

NIGERIA AND MARXISM

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THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION opened a new epoch in the history of humanity. That epoch is the epoch of Socialist Revolution. It made Communism no longer a spectre haunting Europe, but the greatest social force gripping the world and rapidly transforming it for the lasting happiness of mankind.

A hundred years ago only a handful of men dared identify themselves with the working class revolutionary movement. Today the army of the revolutionary working class movement has grown to several millions, and states with a Marxist-Leninist Government embrace over 1,134 million people, a third of mankind.

Against this background of inspiring revolutionary development appears the dying but stubbornly clinging to life—imperialism. It is not enough to proclaim the inevitable doom of imperialism, and thereby fold our arms and expect it to pass away. Imperialism even in its present decaying stage remains the greatest obstacle to man's future happiness. It remains dangerous, more cunning, treacherous and reckless. During the last hundred years, it has gained experience, it has improved its method of exploitation, it has multiplied its profit, it has succeeded in tightening its grip on the state machine and proceeded from national state monopoly capitalism to international state monopoly capitalism. Yet it remains a giant with clay feet. With the united effort of the socialist countries, the world revolutionary working class movement and the national liberation movement, imperialism shall be toppled and crashed into smithereens.

In the battle against world imperialism, the working class remains the most conscious, revolutionary and effective force to combat the might of international monopolistic capitalism. It follows therefore that it requires an effective militant trade union organization. The

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trade union movement today has been divided into two distinct leaderships. On the one hand are the right wing reformist leaderships, who advocate the line of capitulation and class collaboration, the line of agreement reached behind the backs of the working people and against their will. It is this labour aristocracy who serve as a brake on the militancy of the working class and an obstacle to the unity of the working class against capitalism.

On the other hand are the militant left wing revolutionary leaderships who advocate the line of unity founded on defence of class principles, on the consistent struggle for the independence of the union from both the employers and the reactionary ruling class. Representatives of this leadership depend on the workers and organize the struggle of their demand under the banner of trade union unity.

With the ruthless exploitation of the working class by the monopolists, the vicious attack on the hardwon gains of the working class, the frequent police raids on trade union premises, the growing arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of militant trade union leaders; the ever growing unemployment problems and the spiral soaring of cost-of-living, the mass of the working class, the rank and file have swung to the offensive by founding Joint Action Committees over and above the heads of the reactionary right wing leadership.

The waves of strike movement in Western Europe, America, Latin America, Asia and Africa are eloquent testimony of the offensive of the working class against the monopolists. The development of Joint Action Committees of trade unions of different ideological orientation all over the world is the latest phenomenon which has overthrown the applecart of reactionary right wing trade union class collaborators and their monopolistic capitalist masters.

IN NIGERIA

At this stage it is useful to cite the successful application of the Joint Action Committee tactics in respect of two important countrywide strikes which have shaken the forces of neo-colonialism and monopoly capitalism in Nigeria to their foundations. Nigeria today is the largest populated African state with an officially declared population of 55 million (even though this figure is in dispute). After the end of the second world war, as a result of the general economic upheaval, the activities of the national liberation movement, and the marked deterioration in the living standards of the working class and the masses as a whole, a countrywide strike broke out in 1945 which lasted up to forty-four days, ending in the victory of the Nigerian movement. Ever since, the British colonial powers, alarmed at such a grave threat to their economic interest, threw all their weight into the battle to divide

and weaken the movement. Experts on labour problems were sent from the Colonial Office to advise the colonial administrators. The reactionary right-wing leadership of the British Trade Union Congress and other 'experts' helped to devise trade union ordinances which encouraged weak and ineffective unions.

In addition to this, the breakaway bodies of the I.C.F.T.U. sent experts to assist in the break-up of the militancy of the trade union movement. Trade union leaders were offered scholarships to study at Ruskin Trade Union College and on their return offered appointments either in the colonial government offices or absorbed into highly paid personnel management jobs. To complicate matters the I.F.C.T.U. also came through the back door to add to the division.

