

Marxism and African Liberation*

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IT has long been the tradition of Western imperialists to cover their robbery and exploitation in Africa under the cloak of some benevolent missionary work. When Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Germany carved up our continent and subjected the African people to oppression, exploitation and racial discrimination, it was under the pretext that they were bringing light to dark Africa, civilisation and economic upliftment to the barbaric people. Their motives, they claimed, were unselfish and laudable. In actual fact, once they had entrenched themselves and dispossessed the people, none of these benefits were forthcoming. The people were kept ignorant and poor. Tribal and other outworn institutions were deliberately preserved by the imperialists to facilitate the exploitation and oppression of the people.

The bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries, who in their own countries had led the struggle against feudalism, and rallied the masses behind slogans of democracy and nationalism, became the defenders of feudalism and the enemies of democracy and nationalism in Africa. The high principles which were proclaimed as universal turned out to be only for Western Europe and North America. In Asia, Africa and South America, the same principles were trampled in the dust, in the interests of colonial exploitation and super-profits.

Today, it is no longer possible to deny the African people democratic rights and independence. But the imperialist bourgeoisie is still up to its old tricks. They have appointed themselves the bodyguards whose mission is to protect Africa from Communism. Directly, through the European colonial administrators, through American diplomatic and consular offices, and indirectly, through such agencies as the so-called Moral Re-armament movement and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, a continuous stream of propaganda is launched amongst the African people, preaching the horrors and mortal perils of Communism.

It is not too difficult to discern the motives behind this massive propaganda campaign. Indeed, with naive self-exposure and contempt for the intelligence of the African people, they are continually giving the game away themselves, by reiterating day-in-day-out that they are trying "to save Africa for 'the West'."

Communism and Nationalism

In these circumstances, it is somewhat surprising that not a few leaders of national liberation movements, and even trade unions, in Africa have fallen for this propaganda—so obviously designed to preserve whatever can be preserved from the wreck of colonialism in Africa. One would have thought, perhaps, that so many years of bitter experience would have taught us to understand that when our colonial masters are anxious to warn us against some "grave danger", that "danger" is likely to be something which can help us in our demands for freedom and independence.

No doubt, some of the Africans who are so eagerly echoing the parrot cry of anti-Communism, are nothing but stooges and paid interpreters of their masters' voice. But when one hears patriotic African leaders thoughtlessly echoing the anti-Communist trash produced for our consumption by the State Department and the various colonial offices, then one must realise that one has to face here a fundamental misconception.

They imagine that Communism is in conflict with African nationalism and the liberation of our continent, because they believe that Communism will divide the African people along class lines, and will introduce a remote and irrelevant issue—that of an unreal and academic dispute about our future economic system—when all our energies should be united and directed to a single purpose, the emancipation of our continent from alien rule.

That such gross misunderstandings of the nature of Marxist-Leninist theory, and the role of Communists, are seriously believed by responsible African leaders, shows only how well the imperialists have succeeded in screening Africa from the truth about the profound teachings of Communism, and in palming off their own grotesque

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distortions as the real article. It is high time, indeed, that a journal such as *The African Communist* made its appearance, so that our people can judge Marxism not by the slanderous allegations of the imperialists—the common enemy of socialism and African liberation—but by what the Marxists have to say for themselves.

Neither in theory nor in practice is there any basis for the allegation that there is some sort of clash or incompatibility between the aims and activities of African Communists and those of other patriotic Africans seeking the emancipation of Africa from colonialism and racial discrimination, and the advance of her people to unity and equality among the nations of the world.

Certainly, Communists are internationalists, looking forward to a future of brotherhood of man all over the world. But that does not mean that any Communist who is a member of an oppressed nation can for one moment be indifferent to the sufferings and humiliations of his fellows, who daily feel the brunt of discrimination, and the denial of democracy and human rights. On the contrary, he will participate, with all his heart and soul, in the struggle of his people for national salvation, as the key and the condition to all future advance. Any person who stands aloof from this struggle, who confines himself to preaching generalisations about socialism, is not a Marxist at all but a mere parlour-Socialist. *The fact that a man is a Communist makes him not a worse but a better fighter for the freedom of his people from national oppression.*

United Front for Liberation

Marxism-Leninism, dialectical materialism, is not an abstract dogma but a living historical science which calls upon all its supporters to study the concrete historical situation in which they find themselves. In conditions of national oppression, of colonial domination and racial discrimination, the first duty of every Communist is to fight *unconditionally and unreservedly* for a complete emancipation from all forms of domination and oppression, for the building of a *united front of national liberation*. Such a united front should consist not only of workers and peasants, but also of patriotic intellectuals, professional people, and even large sections of the capitalist class who are opposed to the oppression of their people. Working unselfishly and wholeheartedly to maintain and extend the strength and unity of such a national liberation movement, the Communists do so not only because it is the condition of and the key to the future advance of socialism, but also because, as sons of the toiling masses, they under-

stand the burning needs of the people for national dignity, equality and freedom.

