The role of slavery in the history of capitalist and pre-capitalist societies has become a central problem in Marxist and "neo-Marxist" discourse over recent years. In the development of the Jamaican labour force, the transition from slavery to complete legal freedom (finally won in 1838 as a result of the passage of the Emancipation Act in the British Parliament) stands as perhaps the most significant formative event. But the process of the tran-
transition from slave labour to wage labour was a complex one, spanning some one hundred years. The legacy of almost two centuries of slavery meant that once free from their master's control, the newly emancipated were extremely reluctant to return to the plantations to labour for wages. Moreover, the geographic and demographic conditions of early nineteenth-century Jamaica presented the freed slaves with tangible alternative means of support. Vast acres of uncultivated, mountainous land, and further acres of land previously cultivated but since abandoned by bankrupt planters were occupied by the former slaves and developed into small agricultural plots. Work for wages on the plantations was, in the early years after emancipation, performed essentially as supplementary employment. The attachment to private land cultivation was reinforced by the legacy of the "provision grounds system" in place during the years of slavery. All but the most privileged slaves, such as the domestics for whom food was provided by their masters, were allotted plots of estate land not suitable for sugar cultivation, usually in the mountainous areas, upon which they raised produce for their own diet. In the majority of cases, only a small portion of the slaves' food (such as saltfish, which the slaves could not produce for themselves) was provided by their masters. The extent to which the planters relied on slave-grown rather than imported food for their chattels varied, but the peculiarities of Jamaica's geography ensured that this system was by and large extremely widespread on the island.

After emancipation, it was only when land availability and the profitability of small plot production were outstripped by the growth of the labour force that this "re-constituted peasantry" began to function as a more classical wage labour force on the agricultural estates. These conditions began to come into play around the 1880s, but it was not until the turn of the century that the pattern could be fully discerned.

If the purpose of sound Marxist analytical theory is to understand real events in the real world, then this particular historical sequence in the Jamaican class struggle poses some very important and controversial problems. The historical picture can be summarized, crudely, as follows: a class of slaves who were also cultivators, became peasants who were also wage workers. (Later they became wage workers who continued to
cultivate private plots of land, but this second phase of the process takes us beyond the scope of this discussion.) The central question to be considered here is how do we explain this dramatic transition in labour force organization in terms of the existing mode, or modes, of production? In the following discussion, it will be argued that this process, despite the differing forms of labour organization or the differing processes of surplus extraction from labour performed, was characterized by a single mode of production in the historical, epochal sense in which Marx uses the term—a capitalist mode of production. At the same time, the very real distinctions between these various forms of labour organization cannot be overlooked or conveniently subsumed under one single analytical category. It will be further argued that in another sense in which Marx uses the term “mode of production” (or, put differently, taken from another plane of analysis referring to the technical aspects of the organization of production) each historical instance is a distinct “mode”. It is the capitalist mode of production in the historical sense, however, which shapes the dynamic relationship between the exploiters and the direct producers, and thereby similarly shapes and alters the technical aspects of the production process. A failure to conceptualize this historical process as one of changing forms of labour organization within a unitary capitalist mode of production leads to confusion about the very nature of capitalism as a process of production, and to a distorted understanding of the course of the Jamaican class struggle.

The insight that the term “mode of production” must be understood as bearing two distinct meanings in Marx’s work is traceable to a pathbreaking article by Jairus Banaji entitled “Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History”. Banaji’s argument is developed in the context of the general “modes of production” controversy that has loomed in contemporary Marxist circles over the last decade. Though it is beyond the scope of this discussion to give a detailed summary of the “modes” debate, two general perspectives can be broadly, if simplistically, identified as bearing particular relevance for an understanding of modes of production in underdeveloped countries in general, and the transition from slavery to emancipation in the English Caribbean in particular.
The first view follows from the “dependency” perspective, traceable largely to the work of André Gunder Frank. This view maintains that the capitalist mode of production became globally dominant as early as the fifteenth century with the rise of colonialism in the Americas. Frank’s original arguments have been so widely and extensively criticized that a summary of the critiques is hardly necessary. The failure to recognize the centrality of the concept of class, and the emphasis on relations of exchange rather than relations of production are only two of the most glaring weaknesses in Frank’s theoretical framework. Probably the single most widely acclaimed critique of Frank’s perspective using a Marxist approach, however, is Ernesto Laclau’s “Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America”. As an alternative to the metropolis/satellite model put forward in Frank’s dependency approach, Laclau identifies the various modes of production which exist in underdeveloped countries. Rather than Frank’s single (misconceived) global capitalist mode of production, Laclau suggests an analysis incorporating numerous modes of production, some pre-capitalist and some capitalist, which are “articulated” in a hierarchical order of “dominance”.

