her head and went to sleep, or pretended to. We ate and talked and drank far into the night. She and her companion were moving on in the morning. She instructed Joey to lock up the cottage when we left and take the key back to London. What was I going to do? I told her I wanted to do a little writing. She said I would find a typewriter and some paper tucked under all the rubbish in the cupboard. She had done that in case thieves broke in and ransacked the place. The typewriter had belonged to someone called David who used to come to the mountains with her to write. David had died in the war. I got the sense that David had been someone special to her. We finished the wine.She went back to bed. The young lovers unfolded their big sleeping bag, stripped naked, crawled into it. I wrapped myself in a blanket from the cupboard, fully clothed, as near the fire as I could without catching alight. I blew out the lamp. The young lovers almost immediately began the noises of love-

UWI LIBRARIES

making. It went on till I fell alseep.

When I awoke a watery morning sun had not yet warmed the world. The lovers were still in their sleeping looking relaxed and spent as two over-indulged children. The two women were nowhere in sight. The bed was made. A note on the pillow said there was hot tea and porridge and they were on their way to the Italian side of the border.

I spent the next ten days using David's typewriter and the ream of yellowing newsprint- type copy paper to write *The Path of Thunder*, a passionate inter-racial love story set in rural South Africa. I wrote it in ten days up there in the mountains the Saracens once controlled. It was not a good novel; it was a first draft which needed a deal more work done on it. But my mind had shifted to a much more important theme. I began the careful, much slower, much more measured first draft of *Mine Boy*. That one, I knew, could not and would not be dashed off. It was too important for that. And already, the dim outlines of *Tell Freedom* were beginning to take shape. I owe much to those two weeks in the high mountains in the south of France, and the peasant folk among whom I lived while these ideas germinated.

I also realised that I had slipped into a rut. Apart from writing, I needed a family. Not the 'family' of the 'movement' which seemed all the people like George Padmore and Dorothy wanted. I wanted a family in the old African way: a man, his woman and their children. I would talk to Dorothy to see if we could start a family. She had told me of the great love of her life. The committed man of the 'movement' who had gone to jail over the breaching of some official secrets and who had, after serving his jail sentence, written a best-selling book about it. She still saw him occasionally. When I met him in Charley Lahr's

UWI LIBRARIES

bookshop one day it dawned on me that she had told him about me. He was careful, polite and charming, but he obviously knew about me . When I asked her about it that night she was evasive. It surprised me because she had always been open and straightforward about her past. I asked if she was still seeing him. She said sometimes. I left it at that. Up there in the high mountains I decided to ask her about our starting a family. She was approaching forty and if we were to do so it would have to be soon. I had a premonition that she may not want this.

France in those days was DeGaulle's France. He had led the fight during the long German occupation. He had capped the liberation of France with his historic march into Paris while the guns were still firing in the streets and from the rooftops of Paris. France was DeGaulle, DeGaulle France. His pictures, larger than life, were everywhere. And DeGaulle's greatest and staunchest ally in the struggle against Nazi Germany was a black general in the army of France, Felix Eboué.

Eboue' had been one of the first black governors of a French Overseas Department. Where other imperial powers had colonies, France named her colonies Departments of France Overseas. Huge chunks of West Africa were Departments of France Overseas. Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and in the far east massive French Indo-China and an assortment of islands were all Departments of France Overseas. The French-held little islands of the Caribbean as well as the huge French Guyana were also Departments of France. And France Overseas, in the main, rallied behind DeGaulle and fought for the liberation of France.

This, in part, was due to French policy in her Departments. Assimilation,

UWI LIBRARIES

turning the elite of her overseas possessions into French men and women, was at its heart. The educated, those who spoke French, were citizens of France. The illiterate who did not speak French were subjects, not citizens of France. But the children of subjects could become citizens by turning themselves into black or brown or yellow Frenchmen and women. This was the complete opposite of British, Belgian and Dutch colonial policy; they were against assimilation; they were for segregation; the peoples of their colonies were subjects, not citizens.