Sometimes it is asserted by the opponents of Marxism that Communists merely attempt to “use” the national liberation and democratic movements for their own purposes. This unworthy slander is refuted not only by heroic sacrifices and contributions made to the common cause by Communists in Africa, and all over the world, but also by a consideration of the basic theory of Marxism-Leninism itself. The point is well expressed in the new textbook *Foundations of Marxism-Leninism* recently published by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, under the editorship of the veteran workers’ leader Otto Kuusinen. It declares:

“It would be wrong to regard the democratic movements as a simple means for bringing the masses to socialist revolution. It would be wrong first of all because they are of tremendous importance as *independent* movements for the people in general and for the working class in particular. Is the struggle for peace, against nuclear destruction, to be regarded solely as a reserve means? Is it not one of the principal aims of the democrats and progressive mankind as a whole? The same is true of the struggle against fascism and the shameful colonialism. . . . Each Communist, each class-conscious worker, should never lose sight of the ultimate aims of the working class movement. But this does not make him any less conscious and less selfless in fighting for the immediate interests of the people, for such demands as peace, democracy, national independence and sovereignty. Not every democrat by a long way is a supporter of socialism. But every politically conscious fighter for socialism is a consistent defender of democracy, of all the democratic interests of the working people.”

“You Communists,” say some of our ill-informed critics, “seek to divide our people along class lines, whereas we should all be united as Africans.” It is not the Communists, but the inevitable march of history, which divides nations and peoples along class lines. This will always be the case until the achievement of socialism and classless society. Instead of blaming the Communists for the inevitable process of history, the critics would do better to study concretely the nature and role of the various classes that exist in Africa. Naturally, conditions differ from one African territory to another, depending upon a number of factors, such as which European power has colonised a particular territory, the degree of white settlement and economic development, the extent to which the static, sleeping tribal societies have been disrupted and broken up. By making allowances for wide variations and local differ-

ences, it is possible to generalise broadly about the existence of various classes in our continent.

Classes in Society

In general, we may say that the path of economic development and differentiation of classes has not taken exactly the same shape in Africa as it has in the classic countries of capitalism, West Europe and North America. This is because imperialism itself—for so many years, vital formative years, the dominating influence in by far the greater part of our continent—has deliberately retarded, distorted, and suppressed the normal economic and political development of the continent.

The colonisers have dispossessed the people from the land, and destroyed their traditional means of livelihood in order to convert the African masses into cheap labour fodder for their mines, plantations and other enterprises, all of which were concerned merely with extracting the natural wealth of Africa and exporting it overseas, for their own use. Following their policy of divide and rule, they have maintained and perpetuated outworn institutions which no longer have any real meaning for millions of people, in order to maintain "indirect rule" through tribal chiefs who often have become little more than officials of colonial powers. They have deliberately retarded and suppressed indigenous development and industrialisation.

As a result, we find the most numerous class in Africa is composed of millions of people, living on the land, but usually without any land of their own, trying to scratch a precarious living from the soil. Living to varying degrees in conditions of tribalism, ground down by ignorance, poverty and disease, preoccupied with the superhuman struggle for a bare existence, this vast class is the mass basis of the great army of African liberation, the soul of the regeneration of Africa. Its interests and its future are the interests and the future of the continent. Aroused, and given dynamic leadership, the Africans of the rural hinterland will prove an invincible and determined army of freedom fighters. But, in the nature of things, we cannot often hope or expect to find the leadership of the African revolution emerging from the heartlands of tribal society.

They look for awakening, for enlightenment and leadership, to the people of the towns. Who are the people of the towns? They are, firstly, the capitalists; secondly, the professional people and intellectuals; thirdly, the working class.

In most parts of Africa, amongst the *capitalists*, you will find few big manufacturing and financial elements of the type which dominate

the European or North American bourgeoisie. This is because the colonialists have been concerned to keep control of all large enterprises, particularly mining, manufacture and finance, in their own hands. Even in areas of relatively high industrial development, such as South Africa and Rhodesia, the European minority dominates all positions of importance in the capitalist world. Rarely does one find an African manufacturer who is not also working with his employees, who themselves are usually very few. The same applies to all or nearly all important positions in trade and commerce.