Laclau’s approach was widely received as a refreshing return to a classical Marxist framework, but one which continued to shed light upon societies that did not exemplify patterns common to Western capitalism. Of particular import for the current discussion, the most sophisticated Marxist analysis to date of Jamaican labour, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath*, by Ken Post has been written from the theoretical standpoint elaborated by Laclau. Laclau’s perspective, developed within the “structuralist” school of Marxist analysis, is however no less misguided than Frank’s. It is in identifying this misplaced interpretation of Marx’s work that Banaji’s contribution is essential. Laclau, among others described (correctly) by Banaji as “vulgar Marxists”, has reduced Marx’s notion of a mode of production as an historical epoch of social organization governed by certain historically specific laws of motion, to a crude, empirical measurement of numbers and types of workers. In the process, Marx’s use of the term “mode of production” in the general, historical sense has been collapsed into the second usage of the term in the more technical sense referring to the immediate relations of production. Both meanings of the term, and the Marxist
method in general, are distorted in this interpretation. In Marx’s work, the labour process is consistently treated as subordinate to the mode of production in the historical sense, for which the central, determining factor is the social relations of production. It is not the form in which labour is performed that distinguishes, for example, the feudal mode of production from the capitalist mode. More importantly, the labour process does not determine the specific laws of motion which compel the process of surplus extraction to be conducted in a given way. On the contrary, for Marx, it is the mode of production in the historical sense which is pivotal in shaping the labour process.

The critical feature in defining the capitalist mode of production in the historical sense is not the presence of wage labour as a phenomenon, but the social relationship between wage labour and capital. The distinct feature of the wage labour form is not primarily how it is paid for, but that it stands, in Marx’s terms, as “capital-posing, capital-producing labour.” Thus, pre-capitalist forms of labour may be, in terms of their relation to the dominant historical mode of production, “capital-producing labour” without being directly paid in the form of wages; similarly, in pre-capitalist epochs, labour paid in the form of wages was not “capital-producing”.

The framework elaborated by Laclau and adopted by Post fails to theoretically differentiate capitalism as a unique, self-expanding mode of surplus extraction, from particular forms of labour or form of surplus production. As a result, Post is unable to explain the specific process of the transition from slavery to wage labour. When he attempts to account for post-emancipation Jamaican labour force development, his inadequate explanation of the movement from slavery to freedom lends confusion to his understanding of the role of private landholding. Simply on its merits as the most sophisticated Marxist analysis of Jamaican class development, Post’s work deserves some further examination. But even more importantly, as an adherent of the structuralist interpretation of “modes of production”, and one who has made a serious effort to apply and operationalize such an approach, Post’s contribution bears upon contemporary Marxist discourse, especially concerning the understanding of underdeveloped countries. A brief critical examination of Post’s interpretation of Jamaican class development is therefore in order.
Post: Some Critical Comments  For Post, like Laclau, modes of production as epochs or periods in social history are indistinguishable from the particular form of labour organization. The expansion of peasant labour is identified as a "peasant mode of production"; slave labour, as a "slave mode of production", etc. In such a framework, there are ostensibly as many modes of production as there are types of work. But as we have argued, the actual motive forces of these "modes", the overall dynamic shaping the way surplus is extracted and classes interact, cannot be explained merely by describing the forms of labour organization involved. The general dynamic of the production process must be taken into account. Post cannot explain the dynamic drive for the production of surplus value which characterized the class relations between the planters and the slave labourers.11

Post places analytical categories—"structures", "modes of production", etc.—prior to the actual historical reality and experiences of social classes, in this case, the Jamaican labourers. As a result, his framework not only fails to enhance our understanding of concrete historical reality, but actually lends confusion to it. Even from the vantage point Post adopts, the categories he employs are eclectic and contradictory. This is particularly striking when he refers to the transition period from slavery to emancipation. Jamaica prior to emancipation is variously referred to as constituting a "slave mode of production", "an instance of metropolitan mercantile capitalism", a "colonial mode", and two modes of production which were both "complementary" and "antagonistic" consisting of slave gang labour and provision grounds cultivation. At the same time, Post relies heavily and explicitly on Williams' analysis, placing West Indian slavery firmly in the centre of the British capitalist project.12 Further, Post considers a fully developed "peasant mode of production" to be inherently "non-capitalist". In fact, production based on private agricultural development has, in certain conditions, operated as not merely compatible with capitalist accumulation but essential to it.13

It is also not at all clear why this new peasant mode of production, antagonistic to the capitalist concerns of the Jamaican planters and to the interests of British colonialism, would be instituted by British Parliamentary decree, i.e. on the initiative of capitalist interests. Post correctly points out
that the emancipation of the slaves was intended to create a new agricultural wage labour force, but instead, a peasantry developed. What he cannot explain however is why, from as early as the late 1860s, up through the years following the island-wide labour rebellion that took place in 1938, significant efforts to encourage land parcellization among the peasantry were made by the British colonial government.

Post argues that it was the combined efforts of the Colonial Office and the local planting interests which prevented the full development of this competing peasant mode. He does this primarily by noting the extensive acreage of land repossessed by the government from peasant squatters between 1867 and 1901. What Post neglects to point out, however, is that these same lands were rented out on seven-year leases to the peasantry by the government. Moreover, following on the heels of a rebellion at Morant Bay in 1865, the new government Lands Department offered some minimal land reform proposals. When Crown lands were not being purchased at a sufficient rate by the peasantry due to high fees, the government initiated changes in the law to encourage further settlement. Land reform was also initiated after the 1938 rebellion.

As Post correctly points out, land policies tended to be transformed into plans for settlement, but not for development, of peasant properties. For Post, however, it is ownership (or even rental) and cultivation of the land that defines the peasantry as part of a distinct mode of production, not the extent of land productivity. If Post were consistent, land settlement alone, regardless of development, would therefore be sufficient to promote the “peasant mode of production”. In other words, the encouragement of settlement would by itself, according to this logic, promote the peasant mode of production at the expense of the capitalist mode of production. It therefore remains unclear why the ruling class in the capitalist mode of production would undertake to promote the interests of its competitors.

