The Forces of the African Revolution (4)

UNDER the land consolidation scheme introduced into Kenya in the period shortly prior to independence, British imperialism hoped to set up a small class of 'kulaks' which would act as a buffer between itself and the mass of impoverished peasants; at the very worst, it calculated, this stratum would act as a drag on revolutionary change even if indpendence had to be granted. This view was well expressed by a leading member of the East African Section of the London Chamber of Commerce, in a speech in London in January 1961, when he declared his belief that the changes being wrought in Kenya by the land consolidation and resettlement scheme was "beginning to create an agricultural middle class of Africans with a vested interest in ordered progress." He added that if time could be gained for this change to spread "there will be thousands of Africans with much to loose by political extremism, and therefore with no sympathy for it."

But the development of individual title to land among Africans, while it will make possible the emergence of a small class of better-off farmers is rapidly producing its corollary, a growing army of poor and often landless peasantry, who crowd into the towns desperately seeking work, or end up doing seasonal work in the newly emerging African farms. In Southern Rhodesia, for example, where Africans are being settled on individual plots of six acres under the Native Land Husbandry Act, Joshua Nkomo, President of the Zimbabwe African People's Union, has pointed out that while this Act " is ostensibly intended to produce a middle-class of small African farmers, holding land in freehold instead of communally . . . so far, its main result has been to force thousands of Africans off the land—providing a useful float for European enterprise."

Thus all the late efforts of imperialism to encourage individual African farmers growing cash crops for export have produced new problems for the African people. A class differentiation is showing itself markedly amongst the peasantry, a small richer group hiving up at the top, and a mass of impoverished peasants being created down below. A survey carried out in Basutoland in 1950 among 160,500 households on holdings of less than 80 acres, showed almost 7 per cent landless, and a third living on holdings of less than four acres. Some 90,000 households had 4 to 15 acres each, and at the top there were 6,740 households with 15 to 80 acres. Above them were a number of chiefs possessing 100-200 acres each.

In Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), where, as we have seen, the best land has been taken by the white settlers, differentiation among the African peasants has been taking place. A recent study by A. D. Jones on 'Farmers among the Plateau Tonga' (Seminar at Ibadan, July, 1964, on Social Classes and Elites in Africa), reveals that among the 600 African cultivators in this 100 square miles of maize producing territory, 15 are classified as 'commercial farmers'. These 15 have more land, machinery, implements, labour force, and income than the rest, and are clearly a separate stratum. Between them they own 4 maize mills, 1 saw mill, 6 motor vehicles, 3 tractors, 1 wind pump, 4 stores, 1 bakery and 1 petrol pump. The remaining 585 cultivators own only two maize mills between them and none of the other items at all.

In her study of the Gold Coast cocoa farmers in 1954/5, Polly Hill, on the basis of an analysis carried out amongst co-operative societies in ten different cocoa regions, revealed that 34 farmers reached a net annual income from cocoa of £500 each, 83 were in the £200-499 range, 98 in the £100-199 range, and another 542 earning less than £100,140 of the latter earning less than £50). Those in the £200-£500 group accounted for 20-40 per cent of the total income in most of the ten regions, except in Shai where they accounted for 56 per cent, and in Hwidiem where the very big farms, those with incomes, over £500, accounted for 80 per cent of the total income. Further differentiation has undoubtedly taken place since then, though statistical evidence is not at present available.

