

## **Africa & Democracy**

Continuing the Discussion from  
previous issues of *the African  
Communist*

### **NIGERIA AND 'WESTMINSTER TYPE' PARLIAMENTARISM**

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NIGERIA TO SOME observers has been a stable democracy fashioned on the 'Westminster Model', albeit Western political philosophy. The disturbances in the country during the election revealed this statement to be erroneous. Nigeria has always played the reactionary role in domestic as well as international politics. She has consistently favoured Tshombe's rule in the Congo, and has also placed all sorts of obstacles to prevent the advance of African Unity. In her domestic politics she is feudalistic and there is also an element of class formation in the Society. What is responsible for all these is due to the fact that she has committed herself to following the Westminster Model. For the Marxists is it very essential to examine this model in detail.

#### **THE NATURE OF 'WESTMINSTER MODEL'**

In the main, the constitutional structure with which Nigeria was endowed at independence served four purposes:

- (1) To facilitate the transfer of power to a substantial predetermined elite;
- (2) To provide sets of principles and guide lines for the formal, mechanical operation of the government along lines favourable to foreign political and economic interests of both the imperialists and their elite counterpart in Nigeria;
- (3) To assure as long as possible, a political balance between the predetermined elite on the one hand and their potential challengers on the other;

(4) To preserve the status quo in several regions through the protection of certain groups and through certain circumscribed and special kind of individual rights.

Everything went as planned for three years and there appeared to be peace and tranquillity in the realm. But in the month of June 1964 under the calm and serene atmosphere, the latent but simmering volcano erupted in form of a general strike which was a hundred per cent successful. This strike was significant in many ways. It was not only about wage agreement but also the sense of outrage the workers felt at the difference in the living standards between themselves and their masters. The 'bigmen'—Ministers, senior civil servants and employers enjoy an opulence now rare in Europe. Their enjoyment is unconcealed, and in large part unchecked by conscientious or religious scruple.

It is not only for a minimum wage of £12 a month that the workers have been striking; it is against the system in which twice that wage can, for the lucky few, be paid as a car allowance. The most significant thing of all is that the workers, for the first time were able to mobilize full strength and paralyzed the government activity completely. All at once the society was divided into two opposing camps, the rulers on the one hand and the workers on the other. The strike finally revealed that negotiated independence, although it represented an important advance and provides a jumping-off ground for further progress, does not automatically abolish the relics of colonialism. All anti-democratic practices built into the former imperialist state machine continue, especially as European cadres of this state apparatus are often retained for a considerable period after the independence.

The issue has already become complicated in the last eighteen months by the influx of American peace corps and overpaid teachers from other imperialist countries, generally graduates going to teach infant and primary classes. In the majority of cases language difficulty makes the whole venture a waste of revenue which is already overstretched.

In addition to specific anti-democratic laws and practices the retention, for a time, of the former régime (the actual constitutions which the newly independent state inherited have been drawn up in agreement with the former colonial power) naturally, therefore, bear the imprint of colonialism to a considerable extent. State structure, parliamentary procedure, legal systems, powers of the police—all in process of time, will be found inadequate for the aims of the new state, for the elimination of imperialism and building up flourishing economies. That is why the Africanization

of the state apparatus becomes a major demand in all African states, and why these states increasingly find it necessary to change the constitution imposed on them.

### **WESTERN FORMS INADEQUATE**

While amongst sections of rising Nigerian capitalist and petty bourgeoisie there is a certain tendency to copy some of the worst features of western forms of democracy and government, especially in the realm of parliamentary procedure, the experience of trying to make use of political independence to solve serious economic and social problems which have been left as the grim heritage of colonial system, is convincing the Nigerian people, their organizations and their most outstanding leaders, that western forms of democracy do not necessarily have much relevance in Africa's present circumstances. This was clearly spelt out in the discussions in March 1959 at a seminar held at Ibadan, Nigeria on 'Representative Government and National Progress' in which delegates from a number of different African territories took part. Although this was a discussion conference and no binding conclusions were reached or decisions taken, the deliberations clearly showed that

nobody wanted merely to take over institutions inherited from the colonizing powers; everybody considered that there must be changes and adaptations and that newly independent countries must not be expected to govern themselves in the images of the European powers (*West Africa*, April 11th, 1959).