It should not be implied that the peasantry in Jamaica did not remain a severely oppressed, under-represented and impoverished section of the population. Nor should it be suggested that the motivations of the colonial government were altruistic. But any analysis of the nature of the mode (or modes) of production in Jamaica, and therefore, of the nature
of the forms of exploitation must take such realities into account.

Post fails to grasp the theoretical distinction between the two planes of analysis which employ the notion of a mode of production; nor, therefore, can he explain the nature of a capitalist process of surplus extraction in conditions where the wage labour form is not pervasive. The developmental process of the Jamaican labour force cannot be adequately conceptualized from his perspective. Let us attempt then, to address this question from an alternative approach.

**Slavery in Jamaica and the Capitalist Mode of Production** The question which follows is whether or not slavery in the particular context of early nineteenth century (and by implication, late eighteenth century) Jamaica was or was not part of the capitalist mode of production, in either meaning of the term. If plantation slavery in Jamaica during the period under study was “capital-positing, capital-producing labour”, then it would have contributed to the historical development of the capitalist mode of production. In this there can be little doubt.

Probably more than any other slaveholding stratum, the British Caribbean planters were deeply involved in industrial capitalist enterprise. Three-quarters of all land and slaves in Jamaica were the property of absentee owners living in Britain. In his classic study, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams has argued that the surplus yielded as a result of slave labour on the plantations of the West Indian colonies was central in fuelling the growth of commerce and industry in eighteenth century Britain. Further research, however, has called Williams’ argument into question by providing evidence that the actual percentage of wealth generated by the West Indian colonies was only a small proportion of the total. In addressing the question of whether or not Jamaican slavery represented capital-producing labour, however, the quantitative contribution of plantation profits to British industry is actually immaterial. What is significant is that the major portion of the surplus accumulated was in the form of capital. It is useful to return to Marx for clarification: “The colonies provided a market for the budding manufactures, and a vast increase in accumulation which was guaranteed by the mother country’s monopoly of the market. The treasures captured outside Eu-
rope by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there."\textsuperscript{22} It is important to note that the surplus accumulated from plantation production was only transformed into capital once it was sent back to the "mother-country".

Plantation slavery therefore appears to present itself as an anomaly in the development of capitalist production.\textsuperscript{23} A system based on slave labour was fostered during the rise of a system based fundamentally on the economic freedom of labour. But, if we understand wage labour as "capital-positing labour", and not simply as labour paid in wages, then the apparent anomaly disappears.\textsuperscript{24} Jamaican slavery can be identified as part of the general historic epoch during which capitalism became predominant as a "mode of production" on a world scale. Yet the specific form of labour exploitation was not marked by the wage labour/capital relationship. In the technical sense of the concept, Jamaican plantation slavery therefore cannot be considered to be a capitalist "mode of production".

At the same time as slavery was contributing to capitalist expansion during a specific historical period, the drive towards ever more efficient and technologically superior forms of capital accumulation, inherent in the capitalist production process, also meant that plantation slavery ultimately became obsolete. By the early nineteenth century, the slave system ceased to be supported by the major industrial interests in Britain. As capitalist production in Europe became increasingly dominant, the capitalist mode of production in the technical sense also became more pervasive. Marx summarizes the case succinctly when he writes:

Capitalist production therefore reproduces in the course of its own process the separation between labour-power and the conditions of labour. It thereby replaces and perpetuates the conditions under which the worker is exploited... The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourers.\textsuperscript{25}

The predominance of Jamaican slavery in international capitalist development can only be explained by considering the original process through which a market in wage labourers
was developed. While such a discussion cannot be addressed here in detail, a brief examination of this issue is pivotal to an understanding of the similarities and differences between the production relations of slavery and those of wage labour.

Merchant Capital, Slavery and the Primitive Accumulation of Capital  The Atlantic slave trade was one element in the era of international trade dominated by European merchant interests. New World slavery began as early as 1502 with the Portuguese establishment of trading posts along the West Coast of Africa. The importation of slaves steadily grew over the seventeenth century, reached a peak in the eighteenth, and declined in the nineteenth. Slavery was an essential part of the mercantile era, or the era dominated by merchant capital. Contrary to the view suggested by Williams, however, it was not the slave trade which spurred the industrial revolution in England. The hallmark of the industrial revolution was not merely the remarkable rate of expansion of production, but the nature of the process of that expansion. Most significantly, production was increased by the constant revolutionizing of the very process of production. Such a transformation could not have been based solely upon the expansion of merchant capital, which was dependent upon the buying and selling of commodities at an unequal rate of exchange. The industrial revolution, irreversibly in full sway by the early nineteenth century, was based on the expansion of the capacities of production, not merely on an expanded process of exchange. The difference between merchant and industrial capital was not, however, rooted fundamentally in the different technological means of expansion. The social relation of capital to wage labour compelled the drive to accumulation, and therefore compelled the development of increased productive capacity. As Brenner has persuasively argued, merchant capital was not, and could not be, based on this relation.26

The slaves thus served as commodities, bought and sold for a profit, and as such contributed to the profits of merchant capital, though the slave trade was not the central element in the expansion of industrial capital. The Atlantic slave trade was part of the “triangular trade”: the British towns of Bristol, Liverpool, London and Glasgow stood at one corner, the West Coast of Africa at the second, and the West Indian plantation
islands at the third. The slaves were human commodities whose particular exchange value varied depending upon the exigencies of international and local markets, and whose use value to the planters was measured in terms of the slaves' productive capacities as manual labourers.

