



Dr David Featherstone - University of Glasgow

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Time: 13:00-14:00

Where: Zoom - <https://ucd-ie.zoom.us/j/61261225697>

Abstract

'Industrial Persecution', the Agency of Subaltern Maritime Workers and the Spatial Politics of Decolonisation

This paper discusses opposition to what the Liverpool-based Colonial People's Defence Association described in 1952 as the 'industrial persecution' of 'colonial seamen' in the conjuncture of decolonisation. It argues that engaging with the contested racialisation of maritime labour offers an important lens into the conjuncture of decolonisation in the early post-war period. The first part of the paper explores resistances to the renewed calls by the NUS for a colour bar in relation to British shipping in the immediate post-war period, and explores struggles by seafarers of colour within the union and links these exclusionary politics to the union's anti-Communism and its role in opposing leftist labour organising in colonial contexts (Tijani 2012, Silverman, 2000). The paper then explores the activities of the Colonial Defence Association and the Colonial People's Defence Association, in Cardiff and Liverpool respectively. Both organisations had links to the Communist Party of Great Britain, mobilised around the grievances of seafarers of colour and included activists with links to anti-colonial political movements such as the Zikist movement in Nigeria.

The paper positions these organisations in relation to the imaginaries of solidarity shaped by organisations such as the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC) which sought to promote the formation of a Caribbean Federation of Seamen's Unions and had a presence in Britain. The CLC was integral to the opposition to the suspension of the constitution of British Guiana in 1953-People's Progressive Party (PPP), a de facto coup which was supported by key organisations such as the UK Labour Party, the TUC and the Fabian Colonial Bureau. This event marked the intensification of Cold-War repression of leftist struggles for independence and of

attempts to form progressive post-independence governments (Westmaas, 2021). The paper discusses the role of Liverpool-based Irish seafarers who smuggled literature for Cheddi and Janet Jagan of the PPP on board a Booker Brothers McDonnell ships which were sailing between Liverpool and Georgetown. The paper concludes that engaging with the politicisation of race and maritime labour offers ways of foregrounding articulations of subaltern agency in processes of decolonisation.

About the Speaker

Dave Featherstone is a Reader in Human Geography at the University of Glasgow. He is the author of *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: the Making of Counter-Global Networks* (Wiley, 2008) and *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (Zed Books, 2012). He is currently working on a book with the working title of *Politicising Race and Labour: Seafarers' Struggles for Equality and the Anti-Colonial Left, 1919-1953*. He is on the editorial collectives of *Antipode* and *Soundings: a Journal of Politics and Culture*.