Similar differentiation is taken place in a number of other territories. An agricultural enquiry in Senegal, 1960-1961, where the main crop is ground nuts, shows 127,800 holdings of less than two hectares each, totalling only 12 per cent of the cultivated land, while 40,700 holdings, of more than 7 hectares each, totalled 43 per cent of the cultivated land. Right at the bottom of the scale were 63,500 holdings of less than a hectare, covering 33,535 hectares on which worked 134,500 people; and at the top were 2,800 holdings of more than 17 hectares each, covering 77,239 hectares. Even more marked is the growth a class of African planters in the Ivory Coast especially in coffee and cocoa. Here, according to Raymond Barbe, in the rich region of Bongouanou, 500 of the richest planters possessing more than 12 hectares of cocoa and coffee each, employing at least five wage workers each, and representing about 7 per cent of the total number of planters, produce about a quarter of the entire cocoa and coffee output of the region. For the whole of the Ivory Coast he estimates about 8,000 to 10,000 planters, owning 10-12 hectares each, and employing at least five wage workers. "Some of them, including Houphouet-Boigny, political leader and President of the Republic of the Ivory Coast, own more than 100 hectares." It is this stratum of planters says Barbe, which is able to acccumulate sufficient capital, to branch out into commerce and transport and thus establish an African bourgeoisie. This development has been very rapid over the past decade. The emergence of 10,000 better-off African planters in the Ivory Coast has been at the expense of thousands of poor peasants many of whom have ended up as the wage workers on these plantations.

Even in a less developed region, such as Dahomey, where the main crop is palmnuts, a third of the proprietors, owning 60 per cent of the land under cultivation, are now employing wage labour. In Cameroun, by 1957, following on the lifting of the previous colonial restrictions on African production of coffee, there were 17,500 African coffee producers, owning 50-60,000 hectares of plantations, and making an average of 100,000 CFA francs each in that year—which is well up to the average in the Ivory Coast. A similar development of differentiation amongst the peasantry, consequent on the breakdown of the old communal land system, the drawing of the African countryside into the market economy, the change-over from communal land-ownership to individual title and from subsistence farming to cash crops for export, can be seen in Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria.

Thus the effect of sixty years of imperialist exploitation has made significant changes in the face of African agriculture. While elementary forms of feudalism remain widespread (expressed in the power of the chief to allocate land, to expect gifts, to demand labour, to control the native courts), and are sometimes very marked (as in Uganda, Northern Nigeria, and Ethiopia, etc), the main enemy of the African peasant has been not the feudal landowner but the imperialist, who has robbed him of his land, taxed him to the hilt, ruined his subsistence agriculture, limited his participation in the production of cash crops, and so forced him into wage labour in Eurpoean enterprises. Even those who have been able to break through into the cash crop economy and themselves become employers of African labour, have had to contend with the competition of the European farms and plantations and, even more, with the domination of the market by the big imperialist monopolies which strive to pay the African producer the lowest possible price for his cash crops. Alongside a stratum of better-off African farmers and plantations owners is a vast army of poverty stricken and often landless peasants, who are compelled to offer themselves up as wage labour in European undertakings and, increasingly in the past ten years, on African-owned farms and enterprises.

The widespread agrarian crisis in Africa, which is a natural consequence of colonial rule, has been to some extent concealed by the migrant labour system. Communal land ownership and subsistence agriculture remains, but it has suffered heavy blows from sixty years of colonialism, and is now under attack from the indigenous capitalist forces which are growing in the African countryside.

No responsible African independence organisation, or trade union, no national or working-class leader, argues today in favour of a return to the village life of the past. Tendencies there may be to idealise what has gone, but these carry no decisive weight in the national movements for independence. What was positive in the ancient traditions—the communal feeling and activity, the knowledge of the special characteristics of African soils, climate and plant life, the forms of quasi-democratic consultation, the folk arts and crafts—these will certainly be carried forward and developed when the African continent has won its freedom.

But traditional African village life contained, too, the seeds of decay. It was based on a backward form of economy which, while it could sustain the people, gave no possibilities for development. Moreover, on the basis of this form of economy existed a social order and a culture which perpetuated ancient superstitions and shibboleths and maintained the people in ignorance and obscurantism.

In contemplating the fate of African subsistence agriculture, one is inevitably reminded of the writings of Marx on India. Marx saw clearly how the impact of imperialism had destroyed the former primitive communal land ownership and subsistence agriculture, yet he shed no tears for the passing of this backward form of economy:

> **"Sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious, patriarchal and inoffensive social organisations disorganised and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilisation and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies."**
>
> (Karl Marx: **The British Rule in India**, 1853).