The merchant trade, or large-scale commerce, is not the equivalent of a capitalist system of production. In fact it has been argued that the expansion of merchant capital actually reinforced feudal social relations and acted as an obstacle to the development of specifically capitalist, or bourgeois, social relations. The process through which such specifically capitalist relations developed, Marx referred to as "primitive accumulation". This process involved the development of "two very different kinds of commodity owners; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to valorize the sum of values they have appropriated by buying the labour-power of others; on the other hand free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour... With the polarization of the commodity-market into these two classes, the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are present."

The primitive accumulation of capital involved the forced separation of masses of labourers from the land in parts of Europe. This separation was achieved particularly through the enclosures in England. Beginning as early as the fifteenth century, but primarily throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, communal properties, or individual properties operating in a system of communal agriculture, were taken and reallocated into private plots. The small plots of land were inadequate to support the majority of cultivators once communal properties were no longer accessible. By the eighteenth century, a landless rural wage labour force had developed.

As capitalist means of production in England expanded, capital also became internationally mobile. The planters' investments in sugar production in the West Indies operated as part of this process. In order to be productive, however, international capital also required an international market in labour power. At the time of plantation development in Jamaica, such a market on an international scale did not yet exist. The enclosures encouraged the development of a wage labour market domestically, but there was as yet no such pool
of workers accessible to British capital internationally. The potential indigenous Amerindian labour force in Jamaica had been destroyed by the brute force of colonial settlement. Voluntary migration was not possible, for in the isolated pockets of the world where a free proletarian labour force had come to fruition, the local demand for labour was high. European indentured servitude, almost obsolete by the time of British settlement in Jamaica in 1655, also proved inadequate.

The problem was not only one of acquiring a labour force completely separated from the land, but also of keeping the labourers from resettling on the vast tracts of uncultivated land available for the planters. African labourers were separated from their lands at the moment of capture, and were prevented from settling on Jamaican lands by forced restriction of movement. The identifiable colour and features of the Negro race operated as an additional obstacle to land occupation.

The choice of Africa as a source of slave labour is, as Mintz has stated, an issue which "remains less than self-explanatory". At the peak of Jamaican slavery, no two eighteenth-century societies could be identified as greater polar opposites: England standing as the most advanced capitalist centre, and the entire African continent standing as yet on the periphery of international capitalism. The point is that a mass, apparently inexhaustible, labour force was available, which suited the economic needs of both merchants and planters; and the racial distinction supported the emergence of an acceptable, ideological justification for the enslavement of millions of African residents.

It was at the point of their enslavement in Africa that black rural cultivators were first forcibly removed from the land as a means of production. Before the arrival of the Europeans, labour power was not a marketable commodity. Once sold to the white masters to labour on the plantations, the constant threat of torturous punishment or death for attempting to escape compelled them to continue to labour on the plantations.

It is significant that one of the main arguments against emancipation raised by the Jamaican planters was that the abundance of available land would prevent the development
of a class of voluntary wage labourers among the freed slaves. This concern received support from the Colonial Office, under the increasing influence of the work of E.G. Wakefield, written in reference to the abundance of land in the Australian colonies. Wakefield’s views were also influential in the formation of post-emancipation immigration policies for the West Indies. While he was opposed to the inefficient and cruel method of slavery as a means of establishing the proper balance between land and labour, Wakefield’s alternative was to call for the “systematic colonization” of British territories in order to prevent the development of an independent class of land-owning peasant producers. It is also notable that upon emancipation, some of the worst fears of the planting class were realized with the widespread settlement of unoccupied lands by the freed slaves. Wakefield cites exactly such an incident befalling one Mr. Peel, who left England for Swan River, West Australia, equipped with 50,000 pounds worth of means of production and 3,000 working class men, women and children. The abundance of land in Australia, however, left Mr. Peel “without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.”

The slave trade was thus not central to the capitalist accumulation process; but once purchased by the planters, slave labour contributed to the growth of capitalist accumulation through plantation production. The Jamaican slave plantations developed at a point in history when identifiably capitalist relations were becoming dominant in Britain. The peak of Jamaican sugar production was in the eighteenth century; by the 1750s, Jamaica was producing more sugar than had all of the English islands combined in 1700. Slave labour on the plantations was capital-producing, not primarily because it yielded tremendous profits when conditions were favourable, but fundamentally because of the interrelation of plantation production with capitalist relations abroad. The slaves were not wage labourers, but without the existence of the wage labour/capital social relation, slave labour could not have been capital-producing labour. Were it not for the general contribution of wage labour to the expansion of capitalist production, slavery would not have been part of the capitalist mode of production in the historical, epochal sense of the term. It was from this vantage point that Marx drew a distinction between the pre-capitalist slavery of antiquity, and plantation
studies in political economy

slavery in the Americas: "In antiquity, one could buy labour, a slave, directly; but the slave could not buy money with his labour. The increase of money could make slaves more expensive, but could not make their labour more productive. Negro slavery...presupposes wage labour, and if other, free states with wage labour did not exist alongside it, if, instead, the Negro states were isolated, then all social conditions there would immediately turn into pre-civilized forms."37