The inadequacy of the institutions of European capitalism for newly independent states has been sharply emphasized by President Sukarno of Indonesia in terms which have considerable relevance to the situation in Nigeria. Speaking at the University of Istanbul in April 1959, he said:

We imitated the practice of Western countries in establishing a pattern of parliamentary liberal democracy which came straight from text-books of Western Europe and America. . . . We swallowed it and got violent indigestion. . . . The sickness grew worse, not better, and eventually it began to menace not only the health, but even the very life of the nation. . . . Something had to be done. We had to apply our own system of democracy, which is in harmony with the character of our nation. We had to make it possible for all sections of our society to participate in the function of government.

The programme of erecting a class structure in Nigeria started in full swing in 1946, quite apart from Lugard's idea of 'indirect rule' which perpetuates the position of decaying feudal overlords in the North and moribund chiefs in the South. In 1946, the Harragin Commission reviewed certain aspects of the public services and foresaw the creation of an upper class of executives of 'people

who could make decisions and carry managerial functions'. The need for such an artificial class was believed to be urgent because 'the Nigeria society (was) an amorphous one, in which there was nothing like an upper class, middle class, and proletariat'. The Commission felt that an upper class was the *sine qua non* of political stability.

But the realities of class struggle proved this an illusion. The June 1964 strike which was a hundred per cent successful paralyzed the industrial output of the country for a fortnight. The federal election was principally a tussle between the feudal North (represented by the Northern Alliance) and the bourgeois and petty bourgeois of the South (represented by the United Grand Alliance). Practically, these parties are right wing in orientation.

However, the colonial régime developed an unbalanced salary structure which left the 'Senior Service' far above the rest as a special interest group. The creation of a House of Chiefs, although not a new programme in concept, was given legitimacy by constitutional arrangement and the much coveted title, Chief, becomes a mark of social distinction for any politician who makes money.

The formation of élite clubs, such as the African Tennis Club at Enugu Island Club, Lagos, have all proved to be a means of perpetuating the imperialist design of class structure.

### **MOVES WHICH HAVE DEVELOPED THROUGH CLASS FORMATION**

Values and perspectives concomitant with the idea of class have no doubt appeared over the years. There is more emphasis on liberal education: law, bourgeois economics and accounting, history oriented in the Western tradition, all these are regarded with high esteem for the prestige value enjoyed by their adherents. Naturally less emphasis is placed on science and technology. The choice of liberal studies is, they say, a quick and easy way to power and money. This has also led to alienation—the élite on a high pedestal looking down on the workers and peasants as the scum of the earth. More emphasis on material things among the élite, for example cars, refrigerators, more whisky and promiscuity; and corruption in high and low places. This is manifestly true, as the Coker Commission showed. A number of people in Nigerian 'ruling circles' saw their country not as a society to be passionately believed in, but one which was more of a vehicle of personal advancement.

The introduction of the capitalist 'rat race' is a major weapon of neo-colonialism. Such a process does not always take place, and

it certainly does not always happen overnight. Over a period of years, the British policy in Nigeria for example, gradually made positions open to Nigerians, utilizing the time gained to seek out the most likely allies, to feel its way, to find out and sound out people, doing things slowly enough to ensure that Britain reclaimed as much initiative as possible. The creation of Regional Marketing Boards in 1954 was intended to promote a capitalist class. The two great scandals which followed—the African Continental Bank Inquiry (Foster Sutton Commission) 1956, and the Western Region Marketing Board Inquiry (Coker Commission) 1962, all proved corruption and malversation on the part of the 'businessmen' who are in fact the political leaders and their supporters. In each case vast sums of money were scattered and dissipated.

In short, whenever the political assumptions of the colonial period have prevailed, government in Africa tends to mean an oligarchical élite whose members are sometimes bound together by traditional ties, but more often by a network of private interest and activities of the 'log rolling government'. The early years of Ghana's independence saw some remarkable developments in this direction, a veritable efflorescence of luxury living on a scale never thought possible before. Without the solid stand which leadership in Ghana had taken and the overwhelming support of the masses to fight corruption the situation would have deteriorated. Through mass education the people in Ghana have developed a proper attitude towards a corrupt official. The Young Pioneers are educated to ferret out and expose corruption in any quarter. This may have its dangers but its advantages outweigh them.

Nigeria is the home of 'dash' or bribery, and the position has worsened at an alarming rate. The ruling class and some of their supporters revel in it. The ruling class, being once again the capitalist protégés, find themselves completely impotent to do anything about it. They are now the living embodiment of the African version of Tammany Hall. They have found themselves slaves to a system which is essentially based on a capitalist concept of society. A system into which they have been propelled by foreign capitalists through constitutional design, coupled with personal greed and above all lack of vision by the rulers, all these failings have led to acquisitiveness, class mentality, anti-social attitudes unparalleled in the history of Africa.