Except in Indo-China, where France was up against a much more powerful culture than Europe understood, assimilation worked. Black Frenchmen of talent rose to high positions in the service of France; they married into French society; if they served in the Departments they sent their children to school in France. They planned for their sons and daughters to marry 'well' in France. There were no blacks in British, Dutch or Belgian high society. Blacks from the Departments of France were normal in French high society, usually married to French women of the right social class and background. The French managed the setting up of marriages very well. Any potential Governor of an Overseas Department will somehow meet just the right kind of young woman who would make a good wife and hostess for a man holding such a high position. It seemed to happen even at the literary level. When Daphne I moved from London to Paris in 1948 a well-known playwright took me up and introduced me to everyone in his circle: fellow playwrights, actors, artists, muscians. I thought it was because of a book I had just published. Then he discovered I was married. He dropped me so fast I did not know what had happened. I discovered later he was looking for a suitable husband for his very beautiful milk-and-coffee coloured daughter.

The French policy of assimilation, it seemed then, was of greater benefit

UWI LIBRARIES

to France in her hour of greatest need than were the segregationist policies of the Dutch in Indonesia, of the Belgians in the Congo, of the British in Africa. But the young men and women of the British West Indies did join Britain's armed forces in relatively great numbers. The only comparable figure to Felix Eboue for the British Commonwealth was the South African Boer General Jan Smuts who opposed those of his own people who supported Germany. But he was white. All the others, the Governors-General, the Governors, the High Commissioners were, at that time, Britons; or, if born where they served, white and of British descent. The most important of these was always the Governor-General of India. So the black Governor Eboué who declared "France lives on!" after the fall of France, remains the highest symbol of the success of the French policy of assimilation. French Indo-China, in general, and Vietnam in particular, as well as Algeria are the highest symbols of the failure of that policy.

Implicit in the idea of assimilation is the notion of the strong absorbing the weak. There is never assimilation between equals. Inter-marriage and co-existence, yes; never the notion that the one can take in and so transform the other that it ceases to be, or to show any traces of, what it was before the assimilation. The French succeeded in transforming a minority of blacks into Frenchmen. They failed singularly with black women. The offspring of black Frenchmen and their French wives, the French 'brownings' were French by definition but, surprisingly many made the choice to be, to see and proclaim themselves as black; they chose to become part of the unassimilated black majorities in the far-flung empire and, in the end, became the leaders in the anti-colonial struggle. They were the most educated, the most politically aware. As political control by the metropolis loosened the trend away from

UWI LIBRARIES

assimilation with Europe grew stronger. That which was once so desirable no longer attracted. The centres of power, in terms of race and colour had shifted. The Anglo-Indians, the 'Eurasians', who once clung to 'the British blood in their veins' became Indians, proud of Mother India. The West Indians who once jeered at Africans as 'monkey chasers', and who derided Marcus Garvey and his 'back-to-Africa' movement, rediscovered their blackness and found a new black pride, a new black beauty; and the 'wee-dropper' stuff of the British Caribbean quietly died. Africa replaced Britain as the Mother Country, the Mother Continent. It did not happen all at once. It was as gradual as the shift in political power. In South Africa the brown offspring of black and white at first clung to 'the privilege of the white blood in their veins', then became 'Eurafricans', a 'pure' new race of people and then, reluctantly in many instances, part of South Africa's black community. As late as at the end of *Apartheid*, though, a sizeable segment of the Cape/s Coloured community voted against Mandela's African National Congress and with the whites.

In the United States the blacks had moved from being Negroes to being 'Coloured people' to being 'Afro-Americans', to being 'African Americans' to being black people who wanted Africa to be great and powerful so that they would be respected in America. There was a movement away from hair straightening, skin bleaching and all the efforts to look as near white as possible. Looking African was ceasing to be seen as being ugly. Black was becoming beautiful. The long period of self-contempt, of being ashamed of what you were and how you looked, was beginning to come to a close. Only the beginning, though: emancipating ourselves from mental slavery, from the occupation of our minds by others was a longer-term

UWI LIBRARIES

thing. The end of physical occupation does not mean the simultaneous end of generations and centuries of mental indoctrination. However, the convergence between colour and power was becoming clearer in our time. Its starkest expressions was when the South African white racists made the citizens of the economically strong and growing Japan 'honorary white men'. These were the first signs that colour was ceasing to be colour in the old accepted way.

Back in London after my fortnight's holiday in the French Alps what had become a set routine of early morning writing then going to work, then returning to write some more before the end of the day, suddenly ended. I had moved from Central Books to regular sub-editing at the *Daily Worker*. I had made friends with the people at Central Books so I spent most of my lunch hours there helping out. The mood and atmosphere were less tense than at the paper where everybody always seemed on the verge of exploding. Perhaps it was the tension of meeting the daily deadline.