Besides these elements of division and confusion the militant left-wing leadership fell in the hands of pseudo-Marxists, ultra-left dogmatists and crooks. As a result for almost a period of eighteen years, apart from the strike of the Enugu coal miners in 1949 when twenty-one miners were shot dead in cold blood, and the strike of mercantile employees of the subsidiary Unilever Group, the United African Company Limited in 1950, the leaders of the Nigerian trade union movement were engaged in fruitless battle against themselves, leaving the monopoly capitalists alone to wax strong and given a free rein to exploit the workers ruthlessly. The Nigerian trade union movement became an object of international ridicule and derision, weakened and divided.

SOCIALIST AID

During this period it must be recorded that both the moral and material assistance rendered by the trade union movement of the socialist countries as well as the World Federation of Trade Unions (W.F.T.U.) played no small part in helping to keep the militant left-wing of the movement growing.

The First Revolutionary Convention of the Nigerian Trade Union Congress which took place from August 4th to 8th, 1963, marked the turning point in the history of the Nigerian trade union movement. At that Convention a new leadership was elected into office, a leadership which had been tested and proved honest and determined, a leadership which has roots in the trade union movement and which recognizes the necessity of working together with all the progressive classes—especially the Marxist intellectuals. This leadership at the end of the Convention advocated as its main task a joint action programme of all trade unions with different ideological orientation based on the demand for a guaranteed national minimum wage, control of prices and rentals and abolition of the daily paid system.

The Central Working Party of the Nigerian Trades' Union Congress immediately embarked on this programme by calling a wage conference of all unions and central trade union organizations irrespective of their international affiliation. Seeing the impact which this call evoked, the leaders of the I.C.F.T.U. affiliated centre, the United Labour Congress, hurriedly sent out another invitation on a similar theme of wage demand. This move no doubt set the Nigerian Trade Union Congress a problem whether to attend the conference called by the I.C.F.T.U.-led United Labour Congress. The Central Working Committee met and carefully examined the implications and came to the conclusion to attend the wage conference called by the United Labour Congress and at the same time to go ahead with the preparation of the original conference called by the Nigerian Trade Union Congress.

At the meeting of the I.C.F.T.U.-led United Labour Congress wage conference, the reactionary right-wing leadership ignored the presence of the leaders of the N.T.U.C. and pretended that it was only a conference of their affiliates that was in progress. Several leaders of the N.T.U.C. who raised their hands to speak were ignored. However, the rank and file members of both the U.L.C. and the N.T.U.C. affiliates who were directly involved raised their voices and demanded that the leader of the N.T.U.C. be given the floor to speak.

The N.T.U.C. leader who spoke stressed the urgent need for a Joint Action Committee. He pointed out the inability of any section of the existing central labour organization carrying out industrial action effectively. He pointed out that even though Government official recognition had been granted to the U.L.C. yet the Government had no respect for it. He stressed the deplorable conditions of the workers and the great harm which the division of the trade union movement was causing the workers.

At the end of the N.T.U.C. leader's speech the rank and file members who were present unanimously rose up and demanded the immediate setting up of a Joint Action Committee composed of ten members from each side. The meeting also approved the attendance of the U.L.C. to the N.T.U.C. wage conference and also mandated the twenty-man Committee to enlarge its membership and make room for other trade union bodies.

COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY

At the N.T.U.C. wage conference the I.F.C.T.U. Nigerian Workers' Council, the neutralist Nigerian Union of Railwaymen and other neutral trade unions attended and the Joint Action Committee membership was enlarged.

The immediate task of the J.A.C. was to demand the setting up of

a high-powered Commission of Enquiry to overhaul the existing colonial wage structure with the aim of bridging the gap between the lower income group and those in the senior service and the upper segment of the civil service, public corporations and private enterprise.

The Federal Government of Nigeria felt that the demand was a joke. It did not believe that the J.A.C. could last a week, and relied on the right-wing leaders of the U.L.C. majority to whom it offered board appointments. The Federal Government bluntly refused to appoint a Commission of Enquiry.

