

MARXISM AND THE ONE-PARTY STATE

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IT IS NEITHER surprising nor accidental that the Western imperialists and their apologists should be the most vociferous in their attacks on the single-party state structures evolving in independent Africa. These attacks come not from any attachment to what they call democracy, but from a deep fear that national unity among the African people based on a determined programme of social and economic progress will spell doom for imperialism and its still considerable economic interests in the African continent.

The imperialists cannot have any deep attachment to democracy: it is they who through a century of colonial domination destroyed the traditional democracy that ruled among the African people, and made them the subject of sustained exploitation and profit for the imperialist countries. Their current protestations about 'personal liberty' and 'individual rights', of the right of 'opposition' parties to exist and of 'parliamentary democracy' are as unworthy as they are hypocritical. For it is they who support and assist the patently undemocratic regimes in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and in Tshombe's Congo. In South Vietnam, the American imperialists have created through the force of their own arms an avowedly puppet regime which is hated by the people. And similarly in South Korea, Venezuela and a host of other allegedly independent countries, they conspire to maintain corrupt dictatorships whose sole function is to serve the policies of

the imperialist states. Thus it is not from the imperialists that we can look for any meaningful and honest contribution to the current debate on democracy and the one-party state and on the related question of the paths of development of African society in the coming years.

The current debate on these questions is nevertheless real and profoundly important. For what is now recognized to be at stake in these discussions is the future course of the African revolution itself and of the ability and speed with which the newly independent states can organize and mobilize their people to struggle against the remains of imperialist domination and overcome the immense problems of poverty and all-round backwardness. That these questions should now become the focal points of contemporary African politics, is significant and marks the great revolutionary qualities of the African people.

In this article an attempt is made to examine some of the issues in this discussion and to suggest the Marxist view on these important questions. Needless to say, Marxism is not dogma; it is not a set of stereotyped rules and laws which can be blindly applied to all events and historical situations. On the contrary, it is a science of social change which enables us to understand the complex processes which give continual birth to new forms in society, which shows that classes and class relationships are the essential motive forces in the incessant replacement of obsolete forms by new ones and which brings to bear a world outlook and approach to social and economic problems. Marxism is a guide to action, and today when the whole of the African continent is in the cauldron of gigantic changes—of giving birth to new social and political forms—the guidance of Marxism becomes profoundly urgent and necessary for the African people.

TWO LINES OF DEVELOPMENT

A central feature of the African independence struggle has been the emergence of mass national parties organized as the voice of the whole people and expressing their national demands and aspirations for political independence. Such parties came to embrace workers and peasants, intellectuals and petty-bourgeois elements as well as national capitalists. In certain instances chiefs also joined. Within these parties all the patriotic and anti-colonial classes united to struggle against colonial domination. The mass parties of Ghana, Guinea, Tanganyika, Algeria, Northern Rhodesia, Malawi and Kenya were all of this kind. They were national united fronts of their countries, all the elements in which 'agreed on the essentials and pursued the same objective, there

being no reason to be divided and split into parties that fought one another'.*

There were necessarily exceptions to this otherwise common feature: parties representing sectional interests came into existence, in many cases encouraged by the colonialists, but in general the struggle for political independence as a whole came to be led by single national fronts enjoying mass support and united by common aims.

This African experience is by no means exceptional. The policy of national fronts of liberation has been a feature, and in many instances a decisive factor in every independence struggle in colonial and semi-colonial countries. Such fronts represented a coalition of those classes ranging from the workers and peasants to the national capitalists or bourgeoisie, who were exploited and oppressed by the foreign imperialists and their local puppets. This experience and the degree to which this coalition remained united in its aims, have more than anything else fashioned the shape of governments and states in the ex-colonial countries. It is here that two clear and distinct lines of development can be seen.

The first line is represented by the determination of the coalition of classes in the national front to pursue their revolution even after the transfer of power, that is, to systematically work for the complete removal of all foreign colonial influence, to win back the nation's resources and wealth usurped by the imperialist monopolies, to remove the remains of feudal and tribal influences and pursue policies of social and economic reform. Such policies call for the participation of, and must involve, the mass of the people in the post-independence national reconstruction. Here most clearly, the revolution will be carried forward from the phase of liberation from foreign political domination to liberation in the wider sense, that is, liberation from backwardness, poverty and economic dependence. With such policies and such a line of development the state enters what is termed as the stage of new or 'national democracy'—a stage in which the machinery of the state and character of democracy takes a clear and distinct form. The principal characteristics of the policies of the state in this phase was broadly spelt out in the statement of the Moscow Meeting of Representatives of Communist and Workers' Parties in 1960 as follows:

A state which consistently upholds its political and economic independence, fights against imperialism and its military blocs on its territory; a state which fights against new forms of colonialism and the penetration of imperialist capital; a state which rejects dictatorial and despotic forms of Government; a state in which the people are assured broad democratic rights and freedoms, the opportunity to work for the enactment of agrarian

*Madeira Keita: *Presence Africain*, No. 30, February 1960.

reforms and the realization of other democratic and social changes and for participation in shaping government policy.

