

CLASS WARGAMES

SPRING OFFENSIVE

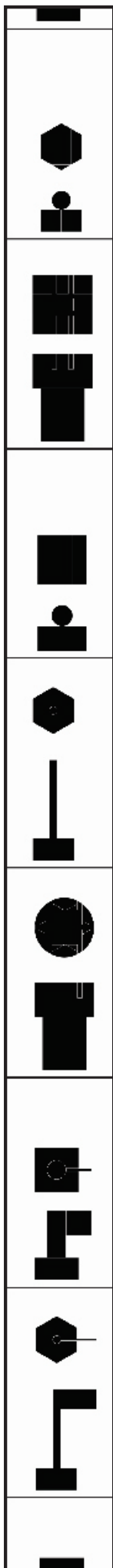
"The actual and successful revolution of Caribbean slaves against their masters is the moment when the dialectical logic of recognition becomes visible as the story of the universal realisation of freedom." - Susan Buck-Morss.

Ever since the publication of C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* in 1938, the world-historical importance of the 1791 Haitian Revolution has been beyond doubt. Yet, Class Wargames could not find a single simulation that represented any of the key engagements of this epic struggle - and so we decided to create our own scenario of the Battle of Bedourete using the game system of Richard Borg's *Command & Colors: Napoleonic*s. Overlooked by Kimathi Donkor's iconic oil painting *Toussaint Louverture at Bedourete*, we first played out this historic encounter for the 2012 *Invisible Forces* exhibition at the Furtherfield Gallery in Finsbury Park. Most gratifyingly, the Haitian Jacobins once again triumphed over the French Bonapartists on the field of battle. For our Bedourete scenario, we'd hacked Borg's rules to investigate insights gained from Alfred Auguste Nemours' *Histoire militaire de la guerre d'indépendance de Saint-Domingue*. In the mid-1930s, C.L.R. James had met this celebrated Haitian diplomat, general and military historian in Paris while researching *The Black Jacobins* and it was his 1925 book that would become one of James' main source documents. Above all, in Nemours' account of the self-discipline of the Haitian soldiery at the Battle of Bedourete, James would find confirmation what was already the leitmotif of his revolutionary politics: the self-creativity of the insurgent masses.

Our table-top simulation of *The Black Jacobins* is a homage to the critical contribution made by C.L.R. James to the breaking of the ideological dominance of Stalinism over the Left in the mid-20th century. Moving to America and teaming up with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee Boggs, he'd participated in a study circle rooted amongst the car workers of Detroit. Dubbed the Johnson-Forest Tendency, its members engaged in intense debates which were distilled into James' celebrated 1950 text *State Capitalism and World Revolution*. By understanding the post-1917 Russian bureaucracy in terms of the concrete conditions of the car factory, these Detroit workers repudiated the Trotskyist vanguard party as an ideological manifestation of industrial Fordism. James had already argued face-to-face with Trotsky himself that the latter-day Bolshevik sects were incapable of leading the 'Negro Workers' to victory. Now the Johnson-Forest Tendency called upon African-American proletarians to organise their own insurrectionary struggles against the US power elite. As the turbulent events of the 1960s would soon prove, James and his comrades had judged the subversive political conjuncture of their times correctly.

It was amongst these radical Detroit car workers that the first English translation of Karl Marx's 1844 *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* was circulated in samizdat form. The Johnson-Forest Tendency believed that everyone should engage in studying communist theory. A refreshing aspect of James' writing is that he always avoided the hubris and mystification of academic jargonising, always ready to admit where he found passages dense and hard to get his head around. Even when approaching such an erudite topic as Hegel's *Logic* - which he described in his 1948 *Notes on Dialectics* as 'the most difficult book I know' - he made it fun: 'I am not expanding it as a doctrine. I am using it and showing how to begin to know it and use it.' This is exactly the approach adopted by Class Wargames as we apply gaming - ludic subversion - to the history of plebeian rebellion. Our motive is to draw the practical lessons from this kind of mental labour that can be used to devise a winning strategy and tactics for fighting our day-to-day class struggles. Even if we are only a fraction as successful as C.L.R. James was in his writings, we will feel that we have done well.