The workers became enraged and on September 27th, 1963, a countrywide strike started from Lagos, and by the 29th it had spread all over the country involving 800,000 workers. During this period the Nigerian Government which had been hard pressed by the progressive forces was compelled to invite the strike leaders to a meeting on the eve of October 1st, the anniversary of independence and the installation of the first President of the Republic Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. The Government was compelled to come to terms, having realized that the workers were determined.

The Federal Government, represented by four Cabinet Ministers, reached agreement with the leaders of the Joint Action Committee on terms dictated by them and the high-powered Commission of Enquiry was set up.

No sooner was the strike called off than both the Government and the I.C.F.T.U. combined together to break the Joint Action Committee. In fact the I.F.C.T.U.-led Nigerian Workers' Council that represented an insignificant section of the mercantile workers was expelled from the J.A.C. when it came out in opposition to the September strike call.

The leaders of the I.C.F.T.U.-led United Labour Congress also used their regional leaders to intensify the call for the dissolution of the Joint Action Committee. However, the leaders of the N.T.U.C. mounted a strong propaganda in support of the J.A.C. and sent out its leaders to meet the regional trade union leaders and encourage them to form branches of the J.A.C. all over the country.

The formation of regional branches of the J.A.C. weakened and exposed the leadership of both the U.L.C. and the N.W.C., and the majority of their affiliates openly disagreed with their directives. Thereby for fear of being isolated and destroyed they had to change their tactics.

The high-powered wage and salary review commission sat for a period of three months. Memoranda were submitted by the J.A.C., some trade unions, progressive economists, medical practitioners, the

Federal and Regional Governments as well as the Nigerian Employers' Consultative Association—N.E.C.A.

After six months of the appointment of the Commissions and non-submission of a report, the workers became very restive. The Government, which felt that it had weakened the J.A.C. enough, became obdurate and arrogant. It would not give a specific date when the report would be ready.

Under the auspices of the J.A.C. a representative meeting of all the trade unions was summoned and at this meeting a resolution was passed giving the Commissioners seven days to submit their report failing which another countrywide strike action would start. Before the end of the seven days ultimatum the report was submitted to the Federal Government. The representatives of the J.A.C. approached the Government for a copy of the report but the Government turned down the request. The workers were not in the mood to wait any longer and thereupon gave another ultimatum.

STRIKE ACTION

At the expiration of the given period a mass meeting of all workers was called to take a decision to start strike action. Simultaneously the Government sent for the J.A.C. leaders, doing its utmost to break the solidarity of the leadership. When it became clear that no report was forthcoming and it was discovered that the Government had deliberately called for the talks with a view to preventing a decision at the mass meeting, the J.A.C. leaders left the Government representatives. The rank and file seriously attacked the leaders for ever attending the last-minute meeting with the Government. The workers then decided to start a countrywide strike action after twenty-four hours.

The decision was hailed with great jubilation and the workers, defying the ban on public procession, poured into the streets and started a march to the Parliament. They were met at the middle of a bridge linking the mainland to the island of Lagos by steel-helmeted police, who attacked the workers with tear gas and baton charges and succeeded in breaking up the demonstration.

Leaders of the J.A.C. were wounded, arrested, locked up and charged in court.

The unanimous and united support of workers for the strike was inspiring. Both the Government and the foreign monopolist capitalists consoled themselves that the strike could not last more than a week. At the end of the first week the strike continued to spread further and further, the docks were paralyzed, the trains stood still, the shops were closed, the police and the army were confined to barracks and the

economic life of the country gradually ground to a standstill. Over one million workers were on strike.

The striking workers started to raise the slogan of 'Balewa's Government must resign'. After the ninth day of the strike the Prime Minister Tafewa Balewa broadcast a message to the nation in which he ordered the workers back to work within forty-eight hours or face mass dismissal. The workers became indignant and defied the order. At the end of forty-eight hours the workers at a mass meeting of almost 250,000 workers gave the Balewa Government an ultimatum to either adopt the Commission's report or resign.