There are many aspects of plantation labour which are similar to those of classical proletarian labour—not only in terms of the general relationship to capitalist production, but also in terms of the concrete labour process. Like wage labourers, the slaves owned no means of production, a fact which compels Patterson to conclude that they were "capitalistic or quasi-capitalistic workers pure and simple".38 The slaves laboured in conditions which involved large numbers of workers whose collective labour was divided into numerous unskilled and skilled tasks. Marx referred to this form of production as "a purely industrial slavery", and James has noted that "they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time".39 It could also certainly be argued that in the early development of the proletariat in Europe, conditions not dissimilar to those characteristic of plantation slavery prevailed.40 However, to simply collapse the distinction between slave and free labour is problematic indeed. The distinction is a real one, both in terms of the political economy and (of crucial importance for the study at hand) in terms of the actual experiences of the direct producers themselves. If a theoretical framework is to shed light on our understanding of such experiences, then it must point out not only the similarities between slave and free labour in the capitalist mode of production in the historical sense, but also the features which differentiate them from one another as modes of production in the technical sense. This leads us to a discussion of the difference between "absolute" and "relative" surplus value.

Absolute and Relative Surplus Value  Plantation slavery in Jamaica was capital-producing labour, and hence produced surplus value. Only under certain specific conditions, however, could plantation slavery prove to be a profitable source of
investment. Profitable production meant continuous potential for expansion, especially in light of increasing competition on the world market. The conditions necessary for slave plantation expansion were: (1) the availability of fresh land; (2) a steady supply of new slaves; and (3) a high level of demand for plantation products on the international market. The rise of Jamaican plantation development followed upon the demise of Barbados as the prime sugar-producing island in the British Empire. Plantation development in Jamaica operated as the colonial version of a “moving frontier” to open up new lands. The expansion of the Jamaican plantation system was not based primarily on technological innovation or on increasing the productivity of labour per hour, but on applying more person-hours of labour at essentially the same rate of productivity to the enterprise. To the extent that labour productivity was increased, the means used to achieve this was mainly the threat of the whip.

Plantation production was based on absolute surplus value, though it differed from the classic form Marx describes in *Capital*. The classic form of increasing the rate of extraction of absolute surplus value was to extend the number of hours during which wage labour was employed per working day. The distinction between the production of absolute and relative surplus value concerns the way in which surplus value is increased over any given working day. In contrast to absolute surplus value, produced by increasing the number of hours worked rather than by increasing productivity per hour, Marx identified relative surplus value as “that surplus-value which arises from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day...” The production of relative surplus value thus implies the constant transformation of the immediate process of production, the revolutionizing of the mode of production in the specific, technical meaning of the term. Plantation slavery was thus based essentially on the extraction of absolute surplus value. If Jamaican slave labour figures in the matrix of the capitalist mode of production in the historical, epochal sense, the fact of slavery differentiated the historical mode from the capitalist mode of production in the specific, technical sense. For the distinguishing characteristic of what Marx termed the “specifically capi-
talist mode of production" i.e., the technical meaning of the concept, was precisely determined by the production of relative surplus value.\textsuperscript{45}

Historically, the production of absolute surplus value precedes the production of relative surplus value. Once the wage labour/capital social relationship, or the capitalist mode of production in the historical sense, is established however, the tendency is also to extend the "specifically capitalist mode of production" in the technical sense. There is also a tendency for the production of absolute surplus value to be replaced by the production of relative surplus value. The two tendencies are not isolated from one another. The production of relative surplus value necessitates the complete separation of labour power and capital as distinct commodities. Only when this separation is complete (marked by the emergence not only of capital as such, but also by the development of a free wage labour force) can labour be totally subordinated to the dictates of capitalist production. Marx made a distinction between forms of capitalist accumulation where labour was only "formally" subsumed under capital, and accumulation where labour was "really" subsumed under capital. The "formal subsumption of labour under capital" occurs in conditions based on the production of absolute surplus value; the "real subsumption of labour under capital, i.e., capitalist production proper" only occurs once production is based on relative surplus value.\textsuperscript{46} The former obliges the labourer to work under compulsion; the latter compels the labourer to work in order to ensure her/his own reproduction, and appears to be a voluntary, "free" arrangement under the circumstances. Though Marx developed this distinction in reference to forms of paid labour, an analogy can be drawn in reference to plantation slavery and wage labour. Plantation slavery can be placed under the category of a system based on the formal subsumption of labour under capital; upon emancipation, the real subsumption of labour under capital came into existence as production became based on the extraction of relative surplus value.

The "specifically capitalist mode of production", based on the production of relative surplus value and marking the real and complete subsumption of labour under capital, produces at the most efficient and productive capacity socially possible at any given time. Moreover, the very process of the produc-
tion of relative surplus value ensures the reproduction of the capitalist system itself. Surplus value is continually reinvested into more efficient technology that can replace human labour power; and the cost of reproducing human labour power is itself supplied in the allocation of wages.