So, inspired by *The Black Jacobins*, a mere 75 years after its publication, we invite you to participate in playing our scenario of the Battle of Bedourete. We hope this little table-top re-enactment will spark off debates about the history of the 1791 Haitian Revolution and what significance it has for us today. We offer this ludic experience as a way of rediscovering the techniques of co-creativity that James and his Detroit comrades used to decipher the mystified social dynamics of mid-20th century American Fordism. Living through the sixth year of the great crisis of global neo-liberalism, we will definitely need to adopt a similar spirit of intellectual openness if we are to rise to the challenges that we face in 2013. Proletarians of all nations, unite and fight: from the game board to the streets and internet superhighway!



CLASS WARGAMES

PRESENTS

RICHARD BORG'S COMMAND & COLORS: NAPOLEONICS

"The vital question before us is how to cut the chains of misery that still bind the hands of Toussaint's descendants and those worldwide trapped in poverty. Toussaint's fierce opposition to slavery, his leadership skills, his freedom-inspired writings and the constitution he drafted bequeath to us all a strategy for opposing injustice. This example tells us that discipline is part of the equation."
- Jean-Bertrand Aristide

For its contribution to *The Life and Legacy of C.L.R. James* conference, Class Wargames is playing a ludic simulation of the 1791 Haitian Revolution: the Battle of Bedourete scenario for Richard Borg's *Command & Colors: Napoleonics*. By moving pieces across its game board, today's rebels against global neo-liberalism can learn the key strategic and tactical principles which secured the triumphs of the past.

Guy Debord urged revolutionary activists to play games which could teach them how to fight and win against the oppressors of spectacular society. Inspired by this call to action, Class Wargames has created a Haitian variant of Richard Borg's *Command & Colors: Napoleonics* which disseminates the strategic insights of Toussaint's victorious strategy to the insurgent leftists of the 21st century.

Just as importantly, the players of this politico-military simulation are able to acquire an immunity to the temptation which has betrayed revolutionary struggles throughout the modern epoch: the leaders of the oppressed themselves turning into a new class of oppressors. When everyone can play at Bonaparte, then no one can become the new Bonaparte.

Wargames are a continuation of politics by other means.

www.classwargames.net

LUDIC SCIENCE CLUB

Class Wargames is hosting the collective playing of classic political games on Sunday afternoons at London's radical coffee house.

Firebox
106-108 Cromer Street
London WC1H 8BZ

Sundays
1.00pm-6.00pm

5th May: Drakes, Jarvis, Walsh and Gluck, *Election*.
2nd June: Francis Tresham and Mick Uhl, *Civilization*.
7th July: Rob Jones, Steven Mortimore and Simon Douglas, *A Very British Civil War*.

Free Entry.

LEIPZIG AND HAITI

200th anniversary re-enactment of the Battle of the Nations at:

Playgrounds of Insubordination. Topographies and Expressions of Counter-Publicity in East Central Europe.

15th November
Gallery for Contemporary Art
www.gfzk.de

Leipzig Centre for the History and Culture of East Central Europe
www.uni-leipzig.de/gwzo

THE PLAYERS

Dr. Richard Barbrook
University of Westminster

Ilze Black
Queen Mary's College

Lucy Blake
Software Engineer

Mark Coplestone
Coplestone Castings

Rod Dickinson
Artist

Stefan Lutschinger
Middlesex University

Fabian Tompsett
Class War 1985

Alex Veness
University of the Arts

THE GAME OF WAR

Guy Debord and Alice Becker-Ho's book & game:

Atlas Press
27 Old Gloucester Street
LONDON WC1N 3XX
www.atlaspress.co.uk