Before the end of the workers' forty-eight-hour ultimatum, the Balewa Government called for talks with the J.A.C. leaders and at the end of the second day of talks the strike was called off after the Federal Government had agreed (i) to withdraw its White Paper in which it rejected the finding of the Commission; (ii) to treat the thirteen days' strike period as earned leave; (iii) to withdrawal of all dismissal and termination papers; (iv) to withdraw cases in court against J.A.C. leaders and strikers; (v) non-victimization of strikers.

UNITY FROM BELOW

From the above experience of Nigerian trade union movement it can be seen that working-class unity should be looked for from below, among the workers who directly experience the day-to-day attack on their standard of living. The agreement from below among the working class based on their suffering is the key note to the further growth of the Joint Action Committee in the battle against imperialism.

Although the cause of the strike was based on economic demands, yet in its development, it has raised possible political action which with a developed Marxist-Leninist party could have led to a proletarian revolution. It also raises a problem of the role of the trade union in the national liberation movement.

NATIONAL LIBERATION

The division of a large area of the world among the capitalist powers and the deprivation of the majority of the people of their independence gave rise to antagonism and opposition to the capitalist rulers, which led to sporadic risings here and there. In West Africa and in Nigeria in particular such risings were led by the local chiefs, Obas and Emirs. The British had to enter into treaty with some of the compromising rulers and to establish the indirect rule system to subdue the people.

The national liberation movement in Nigeria took a national character after the end of the second world war. Before then there was only local opposition and the demand for reforms was confined

to the coastal areas. There was no national movement of any significance over a large area of Africa. Historically before the outbreak of the second world war, with the exception of the one-fourth independent American semi-colony of Liberia, the whole of Africa was in the grip of the European capitalist powers.

The defeat of the fascist forces at the end of the second world war let loose the demand for national independence. But Comrades! Let us not kid ourselves, it was not only because of the might, or the better weapons of the national liberation movement, that the colonial powers abandoned the colonies. It was also because of the might of the socialist countries, their support, morally, financially, materially and militarily that the colonial powers were forced to yield. If the Soviet Union had not gone to the aid of Egypt when both the British and French imperialists invaded her territory, today there would not have been a flourishing United Arab Republic under President Nasser. And if the U.A.R. had been crushed in 1956, which African state would have dared to challenge the imperialists?

Let those erring comrades who have lost their bearings stop and think. The further success of the national liberation movement primarily depends on the continuous assistance and support from the socialist states and the world revolutionary working class movement. To isolate the national liberation movement from its inseparable root means only to turn over the gains of the national liberation movement to the neo-colonialists who are feverishly prowling around for any prey.

The national liberation movement in some countries has been led by the growing national bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie is made up of two distinct groups. On one side are those who wish to compromise with the foreign monopolies, to co-operate with them, to go into partnership with them, to open up markets for unbridled exploitation and to oppose the call for nationalization of the property of the monopolists.

To this group in Africa belong the Government of Nigeria, the Senegalese Government, the Liberian Government, the Cameroons Government and several other Governments that adhere to the former Monrovia bloc.

On the other side are the Governments of progressive national bourgeoisie who are engaged in the completion of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution. They advocate the nationalization of the foreign banks, insurance companies, shipping etc. etc. and proclaim as their main objective, the building of socialism. They establish commercial relationships with the socialist governments and enter into mutual and advantageous economic agreements. To this group belong

the Governments of the Ghana Republic, the United Arab Republic, the Mali Government and the Algerian Government; and recently the newly independent Governments of Tan-Zan and Kenya.

ROLE OF MARXISM

It is a well known fact that there were hardly any well organized and developed Marxist Parties in any of the colonial territories before the victory of the national liberation movements. In Nigeria there existed various pockets of Marxist groups. Attempts made to unify these groups on different occasions were not lasting. In any case the national liberation movement struggle appealed to and unified all forces fighting against colonialism.

It was after the victory of the national liberation movement and the inability of the ruling national bourgeoisie to complete the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution that the formation of Marxist Parties took place.

