

GEORGE PADMORE: A CRITIQUE. PAN AFRICANISM OR MARXISM?

Paul Trewhela

Among members of the Pan Africanist Congress, George Padmore has been rewarded as 'the leading theoretician of Pan Africanism' and as 'the Father of African Emancipation'.¹ Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, the first President of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), in particular, stressed the importance in his own politics of Padmore's thought. The critique of Padmore's politics is thus a critique of a principal source of the politics of the PAC.

Padmore's most important book, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*, was first published in 1956.² Three years later, in 1959, the PAC in South Africa split away from the African National Congress (ANC). In his book, Padmore makes criticism of the post-war political direction of the ANC, particularly its subordination to a 'Stalinist manoeuvre' in the Congress of the People in 1955, resulting in the Freedom Charter. (*Pan-Africanism* p.362) Padmore's criticism in this book of the South African Communist Party (SACP) coincided with long-standing criticism by Africanists within the ANC of its political relation to the SACP.

It is characteristic of the mental poverty of existing political tendencies in South Africa that Padmore is so little read, even by his co-thinkers among the Pan Africanists. The Stalinist tendency has of course its own interest in burying Padmore's criticism — its way, not only with the ideas of critics such as Padmore, but still more with those of Marx.

Padmore (Malcolm Nurse) was born in Trinidad in the Caribbean in 1903 and went to university in the United States. He joined the Communist Party of the United States in the late 1920s, becoming an official of the Third International. He was a leading authority on the black question in the Soviet Union (and a deputy to the Moscow Soviet) during the Stalinist 'third period' which lasted from 1929 to 1935. In 1933, following six months in prison in nazi Germany, he broke with the Comintern in opposition to its adaptation towards the British, French and US

colonialist powers — a turn which Padmore regarded correctly as treacherous to black interests everywhere. From this experience Padmore developed his conception of Pan Africanism, becoming in the words of the novelist (also ex-Stalinist) Richard Wright, 'the veritable father of many of the nationalist movements in Black Africa ...'³ In 1945 together with W.E.B. Du Bois he helped organize the Fifth Pan-Africanist Conference in Manchester, working with Kwame Nkrumah (the future first prime minister and later president of Ghana) as joint secretary. Padmore died in 1959 at the age of 56, six months after the formation of the PAC under the leadership of Sobukwe — a political development that had his warmest encouragement — and six months before the massacre at Sharpeville.

In the words of his boyhood friend and later political collaborator, C.L.R. James, Padmore worked in the Comintern as 'the best known and most trusted of agitators for African independence'. James describes Padmore's later break with the Comintern as follows:

In 1935, seeking alliances, the Kremlin separated Britain and France as 'democratic imperialisms' from Germany and Japan, making the 'Fascist imperialisms' the main target of Russian and Communist propaganda. This reduced activity for African emancipation to a farce: Germany and Japan had no colonies in Africa. Padmore broke instantly with the Kremlin.⁴

In extreme poverty, and almost single-handedly, Padmore then proceeded in London to set up the African Bureau to coordinate opposition to imperialism in Africa. 'Between the wars it was the only African organization of its kind in existence.'⁵ Padmore was thus one of the few who broke with Stalinism during its turn to the right after the unopposed triumph of nazism in Germany. This was when the Marxist programme was openly abandoned by the Soviet leadership, in its vain hope of appeasing British, French and US imperialism in face of the danger from nazi Germany. But whereas for Trotsky, the collapse of 1933 demanded the strengthening and renewal of Marxist internationalism, for Padmore it was the signal for a purely nationalist perspective. There is no direct and explicit criticism of Marx's theory in Padmore's book. But

there is not the slightest presence of Marx's method either, despite the claim by James (and others) that Padmore was to the end 'an undeviating Marxist'.⁶

The subsequent politics of Padmore and Trotsky represented different and opposed responses to the same world political process: the debacle in the Soviet Union in its effect upon the Communist International. Their different responses arose out of fundamentally opposed interpretations of the nature and sources of Stalinism. Trotsky looked towards a world revolutionary process that would, as part of the whole, pull down the autocracy in the Soviet Union through a revival of Soviet workers' democracy. Padmore's conception was more limited, embracing the emancipation of the colonial peoples from imperialism outside of seizure of power by the proletariat and through the formation of a United States of Africa based upon state control of the 'main sector of the national economy' (p.377). Padmore looked generally to a future socialist democracy in Africa. But this conception for him in no way required the revolutionary self-determination of the proletariat, whereas for Trotsky it meant the the political authority of workers' delegates as in the Commune of Paris and the early days of Soviet power in Russia. For Trotsky, in the last resort, Stalinism represented the most profound break with Marxism, which required to be re-asserted and redeveloped, while for Padmore in practice Marxism represented in the present period - unexamined and unexplained — a nullity, a complete dead end.

