The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers or Hamburg Committee was projected by the comrades at the headquarters of the Comintern and RILU to serve as their tool and mouthpiece in the African colonies and the Caribbean. In the continental outlook of the Comintern’s grand strategy, the most important task of the Hamburg Committee was to participate in the construction and running of the underground communication network of the Comintern-Apparatus. In the continental orientation of the Comintern’s and the RILU’s organizational hierarchy, the ITUCNW and its Secretariat in Hamburg, the so-called Negersekretariat (‘Negro Secretariat’), was on the lowest level of the RILU’s international order. Its peripheral position was reflected both horizontally and vertically as I outlined in the previous chapter. The Hamburg Committee received orders and instructions from Moscow, Berlin and Hamburg and could only issue pleas and criticism to others. It would therefore be reasonable to argue that the Hamburg Committee’s two secretaries, James W. Ford and George Padmore, were nothing more than Moscow’s lackeys and yes-man and the Committee itself merely a peripheral annex in the RILU apparatus.

This critical perspective misses a crucial point, namely the capability and capacities of the individual actor to act on his or her own within the organization. If the Hamburg Committee stands out as a weak institution with limited room to manoeuvre from a continental perspective, a different interpretation can be presented if the Atlantic dimension of the Hamburg Committee is reconstructed and evaluated. Ford had been instructed to establish a global network and Padmore was sent to replace him and to expand and tighten the web. One can certainly conclude that a radical African Atlantic was in the making from the perspective of Hamburg with the two comrades as its main architects.

Although much of the correspondence seems to have been lost, there is still enough documentary material available to reconstruct the African Atlantic outlines of both Ford’s and Padmore’s network. Apart from correspondences, Ford’s and Padmore’s reports to Moscow as well as the
printed material, such as the various pamphlets and the ITUCNW journal, are key sources. The available documentation contains enough information about the Hamburg Committee’s ambitions and activities. Most importantly, however, it also contains information about the aspirations and expectations of those Africans who were in contact with the comrades in Hamburg. Therefore, in this chapter I will highlight two central aspects of the radical African Atlantic: its dimension and extension. In the first part, Ford’s and Padmore’s networks will be reconstructed and the African dimension of the ITUCNW will be discussed. In the second part, the activities in the four British West African colonies will be outlined.

1. **The Establishment of a Radical African Atlantic Network**

The embryo for an African Atlantic network had already existed when James W. Ford arrived in Hamburg in November 1930. The Hamburg Conference in July 1930, the participation of most of the conference delegates at the Fifth World Congress of the RILU in Moscow in August 1930 and the meeting of the West Africans with members of the LAI International Secretariat in Berlin in October 1930 served as rallying points where he and the comrades at the various Negro Bureaus in Moscow could establish personal connections with individuals from the Caribbean and Africa. At this point, the overall ambition was still to include African American activists. However, there was already a clear difference already about whom to address and with whom one was to engage. The guiding line was the trade and labour union connection, but such organizations with Black membership existed almost exclusively in the USA whereas the organization of the working class was either undeveloped, as was the case on most of the Caribbean islands, or did not exist, as was the case in most African colonies. A second guiding line was that anti-colonial and anti-imperial agitation and propaganda was to be exclusively directed towards working class. A third was the language question: although the ITUCNW presented itself as an organization for all Negro workers, in practice it was to direct its efforts towards the Anglophone African Atlantic, leaving political agitation in the French, Belgian and Dutch colonies to either the metropolitan parties and their sections in the colonies or to affiliated organizations, such as the *Ligue de la Race Negré* (LDRN). Consequently, the activities of Ford—and later Padmore, too—had to take into account these different circumstances.