One day the office secretary-typist called me to her office. Another woman was there. The secretary introduced me then left us alone.

The woman said: "We've been checking our records and you're not on our files."

I did not understand. I looked blank.

"Your party record, comrade." She sounded impatient. "Where and when did you join? Can I see your membership card? I'm from the Control Commission."

My heart sank. " I don't have a card."

The woman stiffened. Her voice rose: "Not a party member?"

UWI LIBRARIES

"No."

"Then what are you doing here? She stormed out of the little office, telling everybody in earshot. "He's not a party member!"

I lost the job on the spot. I left feeling guilty, as though I had committed some grave crime. Nobody asked me any question or said anything to me. Everybody withdrew. The cashier made out my pay slip and shoved the money at me from behind her grille. It was the middle of the week, as I remember, and the amount I received was a little over two pounds. I walked round to Central Books. The news had preceded me. Nobody looked at me; nobody said anything. So I walked to Soho and told Charley Lahr what had happened. He comforted me with a cup of tea. As an old socialist, he said, he knew the ways of the communists. Would the socialists give me a job on their paper, I wondered. They were in power and I could be of use as a sub-editor.

"Have you got a union card?" Charley Lahr asked, eyes twinkling.

"No."

He shook his head. I was to discover, over the following weeks and months, just how hard it was for a black person to find a job in London after the war.

Neither Dorothy nor Padmore were surprised by the loss of my job. She said it was my fault; I should have joined despite my reservations. She thought if I tried to join the party now they would be suspicious and might turn me down. Padmore's surprise was that I had been there that long without them finding out I was not a party member. To him they were just slack, careless. Nothing like that could have happened in the Comintern or in the Soviet or any

UWI LIBRARIES

other party. I tried to explain I had not intended to deceive. I just felt that anyone who wanted to be a writer had no business joining political parties. Sympathies, yes; preferences and inclinations, yes. However, the need for the writer to see all sides of an issue or situation or person demanded the greatest detachment and objectivity humanly possible. Membership of any political party, especially one as rigidly immersed in ideological dogma, as the communist party, inevitably meant subordinating detachment and objectivity to the interests of the party. Neither George nor Dorothy agreed with me. They cited the great Maxim Gorky. I questioned whether he was a card-carrying party member. Not even George knew the answer. After hours of heated argument we agreed to disagree. It may be different for other writers. For me, from the very outset, being a writer was incompatible with membership in any serious political party which demanded strict adherence to its principles and policies. They said this was 'escapist', 'idealist', 'ivory tower' stuff. Being involved in the anti-imperialist struggle and the nationalist movements of that struggle, was altogether different. The persuit of human freedom is a writer's natural commitment, entered into freely, irrespective of the approval or disapproval of any political party. I could disagree and criticise specific policies or tactics of the African National Congress, or the Indian National Congress without being accused of, or having a sense of, betraying the movement. That is not possible with any more narrowly based political party.

"Bourgeois nonsense!" George snapped.

Arguing with dyed-in-the-wool marxists can be difficult.

I have, over the years, criticised things done by parties of the nationalist

UWI LIBRARIES

movements throughout the world without any sense of ambivalence. Kenyatta, when in power in Kenya, did not like my criticisms of their female circumcision; their tendency, in the early days, to keep all levers of power in the hands of the Kikuyu 'the tribe that won the war'. They said some harsh things about me in return. But because I was not 'the enemy' I was given the opportunity to talk back on their own controlled radio station. Those who were hostile to African independence tried to turn these criticisms into my 'pessimism' about African freedom. They were still trying to divide and rule. They did the same when I published *A Wreath For Udomo*. Kwame Nkrumah got word to me via Sam Morris when he visited Jamaica on his way to Guyana to expressed his disturbed appreciation. Nkrumah was overthrown a few years later. When I wrote critically about the situation in Liberia long before the vast later changes, they again saw it in terms of my 'pessimism' about African freedom. They turned my freedom to criticise my own, into yet another tool to belittle and undermine the struggle for African freedom. Fortunately, the nationalist movements of the world, from the mid-1940s on, had matured too much for that kind of playing off of each other. I could, now, look inward and criticise with love. I still, psychologically, looked over my shoulder to see how 'they' were reacting; but less so than in earlier times. The freedom to say 'I love you but you are wrong here and you are wrong there', and to know that they understand and do not see you as a traitor, is a wonderful freedom. It is a freedom I hope the Irish revolutionaries will achieve before this century's close. It would stop their internecine bloodletting. It would lead them out of their present cul-de-sac. It is the kind of freedom which is essential for the writer to function at his or her best. If there is any residual anger left in me it is that it took so long to work my way through to the point where I could recognise and so use this freedom. This looking inward, this holding up of a