In the mid-1930s, however, Padmore's break with the Comintern had the virtue of standing in opposition to a real betrayal by Stalinism and to the flocks of social democrats who delighted in this betrayal of revolution during the period of the Popular Front. Padmore took issue with Stalinism while illusions in it were at their height. His opposition became still more sharply focussed in 1934 when the USSR undermined its own creation, the League Against Imperialism, at the same time as it entered the previously despised League of Nations — for Padmore, 'the beginning of the Soviet *rapprochement* with Britain and France in face of the growing menace of the Axis powers' (p.330). Then came

... the revelation in the British press that Stalin had sold oil to Mussolini during the fascist invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. This Soviet stab in the back made the League Against

Imperialism exceedingly unpopular among non-Communist British anti-imperialists whose sympathies were with Abyssinia About the same time, the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, with which I was associated as secretary, was liquidated, in keeping with the pro-League of Nations orientation in Soviet foreign policy.

Padmore concluded that in their struggle for emancipation, the colonial peoples could rely only on themselves. At the same time the notion of the proletariat as the decisive class in the struggle for emancipation from imperialism was jettisoned. With this specifically non-class conception of black emancipation, Padmore was set towards becoming (in the words of C.L.R. James) 'the originator of the movement to achieve the political independence of the African countries and people of African descent'.⁷ Padmore's political collaboration with James began in 1935: a point of intersection between the Trotskyist politics of James at that time (James opened discussion on the black question with Trotsky in Mexico in 1939) and the Pan Africanist perspective of Padmore, to which James turned all the more strongly following his break with Trotskyism in the middle 1940s.

Spain and Morocco

Not many years after Padmore's break from Moscow, George Orwell also observed — as a fighter in the proletarian militia from Barcelona during the civil war in Spain — how the Stalinised Comintern betrayed the colonial revolution in order to appease the colonial powers. Orwell realized that this was enough to sabotage the revolution in Spain, since the generals' coup began in Morocco with its initial mass military force composed mainly of African colonial troops.

As Orwell noted in *Homage to Catalonia*, besides butchering their opponents and critics within the revolutionary movement, the Spanish Communist party and its numerous Russian secret police controllers made no effort to develop a real popular movement in Franco's rear.

But what was most important of all, with a non-revolutionary policy it was difficult, if not impossible, to strike at Franco's rear. ...What clinches everything is the case of Morocco.

Why was there no rising in Morocco? Franco was trying to set up an infamous dictatorship, and the Moors actually preferred him to the Popular Front Government! The palpable truth is that no attempt was made to foment a rising in Morocco, because to do so would have meant putting a revolutionary construction on the war. The first necessity to convince the Moors of the Government's good faith, would have been to proclaim Morocco liberated. And we can imagine how pleased the French would have been by that. The best strategic opportunity of the war was flung away in the vain hope of placating French and British capitalism. The whole tendency of the Communist policy was to reduce the war to an ordinary non-revolutionary war... Perhaps the P.O.U.M. [Workers' Party of Marxist Unity] and Anarchist slogan: 'The war and the revolution are inseparable' was less visionary than it sounds.⁸

Orwell was not alone in understanding this. Within two weeks of the generals' counter-revolutionary coup, an international conference of Trotskyists meeting secretly in Europe issued an appeal 'To the Workers of Spain and the Workers of the Entire World' which stated: 'A people which oppresses another cannot emancipate itself. Free the Moroccan people! You will make of them a formidable ally'⁹ The conference simultaneously issued a call 'To the Enslaved People of Morocco', stressing that as in Ethiopia,

What was needed was for the oppressed peoples of Africa to rise and fling the imperialists bandits into the sea; what was needed was for the oppressed peoples to consummate a union with the working class of Europe and the other continents.

The conference noted further that

If the government of the People's Front in Spain had taken immediate measures to help the Moroccan peoples to free themselves, fascism would never have had a base from which to attack the Spanish workers and peasants.¹⁰

Within weeks of this attack on the politics of Stalinism on Africa, the first of Stalin's three main frame-up trials began in Moscow. Trotsky and his son, Leon Sedov, were in effect

sentenced to death in their absence, and the former Bolsheviks Zinoviev and Kamenev were quickly executed. In Spain, there were very few Trotskyists. But leading members of this sole international organization that called for freedom of Morocco as essential to the victory of the proletariat in Europe were hunted down and murdered, as were numerous anarchists and members of the POUM.