Africa's path of development has, of course, been very different from that of India, or indeed, from that of Asia as a whole. But, despite the differences, Africa and Asia share certain things in common.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Should State Enterprises Make Profit?

SAMI vander Pujie's "Ghana T.U.C. and Our Revolution" in the December 24 SPARK may contain "answers" by Africa to the Victor Perlo article in your issue of November 27, "Should State Enterprises Make a Profit ?"

During my last ten years in the U.S., I worked in the Methods Department of a goodly sized paper conversion plant. That gave me a first-hand view of capitalist's approach to worker incentives.

Out of this experience, before arriving in Ghana? I had formulated certain conclusions not too different from those expressed by Victor Perlo. After three years here, however —listening to trade union discussion of this point, and reading detailed reports about it from socialist Asia — I have had to modify my previous views considerably.

For me, the central question raised by Victor Perlo's article vis-a-vis Africa is this: under socialism, what constitutes "an individual incentive at the point of production ?" Is it purely an economic phenomenon? Should it be permitted to be so?

If I read him correctly, Perlo's major points were.

a) That the Soviet Union was about to "call things by their correct names" and, based on a share of profits, institute detailed "individual and group incentives" for workers at the point of production;

b) That, in addition, there were proposals to rationalise the price system; to improve planning, while ending it for "the last nut and bolt," and to reduce paper work;

c) That "historically, Soviet incentives were mainly of the piece-work variety," while "plant-wide collective incentives were based on the amount by which production exceeded the plan;"

d) That the new method was being postulated to overcome certain shortcomings, chief of which appears to be that under the old order, managers could get "a low plan of production which they can easily overfulfil" instead of raising labour productivity and reducing costs for the benefit of *social* wealth ; and

e) That the new way would not undermine planning, but that some controls were needed because "Soviet people are not angels."

In the light of my own experience in this field, may I comment?

Incentives for workers arose under capitalism when the mode of production had reached that stage at which better productivity could provide greatly increased profits for the capitalists. In a word, incentives followed not far behind the arrival of imperialism, that "highest stage of capitalism."

The name most closely associated with incentives originally was Bedaux's. The "Bedaux system" was glorified piece-work, resulting in unbelievably inhuman speed-up. No sooner did the human element in production learn to "beat the machine"than the bosses lowered piece-rates. Then, to achieve the former take-home pay, the worker would have to produce at a greatly increased tempo. This process went on till the worker was tossed onto the employment scrap-heap, a human wreck less than 40 years old.

Naturally, the unions fought the system—to a stand-still. At the same time, one section of the ruling class realised that the Bedaux system contained self-defeating factors: modern large-scale industry requires practical, if not consciously-motivated, co-operation among workers (one of Marx's big points). But "Bedaux" was **individual** incentive at its "purest." and, among workers it caused a failure precisely in co-operation.

So, although the Bedaux system faded, the idea of worker incentives lingered. Carried to an extreme, a kind of "Robert Owens" approach in a few places proved capable of erecting a stone wall against unionisation. Endicott-Johnson's shoe factory in New York state and Heinz Jack's U.S. airplane parts factory were prise examples.

Old Man Johnson used to write a weekly column in the Company paper that served his Company shoe town. He never mentioned "workers;" he talked to "his stockholders." In such advanced factories (for which workers wanting "in" formed a huge waiting list), vacations were provided on plots of resort-type land belonging to the Company. No worker was ever evicted from his Company-owned home if times were slack. During the war, wives (or sons, brothers, etc.) of workers away at the front held down their jobs (while full pay continued for the absent ones); and when those demobilised returned, their jobs were waiting.

When union organisers came to town (my husband was one such, who lived through this experience), management expensively invited them "right in," and voluntarily called a huge meeting of workers. Of course, nobody joined the union.