Production based on absolute surplus value (in this case, as a product of plantation slave labour) lacks these essential characteristics. Plantation production in Jamaica during the period under study was capitalist production, and was therefore subject to the constant drive for increased accumulation; its expansion was not, however, based on constantly improving its technological capacities. Generally speaking, when the slave economy went into crisis due to declining markets, decreasing land fertility, etc., the result was either stagnation and decline, or an expansion of production at essentially the same level of productivity. The primary means by which productivity levels were sustained was the expansion of land.47 It was in such a context that, in 1804, the argument developed in the Jamaican Assembly that “far from being, in all cases, a symptom of prosperity, extending plantations is not unfrequently a paroxysm of despair”.48 Moreover, technology was not only left largely undeveloped on the Jamaican plantations, it was positively held back. Even the horse-drawn plough was not used to replace the hoe. The planters had to find ways to keep the slaves occupied during the slow season of the annual sugar cycle—the six month period from July through December—in order to offset the tendency to rebellion.49 Rather than seeking labour-saving innovations, the planters sought means to increase the amount of manual labour expended per unit of output.

The plantations were thus dependent primarily upon the expansion of the estate for continued capital reproduction; for the reproduction of the labour force, they were primarily dependent upon the slave market. Because labour productivity was not seriously increased to expand production, the aim was simply to purchase labourers who were already considered to be at the prime of their physical capabilities. The slaves were worked at a pace which led to death at an early age, and were then replaced by new slaves.50 The Jamaican plantation system was thus inherently dependent upon external sources to obtain a continuous labour supply. Curtin has termed the South
Atlantic slave system an "artificial creation" insofar as the plantation colonies "could neither supply nor reproduce their own labour force".\(^{51}\)

Without the internal capacity to reproduce a labour force, the elimination of the slave trade rang the death knell for the Jamaican slave system in general. The problem was not simply one of a diminishing quantity of workers, but also of the resulting imbalance in labour productivity among a work force increasingly composed of elderly slaves and/or young children. This concern was voiced in the Assembly as early as 1804, in anticipation of the elimination of the slave trade:

> No care or attention to the welfare and increase of the negroes can prevent these consequences. They may increase in number, but the effective labourers must diminish... A planter with an hundred such negroes may probably work eighty of their number. Twenty years hence, supposing his people do increase, by births beyond deaths, to one hundred and twenty, he will not be able to work more than from thirty to forty able hands; the rest will consist of invalids, the aged past labour, and children not yet fit for it.\(^{52}\)

Although the effective labour force did not fall as dramatically as the above account predicts, there is evidence that by 1817 the projected decline of one-fourth to one-third was not far from the actual decline.\(^{53}\)

The inability of (and for a limited period, the absence of the necessity for) Jamaican slave plantations to produce the relative form of surplus value, and the resulting inability of the system to increase its overall productive capacities significantly were major factors leading to the demise of the system itself. The Jamaican sugar industry failed the ultimate test of the capitalist market, and was undercut by rising competition from a variety of sources. Even though Jamaican sugar was protected in the British market by high tariffs, by the early 1800s it faced competition from new sources in East India and Mauritius. Moreover, West Indian sugar was refined in Britain for sale in other European countries. Competition from Brazil, the French islands and Cuba, where technology was more advanced, forced Jamaican produce from the international market.\(^{54}\) Between 1800 and 1834, Jamaican sugar prices fell by 56.8 per cent; the value of sugar output per slave is estimated to have declined from 35.68 pounds in 1800–4, to 16.60 pounds in 1830–4.\(^{55}\)
Conditions of free labour did not of course automatically lead to economic innovation. Only at the end of the nineteenth century when prices declined even further and conditions left no other option, did the old planter class begin to address seriously the problem of raising productivity. Following the crisis of 1846 (the result of the elimination of protective legislation) some efforts to improve technology were undertaken. Estates which were able to survive this crisis, however, did so mainly due to temporarily favourable prices. The price of sugar began to decline again in the early 1870s, and continued to fall until the turn of the century. Those estates that survived this prolonged crisis were forced to reorganize the technical basis of their production radically, often by depending upon imported technology.\footnote{56}

**Slaves, Peasants and Wage Workers: The Test of History**  
The slaves of Jamaica were denied access to and control over the means of production, and in this regard shared one important characteristic of a proletarian class. Only once they were fully emancipated in 1838, however, did their labour power become a commodity. The distinction marks a crucial variation which arose in the labour process. It is not merely a theoretical distinction, but also reflects a pivotal alteration in the living and working conditions of the Jamaican producing classes. If we return to our introductory premise that the test of sound Marxist theory is its capacity to help us understand real events in the real world, then it will be instructive to apply these theoretical considerations to the history of the Jamaican class struggle. This can be done by considering two major rebellions in the history of Jamaican lower class development.