UWI LIBRARIES

mirror, critically, harshly so at times, but always with love, is, for me, the most important function of the writer. Those of us who are black writers have spent far too much time in protest, in polemics, in attack, in the struggle for freedom. It had to be done. It was a necessity, not a virtue. It was also inhibiting and crippling. Now, at last, there is the prospect of the black writer being just a writer who happens to be black and whose job, in the main, is to explore our black humanity and our black experience as part of the whole spectrum of the human condition. What a pity we had to struggle so long and so hard to get to this point. I think of all the poets and dreamers who had to fight their way past this psychological barrier of colour erected by Europe and its imperialism. Now, at last, in the closing stages of this twentieth century, the end to that barrier seems in sight. The end of the day of the protest novel promises a healthier new literature for the descendants of DuBois' darker races of mankind. And that, surely, must be good for all mankind.

It should make it possible for us to rid ourselves of the vast mythological superstructure of blood and race and colour nonsense which has been part of 'the black man's burden' in the twentieth century.

There is no pure 'race'; no pure blood. The entire human race is a mixed race or, if you prefer, a single race, said to have come out of Africa at the beginning of human time. After a dicey period about its survival that race spread throughout the world, changing its environment and being changed by its environment: not evolving into a different species here and a different species there, but the same species with the same genetic make-up, changing and adapting to survive. So when 'Mr. Garvey' wrote about the purity of the black race or the yellow race it was a psychological and emotional response to the white racism of the times. Black men were

UWI LIBRARIES

lynched in parts of the United States for 'raping' white women by the mere act of looking at them. How do you respond to that if you cannot stop the lynching? You say I do not have to look at your women, let alone rape them; I don't want anything of yours, I have my own and I am proud of what I am and what I have. This is a racist response to racism. It could not be otherwise in a world where skin colour had been invested with such exaggerated qualities. I am my colour; my colour defines me, determines whether I am good our bad, rich or poor, high or low, free or slave, beautiful or ugly. In such a context, anyone, of any colour, would want his particular colour to be the dominant one, the preferred colour, the colour of God's chosen people. So Garvey redefined colour to serve our interests. He wanted his black folk to be the equal of all other colours. He wanted all blacks - and for him it included all shades of black - to be as proud of their colour as were the whites of theirs: no intermarriage, no mixing of blood. Yet all humanity, in all its variety is of one blood. Our genes, our genetic make-up, our blood types, in all their variety, are the same for all people of all colours. Blood knows no colour. And still we, all of us - black, brown, yellow, white - have carried this debilitating burden of colour throughout this century. It is, historically, unsustainable in the centuries ahead. Those who would exploit their fellow beings in that future will have to devise new means of manipulation and management. Early signs of these new forms are beginning to take shape in the new economic vision being offered. The nature of things is changing, and the greatest, and in a sense the most foolish, of all the tools of control in our century, is on its way out. Its going is not without pain but the problem of the twenty-first century will not be the problem of the colour line. This does not necessarily mean that the relations between the lighter and darker races of mankind will become 'normal', without further grief and

UWI LIBRARIES

pain. The scars, visible and invisible, are too deep for that. The psychological effects of three hundred years of slavery followed by a century of racism will linger long into the new century. If we understand this we may help make the process of mental liberation easier and less damaging than it might otherwise be. The big thing is to finally put an end to the beast of racism, in all its shapes and forms: white racism, its responsive black racism, and the massive edifice of racial stereotypes built up over time to justify a manifest evil. As with all great evils, atonement must be part of the resolution and the settlement.

I began thinking seriously about this when we finally found Coyaba, the place of tranquility, in the high hills of Jamaica, where contemplating the nature of things came more easily than anywhere else on earth I have been. The matter of atonement will be the substance of the final part of these chronicles of the remembrances and recollections of one black man of the events, places, people and experiences over the best part of this century. The perspective will be 'Third World' non-Western, non-European; not as protest or criticism but as part of the ongoing search for 'balance' in the desire to assert our place in tomorrow's world.