The owners of such factories lived like royalty, the same as other capitalists. What is more, they were never annoyed by strikes and other unpleasantnesses. Often, they tried to sell their methods to their class; they called it "the intelligent way." Actually, however, their activities merely underlined the enormity of private profits under U.S. monopoly rule. "Intelligence," moreover, could not complete with the "rate of profit" which these individuals' CLASS bases itself on. Furthermore, the "income spread"—the notable difference between management's salaries and wages even for well-paid workers—is a fetish which capitalism cannot give up, since it contains the seeds of super-profits, which are its main diet. These are reasons why only three or four plants of any size in the U.S. ever followed this extreme example.

Yet, many factory owners found it profitable for a time to use genuine worker incentives, based on "time and method" study.

Time study had been introduced by Bedaux in his original speed-up system. The workers had their jokes about this, none of them printable.

The addition of **method** study, however, made it possible to extract the worst speed-up out of incentives schemes, while still vastly improving productivity. While the best worker is still photographed cinematically to determine what "excess motions" he makes as he works, the machine is also scrutinised to eliminate mechanical time wasters.

By this method, a worker may find his work even easier once "standards" or "norms" have been set for his machines. BUT **all** his notions now become **productive**. Thus, for the same energy expenditure **per** work-day, a worker on a measured job is shown how to put all the effort directly **into** production. This has brought enormous savings—and thus, additional profits—for the boss, the main benefitor under capitalism, of course.

Where I worked, management cared not a fig for **individual** incentives, preferring a **collective** of **group** variety. Workers, they reasoned correctly, whose extra gains depend on group performance more than likely will either help or prod their slower members.

This, however, did not mean that individual performance could not be ascertained. Administration of incentives allowed every workers performance to be judged by a scientifically set standard, by the day, week, month or longer periods. Obviously, such a feature could be valuable in a socialist society, disclosing which workers need help and which can give it. Moreover, this system also permitted fairly simple individual job costing, which could also be advantageous under socialism.

Unlike the Bedaux system, standards set under the system I worked with were considered **permanent**, changeable only following a definite, demonstrable change in the equipment. In all cases, union agreement was obtained. At the same time, since an improvement in equipment meant a higher standard, management encouraged workers to offer suggestions or innovations for **methods** improvements. For each such adopted, the "inventor" was paid 15 per cent of the first year's savings—after which, all the fruits of his invention belonged to the Company. (**Methods** engineers, at a set salary often not higher than that of the top workers, received nothing for any of their methods improvements, all of which, under the hiring arrangement, belonged to the company.

Management evidently felt that productivity achieved by his method was pure gravy, because they allocated about 65 per cent of all production above standard to the workers in bonus, themselves retaining 35 per cent.

Nevertheless, after about seven years, the entire incentive system was abandoned, although production continued to be measured. Thus, emphasis shifted from men to machines. To me, this showed that, though sections of this ruling class may experiment with such ideas, capitalism can only move away from incentives for human beings, looking instead to rationalisation to satisfy its inordinate financial appetite. And quite "naturally," for returns from automation are vastly superior to any obtainable out of labour improvements on existing equipment. In the plant where I worked, an unpublished decision by management to go for automation was definitely back of the abandonment of incentives.

The reason **given** for ending the bonus, however, was that incentives had proved "a needless expense." Management contended that the workers were making so much money in base wages that they refused to put out any further for "mere" extra money earnings. U.S. printing trades definitely are among the highest paid in a highy-paid land: some of the workers (but probably not more than 10 per cent) in that plant earned—including overtime, of course —well over £3,500 a year, drove around in big cars or snappy sports models which the Company Credit Union helped them to own. Thus, there was a certain ironical validity to management's argument. But back of it lurked more basic facts: first of all, management salaries of a much higher order though even here, my observation was that management tried to obtain technical and administrative skill as low as the traffic would bear, succeeding to a

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African Revolution (4)

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Both fell under the heel of Western imperialism. In both continents the existing communal village life and subsistence agriculture were destroyed and the people impoverished as a result. In both, to borrow the words of Marx, "England has broken down the whole f r a m e w o r k of . . . society, without any symptoms of reconstruction yet appearing. This loss of the old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the people." (Karl Marx: op. cit).