Few Africans have been allowed to become important figures as wholesalers or large-scale merchants. Usually one finds them only as petty traders, small shop-keepers and hawkers. Only in the north, in such countries as Egypt, can one find an indigenous class of big bourgeoisie. In most parts of Africa, one finds this bourgeois class playing an advanced and progressive role in the struggle against colonialism. Imperialism stands in the way of the development of the African capitalists as a class. The colonialists preserve jealously exclusive rights and privileges to all the best places in the sun for themselves, and prevent the nascent African capitalist from taking what he regards as his rightful place in society. The colonial system keeps the masses of people poor, retards industrialisation, and thus prevents the growth of an adequate home market.

Of course, I should add here, what is under discussion is not the behaviour and motives of each individual, but broad general trends existing amongst classes. Certainly, many Africans from a capitalist background have been and still are loyal and true sons of Africa, activated by the broad interests of the suffering masses with whom they identify themselves, and not by selfish or class interests only.

The support of the patriotic element of the African capitalist class is essential for speedy victory against colonialism. But there are aspects of this class, and elements amongst it, which make it a very unsatisfactory *leader* of the African revolution. True, the support of the capitalist class, or the patriotic elements amongst it, is invaluable, for they can and do provide the financial backing which is needed to run properly organised offices and professional staff for the liberation movement, to open and maintain newspapers, and all other things for which money is required. Also, as businesslike people, they are capable of providing the efficiency and attention to detail and daily routine which are so often sadly lacking in our movements.

But the capitalist elements are apt to be narrow.

selfishly hidebound and conservative. They are apt to be guided not by the general interests of the masses but by their own special, minority class interests. Often they are parochial, chauvinistic, tribalistic, and lacking in broad vision. They are usually opportunist, tend to compromise with the colonialists for small gains at the sacrifice of principle, because they fear the revolutionary activities of the masses of workers and rural people. Also, it has been repeatedly observed, certain elements amongst the bourgeoisie in a colonial country tend to compromise with imperialism and sell out to it.

While they share a common national outlook with the masses of African workers and peasants, they also share a common capitalist outlook with the colonialists. They are tied, sometimes, to imperialism by a thousand strings of dependence and mutual interest. They share with the colonialists the destructive and vicious ideology of a morbid fear of Communism and the masses of the people. For this reason it has happened, time and again in this period of history, that the compromising section of the bourgeoisie has sold out to imperialism and betrayed the interests of the masses of the people. These are some of the reasons which make the bourgeoisie an unsatisfactory leader of the colonial revolution.

Professional Classes

What about the professional classes and intellectuals? The doctors, lawyers, teachers and clerks and others who exist in every town in our continent? We must pay ungrudging tribute to the magnificent contributions which thus far have been made to the cause of African emancipation by men and women from this class throughout our continent. They have been the founders of our national liberation movements, and have carried the spark of enlightenment and rebellion from one end of Africa to the other. Many have studied abroad, even settled abroad, and then given up a life of ease and comfort, and of human dignity let it be remembered, in order to come back and to share the trials, hardships and dangers of the political movements amongst the masses of their people.

At the same time, it must be remembered that, considered as a *class*, this African "intelligentsia" does not constitute a stable and homogeneous group. It is not, properly speaking, an independent economic class at all. For from it have been drawn not only the revolutionary and patriotic leaders of our liberation movements, but also the cadres of colonialism: the clerks, interpreters, and officials, without whose aid colonialism would be unable to continue its rule and maintain its administration in Africa. In conditions of modern

society, the intellectuals occupy a position midway between the rulers and the ruled, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Some of them have chosen, unhesitatingly, the cause of the working people, and stuck to it loyally, come what may. Others serve openly and willingly the cause of the oppressors. They swallow uncritically the ideology and outlook of the colonialists; they learn to have contempt for their own people; they even, as teachers, often do the dirty job of inoculating into young Africans the hateful principles of subservience and self-contempt. Many of these intellectuals vacillate between one camp and another, are always swinging helplessly between the oppressors and the oppressed. Amongst fellow-Africans in the liberation movement they pose as the most radical and uncompromising of revolutionaries, ceaselessly calling for action, for desperate adventures, and swearing to destroy the colonialists. Yet at different times the very same people can be observed hobnobbing with the most reactionary elements amongst the colonial officials, and shamelessly sneering at the alleged shortcomings of the African peoples.