In the same year that Orwell published *Homage to Catalonia*, the US Trotskyist Felix Morrow published his book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, in which the conjoined dialectic of the strangled revolutions in Africa and Europe appears:

Freedom for Morocco? Delegations of Arabs and Moors came to the government [which included the Stalinists] pleading for a decree. The government would not budge. The redoubtable Abd-el-Krim, exiled by France, sent a plea to Caballero [the Spanish republican prime minister] to intervene with Blum [prime minister of the stalinist-supported Popular Front government in France] so that he might be permitted to return to Morocco to lead an insurrection against Franco. Caballero would not ask, and Blum would not grant. To rouse Spanish Morocco might endanger imperialist domination throughout Africa.¹¹

Morrow concludes: 'Thus Caballero and his Stalinist allies set their faces as flint against revolutionary methods of struggle against fascism....And this fitted in, at bottom, with Anglo-French policy'(Morrow, pp.48-49)

Within Spain itself, a very small Trotskyist group, the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain, led by Grandizo Munis, demanded 'absolute freedom of the people of Morocco, including the right of separation, Morocco for the Moroccans....' With this strategy, the Spanish Trotskyists aimed to 'foment insurrection among the oppressed masses of Morocco and cause disintegration in the mercenary fascist army'.¹²

An anti-colonialist insurrection in north Africa was a necessity for the Spanish (and European) revolution. The Army of Africa, composed of north African Muslim *regulares* under Spanish officers together with the Spanish Foreign Legion, with General Franco as its commander, was as Antony Beevor notes, 'Spain's most effective and ruthless fighting force', the 'most

professional force' in the whole Spanish theatre.¹³ In 1921, Moroccan tribesmen under Abd-el-Krim had inflicted on the Spanish army at Annual 'the most ignominious defeat in its history' — 10,000 killed, 4,000 wounded, their general committing suicide — before succumbing five years later to a joint offensive of the French and Spanish armies, only ten years before the outbreak of the generals' coup (Beevor, p.23). In preparation of their coup, Spanish militarists exhorted the Muslim *regulares* in 1936 that 'the Republic wanted to abolish Allah' (Beevor, p.52). Thus the paradox of the bourgeois counter-revolution, a crusade of the Roman Catholic Church *militans*, compelled to find its shock troops in Islam. The nation whose military aristocracy was formed through seven centuries of war aimed at expelling the Muslims to Africa, now depended on the return of the Muslim Army of Africa for the preservation of private property, Church and State in Europe. In its war of counter-revolution, the Spanish army rested for support upon the colonial collaborator stratum of Moroccan tribal chiefs. The Spanish proletariat, facing African colonial troops brought into Spain by the ruling class conspirators, now suffered defeat at the hands of its own political leadership which cemented this bizarre union of opposites instead of exploding it. 'Aside from the troops in Morocco', the German ambassador reported to Hitler's Foreign Ministry, Franco had 'only the wreck of an army'. Raymond Carr concludes: 'the decisive factor was the Moroccan army Without it the Nationalists would have lost the Civil War'.¹⁴ The most extensive, best attempt at socialist revolution in Europe after 1917 was thus partly lost in Africa, through the pro-imperialist politics of Stalinism.

The disaster thus brought to Europe and to Africa by the collapse of the revolution in Russia can be precisely measured. The question of the relation of black colonial troops to the struggle of the proletariat in Europe was not a new question. The final contribution in Trotsky's collection of speeches and articles, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, published in Moscow in 1924, dealt precisely with this question.

This took the form of Trotsky's reply in a letter to a question from the black US poet and communist, Claude McKay, at the Fourth World Congress of the Communist International in 1923. Trotsky's reply was published in English in the *International Press Correspondence* on 13 March 1923. The question from McKay concerned the use of African troops at that

time by French imperialism to garrison occupied regions of western Germany, from which the French capitalists extracted plunder in the form of war reparations.

Trotsky's reply was emphatic:

The Negroes themselves must offer resistance against being so employed. Their eyes must be opened, so that they realize that when they help French imperialism to subjugate Europe, they are helping to subjugate themselves, in that they are supporting the domination of French capitalism in the African and other colonies.

In words that were to have direct and practical bearing on the revolutionary struggles in Spain 13 years later, Trotsky continued:

There is no doubt whatever that the use of colored troops for imperialist war, and at the present time for the occupation of German territory, is a well thought out and carefully executed attempt of European capitalism, and especially of French and English capitalism, to raise armed forces outside of Europe, so that capitalism may have mobilized, armed and disciplined African or Asian troops at its disposal, against the revolutionary masses of Europe. In this way the use of colonial reserves for imperialist armies is closely related to the question of European revolution, that is, to the fate of the European working class.

From this, Trotsky concluded that the 'education of Negro propagandists is an exceedingly urgent and important revolutionary task at the present juncture'.¹⁵ The reversal of Trotsky's politics at the head of the Comintern, on the issue of Spain and Morocco in 1936, was the most serious betrayal ever by Stalinism on the black question.

Effectively, Stalinism was the single most important element *upholding* colonialist domination in north Africa — and thus, as Morrow says, 'throughout Africa' — in the 1930s. The revolution in Spain created ideal conditions for overthrowing European colonialist rule. With its focus on the struggle against imperialism in Africa, it is a very serious weakness in Padmore's book — and a concession to Stalinism, and to imperialism — that it contains no analysis of the conjoined

dialectic of the revolution in Europe and Africa at its central nodal point this century, the strangled Spanish revolution of the 1930s.