UWI LIBRARIES

The history of our time has been, in the main, the story of Europe and North America This is natural: history has always been what happened to the dominant groups: those who conquered and dominated and controlled. All accounts, all records, all the news, were always from their perspective. They decided what was or was not news; what was or was not important. They owned the newspapers, the radio and television networks; they decide what was printed and broadcast and shown. They published the books and the magazines. They controlled the means of communication and so they

controlled communication itself. Their wars were the world's wars; their heroes the world's heroes, their villain's the world's villains. What happened elsewhere was judged and evaluated by how it affected the interests of Europe and America. They determined how we saw their world and how we saw our own world. For East Africa to know about West Africa, East Africans had to read or listen to the news by way of Europe. Our history, our news and our current affairs programmes, the 'think pieces' in our newspapers came from Europe and America, written by Europeans and Americans. Experts on Africa and Asia were Europeans and Americans. Foreign correspondents who reported on the Third World from faraway places were Europeans and Americans. Only a tiny fraction, a token group, in these latter days, are natives of the countries from which they file their stories: then their stories are filtered through the prism of European-American interests. This century belonged to them. They determined how we saw it; what was important; what we thought of it.

To the extent that there were divisions among them, we had some small choice: we could decide which view of that history to see and hear and accept. We were the passive receivers, not the activist participants in the making of that history. Even where we were allowed to participate it was on their terms. George Padmore, the important operative of the Comintern, became dispensable when Soviet interests changed. Felix Eboue` the black man born in French Guyana who became Governor of French Equatorial Africa and played a pivotal role in the Western Allies winning the war in Africa, does not get a footnote in the history of that war as written by the British and Americans. The French, with their assimilationist policy, do better. Eboue' is a hero of France, buried in the Pantheon in Paris. Not even Jan

UWI LIBRARIES

Smuts, a Field marshal of the British Empire, is buried in Westminister Abbey, let alone any black servant of the British Colonial Empire and Commonwealth.

I found Jan Smuts in a popular computer CD-ROM encyclopedia, Felix Eboue` was not in it. The perspective, the choices, what is included or left out, how it is presented, made the world of the darker races of mankind peripheral to the history of our time.

The new world of the computer with its instant communication is fast changing all that. Is it surprising that the Indians in particular and the Asians in general are emerging as the great 'techies' of the computer? You sit at a little machine and you can talk to anyone anywhere in the world who has a similar little machine. That same little machine hooks you up to the news centres of the world and you see and hear, at the same time, what the natives in Moscow, Peking, London, Paris, Berlin, Washington, Tokyo, Cairo, Johannesburg are seeing and hearing. Management and control become less possible. Any smart young person anywhere in the world, siting in front of his/her computer, can launch a Web Page and tell the world what they think. That was not possible till now.

I downloaded portions of the South African *Truth & Reconciliation Commision*'s report the day it was presented to Nelson Mandela and posted on the Internet. Time, space and distance had been conquered! What a difference it would have made if George Padmore had been able to use the computer to run what, in retrospect, was the first worldwide non-aligned news service. Instead of the slowly-typed carbon-copied information taking two or three weeks to reach, it would have been in the intended hands within hours of dispatch. Indeed the recipients would have had instant access to the news themselves, needing

UWI LIBRARIES

only Padmore's interpretation or editorial slant on the news. DuBois' darker races can now speak to each other directly. The Indian National Congress and the South African National Congress now have their own websites and the expatriates of Africa and India, and all the others who want to, can now speak directly to these bodies. Wherever I am I am no longer a long way from home, wherever home is and whoever I am, European, African or Asian.

And with little effort, and at little cost, the peoples of the earth, of all races and colours, can talk to each other across time and space with minimal interference from political parties or powerful governments. The little personal computer is the most potent antidote to exploitation by the use of fear and ignorance.

I once watched a tall skinny young black boy, about twenty or so, in a small room in a modest home in the St. Andrew hills 'chatting' to three friends in rural North America by way of an internet hook-up, the sophistication of which I still do not quite understand. It was young people stuff: a mixture of serious information interspersed with light banter and the kind of flirting common when young people get together - even in cyberspace. It was easy and familiar.

After he signed off I asked: "Ever met any of them?"

"No; but they'll be visiting. I'll meet them on the North Coast."

"Black Americans?"

"Don't think so." That question didn't really interest him.

We turned to the problem with my computer.

UWI LIBRARIES