In 1831, an uprising of slaves, particularly in Jamaica's western parishes, was organized to demand freedom, the right to own land, and the payment in wages for labour; in 1865, a peasant movement in demand of land culminated in a confrontation with the colonial authorities at Morant Bay. Both struggles expressed primarily the frustrations and demands of the lower class labour force dominant in the period—slaves and peasants. Both rebellions also marked a critical transition point in Jamaican social and political development.
In the slave rebellion of 1831, the slaves fought to win their freedom, and "freedom" meant precisely the ability to sell their labour power in exchange for a wage. A corollary to the maintenance of this freedom was the right to refuse to work for wages. The means for achieving this right to refuse was the right to own the land upon which they lived and cultivated. To be able to work on the basis of a contractual agreement with an employer meant that the labourers were in a position to bargain, to trade something that they owned, and that the planters needed, in exchange for employment—this "something" was the commodity labour power. Under slavery, the labourers were not only deprived of ownership and control of the means of production; they were also denied ownership of their own labouring capacity, and were therefore not free to sell that capacity to the employer who would offer the best price, i.e., the highest wages. If, as some theorists such as Patterson have argued, slave labour is theoretically completely equivalent to wage labour, the slave rebellion of 1831 is impossible to explain with any degree of conceptual consistency. This struggle highlighted precisely the sharpness of the distinction in the hearts and minds of the slave rebels.

Neither is it useful to erect a theoretical "Chinese Wall" between conditions of slavery and wage labour as Post's framework suggests. Both forms operated as capital-producing labour within the capitalist mode of production in the historical sense. Slavery played a role in the primitive accumulation of capital, but became obsolete when more efficient forms of production based on relative surplus value advanced and expanded. The labour performed by the lower classes on the plantations before and after emancipation was distinguished largely by the presence or absence of the whip. Large, collectivized work forces were characteristic in both cases.

Perhaps the most important link between the forms of labour performed during slavery and in the immediate post-emancipation period, however, can be identified not at the point of production of surplus value, but at the point of the reproduction of the labour power of the workers. On the slave plantations, the labourers did not own their labour power, but they were responsible for ensuring to the best of their abilities the reproduction of their capacity to work, given the ill-treatment they endured, by means of the provision grounds

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system. Upon emancipation, the Jamaican slaves became owners of their labour power for the first time. As long as they maintained access to cultivatable lands, however, they were not necessarily obliged to sell their labour power for wages on a regular basis. The emancipated labourers could certainly be considered closer to the classic definition of a landless proletarian class than they had been as slaves, insofar as their labour power became a commodity which could be sold. Their survival as a class, however, was not dependent upon wage labour. Instead, they worked as peasant cultivators, supplementing their income with wages drawn from plantation labour.

The effective ownership and cultivation of private lands did not mean, however, that the majority of peasant producers gained control over the means of production or capital. Land only becomes capital in specific conditions, when it interacts with wage labour in order to generate surplus value. The land on which provision grounds were established was considered useless to the planters as it was unsuitable for plantation development. For the freed Jamaican slaves, land operated instead as means of reproduction of labour power. Wage labour on the estates and private cultivation on small plots were treated as substitutes for one another, operating as alternative activities necessary for subsistence.

Under slavery, the direct producers had learned to associate the provision grounds with a degree of autonomy and independence that was unthinkable in connection with labour in the fields. As free workers, the availability of productive lands enabled them to choose an alternative source of income to wage labour. The planters' class interests in maximizing the profits on invested capital were the same in the post-emancipation period as they had been during the period of slavery. The planters were now obliged, however, to rely on a voluntary labour force rather than a coerced one. In either case, their interests were shaped by operating as capitalists in an historically capitalist mode of production.

Post maintains that upon emancipation, two other modes of production arose—one capitalist, and dependent upon wage labour, and the other a peasant mode based on private cultivation. In fact, peasant cultivation and wage labour did not operate as "competing" modes of production, but as two forms reproducing labour power within a single, capitalist production
process. In such circumstances, peasant production could be more accurately understood as a "quasi-enterprise with the specific function of wage-labour".60

Such an analysis can also explain the elements distinguishing between peasant production and wage labour. One essential distinction is that the former relied upon the individual family as the unit of production, while the latter is characterized by large-scale, collectivized patterns of work. Perhaps even more importantly, it is only wage labour that could produce surplus value, upon which the wealth and power of the ruling class depends. As long as land was productive and available to the Jamaican lower classes, the issue of landholding was central to the class struggle. Peasant production was a favoured alternative to wage labour for the labourers, but it meant the absence of a fully dependent work force for the planters.

The Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 expressed this fundamental conflict. From the perspective of the rebels, their appeals were modest. In depressed economic conditions, employment for wages was scarce; when jobs could be secured, wages due were frequently withheld. Increased access to land, and the legal right to own the land upon which one had worked and lived for decades were demanded as the solution to this crisis. These demands were further reinforced by the historic importance of landholding to the identity of the lower classes. From the vantage point of Governor Eyre, the local parish magistrates, and the planters both in the parish of St. Thomas-in-the-East (where the revolt broke out) and across the island, however, a conscious and articulated claim for generalized access to land signalled a major economic and political threat. The British Colonial Office, more concerned with re-establishing a climate of stability than with the immediate interests of a weak and faltering section of colonial capital, was less threatened by the claim for land. Yet, as the reply of the Colonial Office—the "Queen's Advice"—to the petitioners of St. Ann's parish indicated, the main concern remained the development of a fully dependent and therefore "reliable" wage labour force.61

Private landholding figured less prominently in the class struggle once changing conditions had led to a general decline in levels of productivity and lower class access to land. This occurred around the turn of the century. Small-scale, private,
land ownership then became more of a symbolic than real means of reproduction. Beginning in this period, large sections of the Jamaican labour force became a full-fledged, landless proletariat in objective terms, but the historic identification with landowning as a means of bargaining continued to influence patterns of resistance and organization.