Padmore says that General Franco 'like all imperialist-minded dictators, can only conceive of national "greatness" in terms of dominion over subject races', and that 'Spanish Morocco provided him with the initial contingent of troops to overthrow the Republic and make himself the "Sawdust Caesar" of Spain' (p.224). This is to under-estimate and trivialise the matter. The really revolutionary conclusion — one that relates the fate of African emancipation to the overthrow of capitalism in its global centres — is not drawn. Padmore understood that the Moroccan question 'had a most far-reaching effect' on European politics before the first imperialist world war, bringing France, Britain, Germany and Italy to the very brink of war in 1912 (p.81), yet the far greater significance of the Moroccan question before the second world war escapes him.

It was this deeply inter-connected world complex of imperialist domination that the Spanish revolution threatened to spring into the air. For the Spanish right to have had to rely so decisively on an oppressed colonial people indicates that the Spanish left was crucified by its own chauvinism. It perpetuated the centuries-long oppressive relation of the Spanish ruling classes to the former Muslim inhabitants of Spain, reaping a terrible revenge which bourgeois society exploited to its exclusive advantage. To advance the revolution in North Africa, what was necessary was that the Stalinists' grip on the proletariat in Spain be broken.

Padmore's blindness to the basic requirements for revolution in Africa may be measured from his silence concerning the one occasion — the only one — when the proletariat in *Europe* rebelled and shed its blood against imperialism in *Africa*: the *Semana Tragica*, or tragic week, of the proletariat of Barcelona in July 1909, in opposition to its conscription into the colonialist war in Morocco. By comparison, not long after the 'tragic week' of July 1909, the English critic of imperialism Henry W. Nevinson described the 'refusal of the Catalonian reservists to serve in the war against the Riff mountaineers of Morocco' as 'one of the most significant' events of modern times.¹⁶ Barbara Tuchman states that the war in Morocco was regarded by the Barcelona workers in 1909 as 'a war in the interests of the Riff mine-owners. A strike initiated by the Labour Federation of

Barcelona became overnight an outpouring of the people themselves, especially the women, against war, rulers, reaction, the church and all the elements of an oppressive regime'.¹⁷

About this proletariat, Padmore has nothing to say. Not to have known about this episode in the relation of Europe to Africa, or to have ignored it, was a serious failing. But it must be said that the Marxists have not been superior to Padmore, either in study of the history of the proletariat of Barcelona, or of its relation to the emancipation of Africa. Yet here in embryo was the relation of the revolutionary proletariat to the liberation of the oppressed peoples.

This same proletariat of Barcelona, massacred in 1909, rose up again and was again suppressed in blood in its revolutionary general strike and insurrection of July-August 1917 (between the February and October revolutions in Russia) and then became the first in all Spain to establish dual power against the bourgeoisie in July 1936, by successful military assault against the barracks in Barcelona. The proletarian insurrection of the Barcelona workers of 19/20 July 1936, under supremely heroic and self-sacrificing leadership of the anarchist trade unionists, was the greatest rising of the proletariat in Europe following the revolutions in Petrograd of February and October 1917. If the October revolution of the Petrograd workers was the finest result of Marx's wing of the old First International, the Barcelona insurrection of July 1936 was the best work of Bakunin's. This outstandingly revolutionary proletariat of Barcelona — comprising nearly half the industrial work force of Spain, with its exceptional workers' democracy and its sweeping socialization of production — was struck down within a year by Stalinism behind the front line of the civil war, in conjunction with the Moscow Trials in Russia. The bourgeois government of the Popular Front served the interests of Anglo-French imperialism in the Mediterranean area, in advance of the coming imperialist war for the re-partition of the earth. By entering this Kerensky-type government alongside the social-democrats and Stalinists, the leadership of both the anarchists and the POUM betrayed the revolution. The Barcelona workers had made the best attempt at socialist revolution in western Europe since the Commune. Against them, the Stalinist coup in Barcelona of May 1937 prepared the triumph of fascism.

Padmore and Stalinism

In *Pan Africanism or Communism?* Padmore refers to the treacherous effect of Stalinism in France, especially through the Popular Front governments of the 1930s and 1940s, on the struggles of the oppressed peoples above all of Algeria and Vietnam: 'a two-faced role' carried out by 'double crossers' (pp.337, 334). Nevertheless, he has not a word to say concerning the slaughter of Trotskyist revolutionaries by the Vietnamese Stalinists, headed by Ho Chi Minh. This was at the time when Ho's comrade, Maurice Thorez of the French Communist party — then in De Gaulle's post-war government — is reported to have said that he 'ardently hoped to see the French flag flying over every territory in the French Union', and that he 'had not the slightest intention of being held responsible for a sell-out of France's position in Indochina'.¹⁸ Towards the Stalinist parties of east Asia, Padmore is remarkably selective and uncritical: so also his co-thinkers in South Africa.