The leaders—Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa, Awolowo, Okotie Ebo, Okpara, Sardauna of Sokoto, and many more have all committed themselves to a capitalist road of development because they stand to benefit more from the system. These are indigenous

money and property magnates in the country. If the system goes they are the ones who will feel the greatest pinch of all.

'Freedom and democracy' are the magic words which sustains a régime which allows the top dogs to spend the tax-payers' money freely for personal enjoyment and advancement. There are reports of the ruling class investing in London, New York, Paris and Swiss banks, while at the same time the country is groaning for investment capital. Freedom to live at Kkoyi, the Lagos garden suburb, apart from the masses who live in squalor and the sweltering heat at Idummota, Ajegunle, Ebute Metta, Idi-Oro.

It is a sort of arrangement which Hodgkin rightly termed 'urban apartheid'. If the price Nigeria has to pay for opting for the capitalist path of development is corruption, mass unemployment, superstition, the crippling millstone of poverty, stagnation, tribalism, and overwhelming illiteracy, then it is high time the system was cast overboard by progressive forces in the society. These are the evils which will not be eradicated by the present parliamentary and economic arrangement but by a socialist system. That is why there is an enormous task for the workers and the peasants to accomplish in Nigeria.

The solution to these major problems can only come about if the imperialists and their lackeys are overthrown by the masses and a socialist system is set up to take the place of the existing order. The enemy now causing confusion by retarding the progress of the people are the imperialists, the local bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, who have a vested interest in adhering to the system.

In waging its ideological warfare, imperialism uses a variety of slogans and arguments to mislead the African opinion. It encourages corruption and ideas of personal careerism, fosters all the worst, most commercialized and degraded aspects of western life. It preaches 'non-violence' and passive acceptance of suffering on the one hand and personal dictatorship on the other. It presses every divisive and disruptive demand into service, strives to turn Africa back to the obscurantism and narrow horizon of the past. Above all it beats on the drum of anti-communism. This is the secret weapon of neo-colonialism. Its aim is to isolate and put a wedge between the African States so that unity becomes mere wishful thinking.

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE**

To carry through this great transformation of society, especially in a continent like Africa, which has been so terribly ravaged by

imperialism for sixty years, requires enormous effort. Difficult as is the struggle to end colonial rule, the struggle to build a new Africa along socialist lines is still more difficult. Not only is it necessary to carry through this great change in the face of constant opposition and sabotage by forces of internal reaction—feudal and tribal leaders, career politicians, who are the hangers on of imperialism, local capitalists, who think more of their pockets and privileges than of the national interest. Equally one must overcome the people's force of habit: this 'terrible force' as Lenin termed it, continues long after the original conditions which gave rise to it have gone.

In Africa this means a struggle against tribalism, against petty parochial ideas, against superstitions of all kinds, against the self-centred ideas of small producers or farmers, against a contemptuous attitude towards women, against a whole range of ideas and habits of thought which hold man in thrall, stifle his initiative, keep him in ignorance, rob him of confidence and prevent him from utilizing his potential creative power in the interest of the whole people.

It is precisely to contend with such difficulties that the working class and peasants need to establish a leading role, to use the power of the state to guide the whole people in the building of a new life. The state is not merely a weapon to safeguard the new people's power and crush the enemy; it is even more a powerful educative and constructive weapon to enable men to transform society and thus in the process transform themselves.

One can readily see what a heavy and difficult responsibility rests on the back of the working class. Such a historic task can be performed only by a class which has a body of scientific theory, a theory based on the experience of the struggle for socialism throughout the world, from which the general laws of universal validity has been established. Such a science is Marxism-Leninism and to wield this weapon the working class must be organized politically, must have the responsibility of championing its political viewpoint.

To achieve socialism, the working class has to rally around itself all the progressive forces in society. In underdeveloped regions of Africa, this means uniting with the peasantry who comprise the overwhelming majority of the population. The alliance of the working class and the peasantry will provide a bedrock on which the unity of all progressive forces will be based.

To ensure that political power is in the hands of the people guided by the working class, it is not enough to enjoy universal

franchise and other election rights and to be able to exercise democratic freedoms; the key is to win state power, to direct the whole apparatus of government and state, including the armed forces and the police, which, if left in the hands of pro-imperialist or capitalist forces, can be turned against the workers and peasants and their organizations. The first step in effecting this change in the control of the state is the struggle for Africanization, that is, to clear out the remaining cadres of imperialism from the state apparatus; but this is only a first step, which must be followed by a change in the class character of the state, if progress is to be made towards socialism.