Though we must pay the most sincere homage and tribute, therefore, to those many African leaders of great stature who have emerged from this group, we must remember that as a group it is inherently unstable and unfit for leadership. It is for the members of this group, each individually, and all of them together as a group, to choose which side they are on—that of the masses of workers and peasants, or that of the exploiters. Every great African leader who has emerged from the ranks of the intelligentsia has achieved greatness only because he has unswervingly and completely aligned himself with the masses.

The Working Class

Finally, we come to the African working class, the proletariat. Except in some of the areas of greater industrialisation, where African workers, miners and landless farm labourers working on plantations, have come into being, the African working class is numerically small in most parts of our continent. Yet it is the class of the future, for every day it is growing in numbers, wisdom and maturity as industrialisation spreads in Africa, disrupting the old sleeping tribal societies and sending forth the sons and daughters of Africa as workers, people who have no means of livelihood, and nothing to sell except their labour power.

The conditions of its life and labour make the African working class the most revolutionary, dynamic and far-seeing group amongst all our people. The working class is homogeneous. Un-

like sections of the bourgeoisie, it looks beyond formal political independence. It does not seek merely to replace a group of white exploiters with another group of black ones. It looks forward to a life of greater happiness, of higher material and cultural standards, of progress and prosperity for all Africans, above all for the toiling masses also in the rural areas from which they spring. The African working class is the ideal leader in the great progress and onward march of the masses to build a new Africa.

The Communist Party

But in order to fulfil this historic role, it is necessary that the working class should be organised and trained in the most modern and advanced principles of social science. It should be organised, industrially, in trade unions which can be a powerful and indispensable weapon and partner in the movement for the national liberation of our continent. And they should be organised in their own political party, a party based upon the wise and far-seeing scientific principles of Marxism-Leninism, a Communist Party.

The Communist Party is the highest form of working-class organisation. It selects only the best members of the working class, those who have proved their loyalty, courage and determination in political work. The party is highly disciplined. Every member is a student who learns more about Marxist theory and enriches this theory by studying local conditions and applying it to them. Every member of the Party is an activist who puts into practice what he learns and studies.

Membership of the Communist Party is not necessarily confined to members of the proletariat. This is particularly important in Africa where we have already said that the proletariat is at present very small in relation to the other classes. A person may by trade be a worker, and yet in fact be under the influence of bourgeois nationalist or other anti-working-class ideology. Sometimes trade union leaders, for example, may become opportunistic in their outlook because of the need constantly to reach compromise agreements with the bosses, and because they lack training in the theories and principles of the class struggle. On the other hand, many people of bourgeois, peasant or petty-bourgeois origin can become valuable members of the Communist Party and firm supporters of the working class if they accept the ideology of the working class and base their deeds on the policies and needs of the working class.

During the period of struggle against imperialism the national bourgeoisie, and even the feudal chiefs and princes, may be the allies of the working class in the struggle against imperialism. However, after the overthrow of imperialism a section of the national bourgeoisie may have ties with foreign imperialism and may betray the national revolution, may not seek a complete break with imperialism. The working class on the other hand will seek a complete break with imperialism and capitalist exploitation. They will seek to win the patriotic national bourgeoisie into a stronger and firmer alliance with the workers and peasants and isolate the treacherous section of the bourgeoisie which has ties with foreign imperialism. The working class will seek to win the broad masses of the revolutionary land-hungry peasantry in a way which will enable them to complete the agrarian revolution and redivide the land.

The need for a revolutionary vanguard which will lead the working class to destroy exploitation is as great in Africa today as it was in Asia. The treachery of the imperialists can convert the independence of African states into an empty symbol by granting political independence and continuing the ruthless exploitation of the peoples through the national bourgeoisie. It is this which the imperialists hope to do when they say they want to "save Africa for the West".

In struggling against imperialism the working class must always avoid two errors. The first is to allow the bourgeoisie to dominate their leadership. The second is to try and impose exclusively working-class leadership and programmes on the national movement. Both these errors would weaken the struggle of the working class for socialism. In the first instance the power of the national bourgeoisie will be used to curb militant forms of action because they fear that if this should happen the revolution might be carried beyond their interests. The second error is one of sectarianism, which undermines the unity of the various classes and is bound to create internal conflicts, thus diverting the attention of the people from their common enemy—imperialism.

Guided by the theory of Marxism-Leninism and the accumulated experience of the workers of the whole world, the Communist Parties in the various colonial countries and independent states can lead the African people against imperialism either of the old form or the "new" form, which the imperialists seek to maintain under the cloak of "protecting Africa from Communism".