The historical process through which the revolution collapsed internally within the Soviet Union was of no interest to Padmore. This is a tremendous failing. He describes the effects, but cannot explain the cause. He is not even seriously interested in the question. Arriving in Moscow in 1930, he appears to have shown no interest in the substantial issues which had brought about the suppression of the Left Opposition and the expulsion of Trotsky from the Soviet Union, or the break of the Stalin faction from the Right Opposition of Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky not long afterwards. Cattle-herding of peasants by force into collectives, the death of millions by human-engineered famine, construction of the now useless Baltic-White Sea Canal through a system of working to death by slave labour: all this took place during Padmore's Moscow years, and all this he passes over in his best-known book more than twenty years later ... without comment.

In *Pan Africanism or Communism?* Padmore makes a very sharp criticism of the programmatic resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, held in 1928, in relation to the black question both in the United States and South Africa. This put forward for both countries the perspective of a 'Black Republic' — a 'fantastic' utopia, in Padmore's phrase, in its relation to the United States, suggesting a form of black territorial rule in the deep south 'no different from Dr Malan's *Apartheid* ... a sort of

glorified Native Reserve' (p.307). In its relation to South Africa, Padmore regarded the programme of the 'Black Republic' as an attempt to segregate blacks 'into some sort of Bantu state' (p.352). This is not the place to make a thorough-going criticism of Stalin's and Bukharin's 'Black Republic' slogan. But what is left unclear in *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* is how far, if at all, as head of the Comintern's 'Negro department of propaganda and organization', in James' description,¹⁹ Padmore actively and publicly opposed this policy: whether as member of the Communist Party of the United States while this programme was being decided, or as lecturer on colonial affairs at the University for the Toilers of the East in Moscow, or as secretary of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, or as member of the presidium of the Colonial Bureau of the Communist International, or as deputy to the Moscow City Soviet representing the Stalin Ball-bearing Works. Yet the Comintern during the period of the 'Black Republic' slogan had no more important black executive than Padmore.

His subsequent critique of stalinism is restricted to a very narrow corner. He recognizes its betrayal of the colonial peoples of Africa and Asia in the 1930s and 1940s, while being totally uncritical of Stalinism in China and Vietnam. He further actually endorses and upholds the chauvinist oppression of non-Russian peoples within the Soviet Union, against every principle of the revolution. In this, he adds his authority as a critic of imperialism to a blatant lie:

The coloured Soviet citizens of Central Asia — Uzbekians, Tajiks, Kazans, Turkmans, Tartars, Kirghizans, Chuvashians, Kazans, Burians, etc. — enjoy absolute racial equality with those of Slav descent. If they are sometimes persecuted, it is not for their race as are the non-Europeans — Africans, Indians and Coloureds — in South Africa, but for political "deviations", and even this did not affect the few Negroes working in Russia at the time of the first Five Year Plan, for they had the common sense to keep out of Soviet internal politics. So purges did not affect them. (pp.313-14)

His earlier work, *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire* (not yet available to the present writer), was presumably impregnated with the same spirit.

This passage illuminates the crass, apologetic character of Padmore's politics. He starts from a nationalist premise that the internal struggles and purges in the Soviet Union were an 'internal' affair, of no concern to blacks. From this undialectical and unrevolutionary standpoint, Padmore closes his eyes to the oppression of minority peoples in the Soviet Union, above all the wholesale deportation — continuing right up to the modern day, more than 40 years later — of the Crimean Tatars: a grossly chauvinist stand for a supposed fighter for colonial freedom. The sheer block-headedness of Padmore's politics emerges in the same paragraph as this classic of vulgar 'common sense' quoted above. In this passage, writing in 1955, he states: 'Because of their tolerance on race and colour, the Russians and the Chinese are going to get on marvellously' (p.313).

Here Padmore's limits as the leading theorist of Pan Africanism are blatant. He spuriously divides the internal from the external politics of the Soviet regime, imagining that a critique of its international practice is possible in abstraction from its internal roots. His cover-up of national oppression within the Soviet Union leads to an absurd endorsement of the mutual state relations between the USSR and China, a facade of harmony broken within ten years of these words being written, followed by war between China and Vietnam and the flight from Vietnam of the ethnic Chinese 'boat people', victims of severe chauvinist oppression. Padmore displays here the same nationalism as the Stalinist regime itself. He has no criticism to make of Stalinism's basic ideological formulation of 'socialism in one country'. Rather, he shares this prejudice.

Padmore and Nationalism

The reactionary nature of Padmore's proposed alternative to Stalinism reveals itself in a pamphlet published with Nancy Cunard in war-time London under the title *The White Man's Duty*, with a preface dated December 1942. In this pamphlet, in which Cunard questions and Padmore replies, he gives an explicit account of the class foundation of Pan Africanism when writing about West Africa:

The more well-to-do of the farmers have been able to send their children to better schools or to provide them with higher

education either locally or abroad. These educated or "Europeanised" Africans constitute the intelligentsia of the West African colonies. They represent the vanguard of the national and progressive movements which to day are voicing increasingly the political and economic aspirations of the African people. This is a natural development.²⁰

With this conception, Padmore argues for British imperialism to emancipate the colonies politically *in its own self-interest*: 'Britain, by freeing her Colonies, can save both herself and them and lay the foundations of a new Commonwealth of Nations, bound together in equal partnership' (*White Man's Duty*. p.48).