With the means of production in the hands of the people, and with the decisive sections of the economy in the hands of the state, production can be planned, instead of being left to anarchy of private profit interests; and further, the main aim of production becomes that of satisfying the material and spiritual needs of the people and no longer that of filling the pockets of private capitalists, whether foreign or indigenous.

## **A PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT**

**G. Chukuka Eke**

I have always found the AFRICAN COMMUNIST lucrative and inspiring to every progressive youth of our time. There is an impressive high understanding of the principles of Marxism-Leninism and of the fact that Africa at this age needs such an element of world outlook.

In a recent issue you challenged interested readers to a political discussion on democracy and Africa: In this I beg to participate.

Comrade Mokwugo Okoye stimulated the nerves of most readers with his assembled panel of accuracy that provokes thoughts. Though I may not go so far as comrade Okoye, yet I wish to confine myself with two terms.

What really does Africa need at this era? Does Africa need that brand of 'Parliamentary Democracy' or a brand of 'National Democracy'? History shows that the so-called parliamentary democracy has failed to solve the vital problems confronting a nation.

Let us dwell on the definition of a state.

As we all know, a state is a political power-instrument of the economically ruling classes. It means that democracy in the imperialist countries is a screen for the very real dictatorship of



the big capitalist monopolies, directed against the working class, against the working people. Here, power is often disguised by a democratic appearance: there are regular general elections, the government is responsible to parliament. The face of this power is revealed as soon as the working masses become conscious of their class interests and begin to present demands to the governments. Then the advocates of parliamentary democracy do not shrink from sending troops and police against the workers, opening fire on peaceful demonstrations, arresting workers' leaders. Should it reach higher dimensions, they resort to open terroristic methods.

This is parliamentary democracy which leaves the masses only one great realm of freedom—that of imagination, fantasy in the dream world of unreality, sickness and in death. It is full of early deaths, suicides, insanity and corruption.

Must a liberating Africa contest for a parliamentary democracy? NO.

The world capitalist camp has always declared democracy to presuppose the struggle of parties, a parliamentary opposition and proclaimed the one-party system and proletarian democracy as undemocratic systems. Having parliamentary opposition could be logically debated. What warrants an opposition party in the parliament? Is it not owing to the development of class-differences? This is more reason why parliamentary democracy cannot and could not have been a government of the people, by the people.

As I have defined a state above, we Marxists judge the democratic character of a political system in a different way. The criterion that must be applied is: whose interests does the power defend, whom does it serve, what policy does it pursue, whom does the power belong to?

Liberating African states do not want parliamentary democracy of lazy big bellies who waste what toiling hands have won.

The next assignment of African states after the attainment of political independence is the struggle for economic independence and national progress. The policy of 'National Democracy' aims at eliminating exploitation of man by man, raising the living standards and cultural level of the masses. A state of national democracy is an alliance of all different classes with progressive forces full of revolutionary potentialities in a united front. This united front stands in struggle against all reactionary forces both inside and outside which are pro-imperialist, thereby defending universal peace and strengthening international friendship. This will surely accord with the most vital aspirations of the popular masses, of all progressive people, hence it will enhance democracy

for the working people on an unprecedented scale and finally it leads to proletarian democracy. Of course, such a front could only be recommended to those independent African states, where a multi-party system exists, e.g. Nigeria, Morocco, etc.

Seeing the evils which lie behind parliamentary democracy, we stand against such a system. Nevertheless, we do not mean to undermine the sense of having a parliament. We Marxists need a Parliament which represents the interests of the masses, the patriotic toiling people; such a Parliament which advocates the refinement and emancipation of man, and finally which ranges itself alongside all the many governments already taking part to see that lovely day when human freedom is the right of all people everywhere. Only then the parliament could play a real democratic role.

The course of Africa in our epoch is devoted to that of socialism. This entails rebuilding the whole of social life from top to bottom. This is an extremely complicated task, and its fulfilment is only possible, if the broadest strata of the population consciously participate in the construction of the new society.

Active participation of the working class in the execution of the state economic plans and in the management of the industries is an impressive expression of democracy. This being the case, those independent African states, e.g., Ghana, Mali, etc., which are ruled by one-party systems with full rights of self-determination of the masses, have been in no doubt practising democracy.

In our days, under new conditions, the patriotism of the working class, inseparable from proletarian internationalism, has become a particularly active and powerful force. V. I. Lenin wrote in 1908: 'The given political, cultural and social environment is the most powerful factor in the struggle of the Proletariat'.

Therefore in defence of national independence, the working people should not be indifferent to and unconcerned about political, social, and cultural conditions of its struggle and consequently cannot remain indifferent to the fate of their country. This should be our own democracy in Africa.