If the role of sound theory is to enhance the understanding of real events in the real world, then Post's perspective does not pass the test. His failure to maintain a clear distinction between the immediate, technical process of production and the more general, historical mode of production, renders impossible a clear understanding of the relationship between specific labour forms and the process of surplus extraction. An adequate explanation of the development of the Jamaican work force over time therefore cannot be provided. In Post's view, the distance between various labour processes become so great that they stand as complete, self-enclosed "structures", separate and unrelated to one another. The question of continuity in the process of labour force development—both objectively and ideologically—is evaded. The links in the chain of continuity are perceived to be discrete units in themselves, disconnected from those coming before and after.

An alternative theoretical approach, however, one which maintains the essential elements of Marxist analysis as a method for understanding the dynamic process of class action and class conflict, can incorporate and highlight the process of continuity, while simultaneously explaining the very real differences among various forms of labour force organization. The applicability of such an approach beyond the example of the transition from slavery to freedom in the Jamaican labour force is a subject for research in the future.

Notes
This article has taken several forms. Originally drafted as a chapter of my doctoral dissertation, "From Slavery to Wage Labour: A Study of the Development of the Jamaican Labour Force, 1831-1944" (York University, 1983), it was revised and presented as a paper to the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association in June of 1984. This is a further revised version. Many thanks for helpful critical comments are owed to numerous readers at each stage, especially Liisa North, Ellen Wood, Grant Amyot and Colin Barker.
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3. This argument is developed in J. Banaji, "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History," Capital and Class 3 (Autumn 1977), pp. 109-78.


5. See Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Chile and Brazil (New York, 1967), and Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution (New York, 1964).


7. For a summary and critical examination of the concept of "articulation" in the modes of production debate, see A. Foster-Carter, "The Modes of Production Controversy". See n. 4, above. Though Foster-Carter strikes me as still unduly sympathetic to this very problematic concept—a subject which could merit an article in itself—he notes that articulation "is a term deriving from anatomy, a science whose demonstration requires that the subject be dead." (p. 77)

"Dominance", not dissimilar to "articulation", is another problematic notion frequently employed but rarely explained by structuralist Marxist theorists. Laclau, for example, does not explain by what means one mode of production can be accurately identified as more or less "dominant" than any other. Is this measured statistically? If so, is it on the basis of the numerical predominance of representatives of one ruling class or another, one section of direct producers or another, the value or quantity of the surplus extracted, etc.? Or is it based on political relations of power and authority or state control? And how do relations of "dominance" between and among such modes change? These issues need to be critically examined.


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11. Post, Arise Ye Starvelings, p. 23. (See n. 8, above.)
12. Ibid., pp. 21, 23, 25, 40.
15. In 1895, Governor Henry Blake introduced a land scheme whereby Crown lands could be bought in lots of between five and fifty acres. Four years later, the point of forfeiture for non-payment had been reached in only one of sixteen cases, and 1,177 lots had been sold. See G. Eisner, Jamaica, 1830-1930: A Study in Economic Growth (Manchester, 1961), p. 223.
17. Post could conceivably argue that land parcellization was offered as a concession to popular pressure, such as that expressed in the rebellion of 1865. While this is true in terms of the general political motivations of the Colonial Office, it is not the case that popular pressure was so well-organized, and so resistant to repression, that only by a programme of land reform could stability be maintained. Furthermore, in Post's theoretical framework, increasing the capacity of a competing mode of production to expand would have, one assumes, led to increased instability, rather than stability, within the system.
18. See Fox-Genovese and Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital, p. 23. (See n. 1, above.)
21. G. Eisner, Jamaica, p. 196. (See n. 15, above.)
23. This argument is maintained by Fox-Genovese and Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital, p. vii, and passim.
24. I am indebted to Colin Barker for this insight.
27. See Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, pp. 51-52.
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35. Wakefield, *England and America*, vol. ii, p. 33. (See n. 34, above.) This clever example is also cited by Marx in *Capital*, vol. i, pp. 992–993, as an indication of Wakefield’s discovery of the secret of capitalist production in England, i.e., the development of a dependent labour force.
38. Patterson, “Slavery”, p. 49. (See n. 1, above.)
41. Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital*, pp. 37, 44.
42. See B.W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica 1807–1834* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 212-227. Higman maintains that stagnant Jamaican plantation productivity was not inherently the result of the slave system. He fails to consider, however, the necessity for the plantation economy to expand in order to remain profitable, and hence productive, on the international market. Higman thereby underestimates the inefficiency of the slave system.
43. See Marx, *Capital*, vol. i, p. 645, 325.
44. Ibid., p. 432.
45. Ibid., p. 1035.
46. Ibid., pp. 1025, 1027.
47. See Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital*, pp. 45-46; and Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 213. (See n. 42, above.)
50. Hart maintains that the average lifespan for creole slaves was 26½ years of age; *Origin*, p. 4. (See n. 32, above.) During the mid-eighteenth century, the peak period of Jamaican plantation prosperity, the natural rate of increase among the slaves was –1.6 per cent (Patterson, “Slavery,” 293–293).
51. Curtin, *Two Jamaica’s*, p. 5. (See n. 34, above.)


57. For Patterson, slavery represents “merely capitalism with its clothes off”. See “Slavery”, p. 51.


60. Banaji, “Modes of Production”, p. 34.