In bringing about the destruction of the old order in Africa the imperialists have, just as in India, done nothing to "emancipate or materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people." (Karl Marx: *The Future Results of British Rule in India,* 1853). On the contrary, they have plunged the African peasant down to the utmost depths of poverty and disaster, producing as a result that peculiarly African phenomenon, the continually migrating peasant-worker, confronted with the "loss of his old world", yet "with no gain of a new one". It was not without reason that a report on the effects of migrant labour in Nyasaland, in 1953, correctly forecasts that: "the Nyasaland-born natives will have acquired a mistrust and loathing for administration by the white people which has made a wilderness and called it peace."

But a "wilderness called peace" does not exist only in Nyasaland. Similar wildernesses are to be found throughout the African continent. Sixty years of imperialist exploitation have been sufficient to wreak this terrible damage.

We have already noticed that an African capitalist stratum has been developing fairly rapidly in the countryside. But this is not the only sphere in which one can note the emergence of such a class. It is true that it is not yet a fully matured and differentiated class, that it is often economically weak, and that its main fields of acvtivity are still farming, trade and transport, with some building or construction work. But it is correct to state, as the late Dr. I. L. Potekhin (former head of the African Institute of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences) has done, that "there is still no class of bourgeoisie opposed to the working class" but only "capitalist elements which exploit wage labour"?

The origins of an African capitalist class are generally to be found in trade. Long before the arrival of Europeans in Africa, trading had taken place, much of it in the form of barter, the exchange of handicrafts, and sometimes of food. When the Europeans came (and the Arabs) the plunder of men and women, of Ivory and gold, became the main form of 'trade', the Africans receiving in return only guns and baubles. In time, however, the relations between Europe and Africa began to change. An industrial revolution took place in Europe, and this increasingly demanded the raw materials of Africa as well as the use of Africa as an outlet for European manufactured goods. This development went ahead first in West Africa where palmfruit production was already in the hands of Africans and where local trading was already widespread.

"The imported goods given in exchange went into African hands and African markets. The produce-buying companies, gradually extending inland, found Africans to bring the produce in and Africans to distribute the European goods even to the smallest villages."

(*The New Societies of Tropical Africa:* Guy Hunter: Oxford University Press, 1962)

*Africa: Ways of development: by I. L. Potekhin: Nauka Publishing House, Moscow, 1964.

In East and Central Africa, the lack of an immediate crop for export, and poor transport facilities compared with West Africa, delayed the emergence of African traders connected with the European market. Much of the trade fell into the hands of the Asians, who later expanded into cotton ginning and sugar plantations. European settlement in east and central Africa meant that they, too, monopolised certain branches of trade.

In the developing towns of Africa, the indigenous trader often had to compete with the petits blancs—French and Levantines, Greeks and Pakistanis, Belgians and Portuguese. In West Africa, however, African traders had more opportunity, and with the c o m i n g of the lorry at the beginning of the t w e n tieth century, a veritable revolution began to take place in African trading. Now it became possible to carry larger loads over longer distances in a shorter space of time; the interior could be more easily opened up to the trader; the village store could be set up and constantly restocked.

"The possession of a lorry became for some Africans a major instrument for multiplying their wealth—a multiplication which was inconceivable for them when their only means of transport had been men and beasts of burden."

(Les Classes Sociales en Afrique Noire: Raymonde Barbé: Paris, 1964).

During and after the Second World War this process developed still more rapidly. In West Africa, says Guy Hunter, "from the mass of petty traders and craftsmen, the market women and the wandering Hausamen, there began to appear . . . a group of more substantial Africans in a more modern way of business. These might be the big traders of Accra, Kumasi, Kano, Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Onitsha, trading both in produce and European goods; the building contractors, the owners of fleets of lorries. These were men concerned with banks and credit, wages and customs dues; in many ways they were seeking to become modern men of business. **This was the real start of a transition from the traditional market to the twentieth century sense of commerce."**