He states:

The advantages of such a policy are incalculable. The relationship between the indigenous populations and the army in India, and the scattered forces in the colonies at present occupied in policing those regions against revolt and civil disturbance would undergo a complete change. These forces would no longer be regarded as the instruments of alien operations, but rather as friends and allies

In this changed atmosphere the vast man-power of India could be drawn upon. Industrial and agricultural resources would be exploited in a new burst of energy having behind it the full force of political movements which are to-day operating against England. (*White Man's Duty*. p.47-48)

Far from being the 'Father of African Emancipation', as C.L.R. James and the Pan Africanists claim, Padmore reveals himself in this pamphlet to have advocated the continued indirect domination of the colonies by metropolitan capital. In this pro-imperialist plea to the British ruling class, Padmore sets out more clearly than in *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* the future political programme by which the proletariat would continue to be imprisoned by the weak bourgeois strata of the colonies, acting as branch agent for imperialist capital. A deal is proposed, by which the 'vast man-power' of the colonies would continue to be exploited through slightly altered means. Essentially, the extremely weak colonial bourgeoisie — through Padmore — makes use of the war-time crisis of imperialist

Britain to demand not emancipation but a few crumbs from the exploiters' dinner, to be paid for by the black proletariat.

This wartime plea to the oppressor class was not an aberration in his politics. His book *The Gold Coast Revolution*, published ten years later, called on the British parliament to 'restore faith' among Africans by permitting its colonies Dominion status within the Commonwealth, noting that Africans had already 'lost faith' in their British masters. The appeal to imperialism for a modified form of rule by metropolitan capital was basic to Padmore's politics. He complains that 'Britain is today squandering her last imperial assets — the trust and loyalty of her coloured citizens'.²¹ To write of 'revolution' in relation to such thinking is absurd.

The Pan Africanists need only compare Padmore's touching faith in the British state with its handing over to the South African Special Branch of long lists of PAC militants, obtained in a raid by British police on the PAC headquarters in Lesotho in 1963, leading to mass arrests, jailings and torture of their members in South Africa.

Padmore's 'faith' in British imperialism proved deadly first of all for the Pan Africanists themselves: a definite ideological source of that heavy blow at the hands of the South African state only four years after his death.

In the Indian sub-continent, a change of form of imperialist rule similar to that proposed by Padmore in *The White Man's Duty* brought about a holocaust, with consequences that live on today. It is instructive to examine again Padmore's method of political diagnosis. What is revealed is the necessary connection between nationalist politics, represented ideologically by Padmore, and its disguised class content relating to religious, tribal, linguistic or other sectional interests negating any real unification of peoples. Padmore's Pan Africanism is shown to be unable to unite the peoples of Africa, just as Indian nationalism, upheld by Padmore in 1942, proved itself unable to unite the peoples of the Indian sub continent.

Padmore states:

In India machinery exists to make full self-government immediately practicable. There is no evidence that the opposition of the Muslim League to the National Congress is shared by the mass of the Moslems. . . . during the troubles

last July and August not even the Tory press reported communal riots. (*White Man's Duty* p.46)

Effectively, this was a political argument on behalf of the Hindu bourgeoisie, as specious and ignorant as Padmore's later prediction of a harmony of the spheres uniting Russia and China. Padmore's innately pro-bourgeois politics expresses itself in a further telling remark. He states that 'Gandhi was the only person who could have kept the masses in leash; without him there is danger of the people rushing ahead' (*White Man's Duty*, p.47). That is the heart of the programme: the people are to be kept *in leash*.

This argument by Padmore in 1942 on behalf of the Hindu bourgeoisie of India — whose sectional self-interest greatly promoted the religious massacres of 1947 — puts an interesting light on his later attack on the 'merchant-moneylending class' among people of Indian origin in South Africa, in a book which appeared between his wartime pamphlet *The White Man's Duty* and his major work, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*. Published in London in 1949, this book, *Africa: Britain's Third Empire*, appears to have had a marked influence on Pan Africanist thought in South Africa through its identification of a major class differentiation among people of Indian origin in South Africa, while scorning the existence of class relations among people of indigenous African origin.²²

By May Day 1948, when Padmore wrote the introduction to this book, nationalist politics on India (including his own) had reaped its harvest in mutual massacres of Hindu and Muslim and Muslim and Sikh. The north of the sub-continent was partitioned by religious sectarianism, the antithesis to Padmore's programmatic goal of a United States of Africa. Now, Padmore makes a strident attack on 'prosperous Indian settlers in Africa', the 'merchant-moneylending class' of Indian origin in South Africa, these 'upper-class Indians', 'Indian businessmen', 'Indian capitalists', these 'wealthy Indians' — that is, precisely the class that he had signally failed to detect in his pamphlet of 1942 *within India itself* (*Africa*, p.222).