Considering the socio-economic stage of development in some of the African developing states, where there is practically no industry, where the working class consists of white collar merchant clerks, where capitalism is still in its infancy, where the mass of the people are illiterate and the country is still in the feudal stage of development the classical text book solutions do not apply and therefore new methods and tactics are required to guide the people to socialism.

There is therefore no ready-made answer for Marxists-Leninists in Africa. It is our duty to map out the road to consolidate the victory of the national liberation movement and support it to complete its anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggle. In some of the African states like Ghana, the United Arab Republic, Algeria and Mali the question has been raised whether there is a necessity to found a purely Marxist-Leninist Party as distinct from the popular nationalistic governments. In some of these countries existing Communist Parties that have played leading roles in the national liberation movement have been banned and their leaders jailed.

As Marxists-Leninists, we must admit that we are capable of making mistakes, if we become dogmatic, if we feel that we are the only chosen people to herald scientific socialism and that the move towards socialism not necessarily based on scientific socialism by others must be opposed. If, rather than using our knowledge to guide others towards our goal, we create the impression that as individuals we are the only group to rule the people, then we are bound to end up in isolation. The realistic application of Marxist-Leninist tactics by the Cuban Communist Party in support of the national liberation movement of Cuba led by Fidel Castro is worthy of very close study.

It follows therefore that in countries where the national leadership is not necessarily Marxist, but simply anti-feudal and anti-imperialist, it is the duty of true Marxists-Leninists to place their services at the disposal of such a government.

It would be sheer dogmatism for Marxists-Leninists to insist that the newly emerging African states must traverse the road of capitalism from feudalism so as to afford Marxists-Leninists the luxury of creating the ideal atmosphere of a proletarian revolution.

UNITED FRONT

In the African states where power has fallen into the hands of the reactionary national bourgeoisie, the approach of the Marxist-Leninist party and the militant working class is to work for the creation of a United Front of all progressive forces and to fight for a National Democratic Revolution. Depending on the reaction of the ruling class in different countries, the path of struggle may lie in Parliamentary struggle or extra-Parliamentary struggle.

Where the Marxist-Leninist party is banned, then depending on the prevailing circumstances, the party may take up armed struggle, but great care must be taken that the populace support an armed struggle, otherwise the Marxist-Leninist party which prematurely resorts to armed struggle will soon find itself in isolation and consequently face destruction. Such a party can only do great harm to the revolutionary working class movement.

Some Marxist parties in the Latin American countries who blindly aped the Cuban revolution and took up arms have paid dearly for their mistakes.

SOVIET RECOGNITION

Another problem which has caused a great deal of confusion and accusation against the Soviet Government and other socialist countries, is the establishment of diplomatic relations with the reactionary African governments and the rendering of substantial material and financial assistance to them.

These are very important problems which require very close study. Some African Marxists feel that this is a betrayal of Marxist revolutionaries. This conception is wrong. The establishment of diplomatic relations with any African state whether reactionary or progressive is a positive and correct policy.

The fact that the national liberation movement has succeeded and freed the people from colonial rulers is a very significant development. It is a defeat for the forces of imperialism. If the Soviet Government or any socialist government refuses to recognize a newly independent

African state because the national bourgeoisie who came to power are reactionary, then the Socialist governments would cease to be Marxist-Leninist.

The establishment of diplomatic relations with reactionary African governments rather strengthens than weakens the chance of the growth of the revolutionary forces.

The African Marxists-Leninists have their own contribution to enrich the treasure trove of Marxism-Leninism. They call on our comrades everywhere to assist the national liberation movements to complete the anti-feudal and anti-colonialist struggles. They call for active support to the armed national liberation movements of Angola, Mozambique and 'Portuguese' Guinea against the ruthless Portuguese colonialist government. They call for support to the patriots fighting the American-controlled government of traitor Moise Tshombe in the Congo. They call for active participation in the world fight against apartheid in South Africa, and the encouragement and growth of the organization of African unity.

Long live the unity of the Marxist-Leninist parties!