One asks why Padmore in 1949 should be so eager to stress in Africa what Padmore in 1942 had kept hidden in relation to India. The answer is not hard to find. The 'merchant-moneylending class' of Indian origin discovered by Padmore

in Africa appears in his book of 1949 as a scapegoat, against whom the anger against imperialism of the African masses may safely be diverted, to the advantage of the even weaker bourgeois elements of purely African origin. This stratum in Africa of Indian origin plays for Padmore essentially the same role played historically for the nationalists in eastern Europe by the Jews. Padmore appears here *in theory* as the father of what the regime of Idi Amin and other despotisms in east Africa later carried out *in practice*. His class critique of people of Indian origin in South Africa is not accompanied by any class critique of developing bourgeois elements of purely African origin. Rather, the reverse: in his 1942 pamphlet he describes this African stratum as forming by a 'natural' process the 'vanguard' of the anti-colonialist movement. True, Padmore does advocate 'joint non-European struggle', in which 'the poorer Indians' would link up 'with the Africans in joint struggle for their common economic and social demands' (*Africa*, pp.222-23), a theme later taken up by Sobukwe. But it is utterly one sided: only those of Indian origin are first required to repudiate their 'own' weak bourgeoisie. Padmore's book, written shortly before the riots in Durban in 1949, served to vindicate this anti-Indian pogrom *in theory*.

In its fairly extensive (but frequently inaccurate) investigation of conditions in South Africa, *Africa: Britain's Third Empire* attacks two clear political targets: the 'Indian capitalists' and simultaneously both 'Stalinist Communists' and 'Trotskyite Communists', equally dismissed as representing white manipulators of black interests. Substantial questions concerning the fate of the proletariat as the world class over this century are dismissed as the product of 'sectarian pressure groups' (*Africa*, p.222, 224). At the same time, the existing trade union and strike movement elsewhere in Africa is extolled uncritically as an expression of 'Trade Union Nationalism'. Padmore now makes an amendment *post hoc* to his former uncritical support of the nationalist bourgeoisie in India. He introduces a transparently false criterion to suggest that the same all-class programme he had advocated for India in 1942 would not have similar consequences in Africa. He achieves this by means of a fallacious distinction between the colonial bourgeoisie of India and that of Africa. In India, he argues,

... the middle-class capitalists and landlords were numerous and powerful enough to seize leadership of the nationalist movement and direct the anti-imperialist struggle in such a way as not to clash with their particular class interests. In Africa, the far weaker bourgeoisie will not be able to subordinate the trade union movement in the same way. Already they have been compelled to make common cause with the masses of labourers and peasants, whose working class aspirations are not likely to clash with those of the middle-class, since the decisive sectors of the national economy are in alien hands — Europeans, Indians, and Syrians.

Padmore goes on to note 'several large-scale strikes in Nigeria, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Southern and Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia), Kenya, Uganda and the Sudan. He invokes working class militancy in the cause of 'national unity and the solidarity of the common people'. For Padmore, this alleged national unity and solidarity in Africa incorporates the 'far weaker bourgeoisie' than existed in India before independence. He adds:

In this way, trade unionism can reinforce political nationalism and provide the key which will open the door to Africa's future progress, unity and amity and the realization of the United States of Africa. (*Africa*, pp.217-8)

Once again, it is Padmore's limits as a political analyst that history confirms. In not one of the countries in Africa named by Padmore, in which 'trade union nationalism' is cited as the key to 'progress, unity and amity', is the proletariat today not ruled by the gun. That gun is in the hands of the same weak African bourgeoisie (or its military usurpers), which it was the task of Padmore both to represent and misrepresent.

Padmore's politics in this book, which seems to have exerted a powerful influence on the generation at Fort Hare to which Sobukwe belonged, is not different in essence from that which brought about the beheading of the Chinese proletariat in 1927. In relation to the African proletariat, his politics in 1948 as in 1942 is indistinguishable from the left nationalism of the Kuomintang before its slaughter of the Chinese workers. It is significant that Padmore makes no analysis in *Pan*

Africanism or Communism? of what he calls 'Stalin's part in the fiasco' in China in 1927, despite uncritically having promoted such politics himself from 1927 to 1933. He makes no attempt to explain why 'Stalin was then under heavy fire by the Trotsky Opposition' (p.296). To have taken issue properly on the question of China, he would have had to call into question his own former politics as one of the most important international representatives of Stalinism in relation to the colonies. But this was beyond him: there is not a word of serious criticism of his own previous politics in this book.

In 1931 he had been appointed by Lozovsky, the general secretary of the Red International of Trade Unions (who shared responsibility for the catastrophe in China), to serve on a special committee in Moscow on the Chinese question. In *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* he recalls in some detail his collaboration with Lozovsky on the matter of China, as well as their work together on the Negro Bureau of the Red Trade Union International (p.297). Yet Padmore neglects to report that Lozovsky, at the age of 74, was executed in the anti-semitic pogrom of the last years of Stalin's life: only three years before Padmore wrote this book. Strange silence over the murder of a former comrade! But characteristic of Padmore's strict abstention from criticism of the 'internal' affairs of the Russian state.

As set out elsewhere in this journal, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* conceals an even stranger omission relating to the revolutionary movement in South Africa. It concerns the last years and mysterious death in the Soviet Union of the first black general secretary of the Communist Party of South Africa, Albert Nzula, Padmore's close friend and colleague in Moscow.

The contradictions in Padmore's politics are by now apparent. His anti-Stalinism reveals itself as a species of pro-Stalinism, his form of advocacy of Pan African unity as in India promotes the interests of a class dependent on fracture and fission not union among African peoples, while his struggle against colonialism during world war two expressed itself as struggle for colonialism by other means. Starting from the intellectual premises of *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* — that is, anti-Stalinism, nationalism, Pan African unity — the consequences of Padmore's politics prove the inadequacy and self-contradictory nature of these premises, for Padmore and his

followers. Such politics is proved bankrupt and dangerous for the proletariat.

Yet the question of the programme and political organization of the proletariat of South Africa asserts itself now with extreme urgency more than in Padmore's time, given the enormous growth of the black proletariat in numbers, concentration, trade union organization and capacity for struggle. Simultaneously, all the main political tendencies within the revolutionary movement in South Africa, above all the ANC, the UDF and the Communist Party but also the PAC and Azapo, repeat the suicidal politics of the Popular Front in Spain and France, as well as the left nationalism of the Kuomintang before its slaughter of the proletariat in China. The two main nationalist tendencies (roughly, ANC/SACP and PAC/Azapo) now stand at the head of a great body of organized workers, the first in the much larger Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the second in the smaller National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). Given its ideological derivation from Padmore, the smaller and weaker Africanist tendency is shown to be unable to challenge nationalist and Stalinist politics in the main body of the proletariat. Rather, it serves to complement and strengthen what it purports to oppose.

Pan Africanism reveals itself as yet another school of intermediation between capital and labour, obstructing the proletariat from taking its destiny, and the fate of humanity, into its own hands.

NOTES

1. Zolile Keke. draft of a history of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, chapter 20, 'Africanist Socialist Democracy'. C.L.R. James in a lecture in London in August 1967 said that Padmore was 'increasingly known as the Father of African Emancipation'. ('Black Power: its Past, Today and the Way Ahead', in C.L.R. James, *Spheres of Existence. Selected Writings*, Allison and Busby, London, 1980 p.227)
2. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*, Dobson, London, 1956.
3. Richard Wright, foreword to Padmore, *Pan-Africanism*, p.ii.

4. C.L.R.James, 'From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro' (19G2), Appendix to *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Vintage Books, New York. 1963, p.397.
5. C.L.R.James, *ibid.*, p.398.
6. 'C.L.R.James Talking to Stuart Hall', Channel Four television, Britain, 30 April 1988.
7. C.L.R.James, 'Black Power', p.227.
8. George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Pelican, 1975, pp.68-69.
9. 'To the Workers of Spain and the Workers of the Entire World', statement issued by the First International Conference for the Fourth International, 29-31 July 1936, in *Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40)*, Pathfinder, New York, 1973, p.144.
10. 'To the Enslaved People of Morocco', statement issued by the First International Conference for the Fourth International, pp.149-50.
11. Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, Pioneer Publishers, New York, 1938. p.48.
12. 'What do the Trotskyists want?'. programme of the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain (Fourth International), Barcelona, 19 July 1937. Reprinted in *Revolutionary History*, London. Vol.1, No.2, Summer 1988, p.39.
13. Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, Orbis, London, 1982, pp.37,117.
14. Raymond Carr, *Spain 1808-1975*, Oxford, second edition, 1986, p.686. Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International (1924)*, New Park, 1974. Volume 2, 'To Comrade McKay', pp.354-356.
16. Henry W.Nevinson, *Peace and War in the Balance*, Conway Memorial Lecture, London, 17 March 1911, Watts, London, 1911, pp.47-49.
17. Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower. A Portrait of the World Before the War 1890 1914*, Macmillan, 1980. p.450.
18. Maurice Thorez. as quoted in Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, Penguin, 1968. p.132.
19. C.L.R.James, 'From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro', p.397.
20. Nancy Cunard and George Padmore, *The White Man's Duty*, W.H.Allen, Londonⁿ. n.d. p.43.

21. George Padmore, *The Gold Coast Revolution. The Struggle of an African People from Slavery to Freedom*, Dobson, London, 1953, p.9.
22. George Padmore, *Africa: Britain's Third Empire*, Dobson, London, 1949. p.222.