Inevitably, the success of this line of development depends upon the alliance of the revolutionary classes in the liberation fronts. The workers and peasants as indeed sections of the intellectuals and petty-bourgeois class possess a deep and abiding interest in carrying forward the anti-imperialist revolution to win a state of national democracy. Their class position is synonymous with progress in every field. They do not want and will fight against any movement which attempts to create a new system of exploitation and oppression in the place of the colonial system. But can the same be said of the national bourgeoisie—that class of local capitalists who live on the labour of others? Such a class most certainly has an interest and invariably participates in the anti-imperialist alliance and often occupies a leading place in national liberation fronts. This is understandable precisely because the national bourgeoisie find that their economic positions are trampled upon and severely limited by the imperialist monopolies who control the country's resources and enjoy special privileges in the economy.

But history is replete with examples of another and contradictory tendency among the class of national capitalists and to a lesser extent among petty-bourgeois elements. They become inconsistent in the post-independence period; they show an inclination toward unprincipled compromises with imperialism; they hesitate to build up national industries and show more than a liberal attitude and approach towards the role of foreign capital in their country. This is the class that has proved itself most prone to ditching the revolution once it occupies the seats of state power. We need only look at the so-called independent states of Latin America to see the truth of this. There the local bourgeoisie have so compromised the independence of their countries as to make them little more than client states of U.S. imperialism; their wealth and resources are dominated by the imperialist monopolies while their regimes are corrupt and undemocratic. Only in Cuba where the alliance under the leadership of Fidel Castro has remained united, has the revolution been carried forward and real independence won. It is this dual character of the national bourgeoisie which marks the possibility of a second line of development. Here the bourgeoisie and their supporters through their control of the machinery of the state undermine the further progress of the struggle for national independence and real democracy. They pursue policies which tend to preserve the post-colonial *status quo* in agreement with the imperialists and the feudal class. In this situation the character of the state and of democracy is different.

These, then, are the two lines of development in the colonial and the

semi-colonial countries—one, to carry forward the anti-imperialist revolution and the other, to seek compromises and betray the revolution

AFRICA AND THE TWO LINES

How far can these two tendencies be seen to exist in Africa? The African revolution is still in its infancy and it may not be either possible or necessary here to take a conclusive view of the African situation in general. This at least is suggested by the fact that classes in Africa are still in the process of formation. Compared to the movements of liberation in other parts of the world, the African movement has been less conditioned by or subject to class differences in the struggle for independence. The national bourgeoisie is generally small and weak: the colonialists only gave limited opportunities for the bourgeois to develop into a sizeable and cohesive class. Further, as Jack Woddis points out, 'mobility between classes in Africa is considerable . . . workers are migrants or conscripted peasants and many peasants are casual workers'.*

Thus, it was possible to organize large mass parties, all the elements of which were united by the common aims of winning political independence.

The successes in the struggle for political independence have in general not weakened or disrupted the broad unity of the people in these mass African parties. Rather, what has proved to be significant of the African situation is the broad unanimity that has been achieved in the greater majority of the newly-independent states in favour of a non-capitalist path forward and for policies of a socialist nature. On the other hand, it is clear, and the evidence for this is formidable, that the imperialist countries are excessively busy trying to find and cooperate with bourgeois elements in independent Africa, and through them to secure some influence over the governments concerned. In the Congo their intervention has been blatant; they have put into power their own discredited agents and nominees. Elsewhere they have encouraged rival parties and groupings. Through aid and capital exports, they have tried to influence the governments of free Africa away from the path of non-capitalist development. For, as Dr. Nkrumah puts it.

The imperialists of today endeavour to achieve their ends not merely by military means, but by economic penetration, cultural assimilation, ideological domination, psychological infiltration and subversive activities even to the point of inspiring and promoting assassination and civil strife. †

* *Africa, The Way Forward*, London, 1963.

† Statement to the First Conference of African Independent States, Accra, April 1958.

That the imperialists try to go to these lengths is a measure of the opportunities they see for creating a class of compromisers in independent Africa and to use them to cut short and betray the African revolution.

These opportunities certainly exist. Despite the claims of several African leaders, the formation and growth of classes is developing apace. Class formation is a fact of history and Africa will be no exception to this experience. The indications are already clear. There is a rapidly growing working class in almost all the independent African states—a growth which was already apparent in the colonial period.

A new bourgeoisie is arising from the ranks of the big traders and rich farmers. As Jack Woddis points out (*Africa—The Way Forward*, p. 129)

Some (Africans) have large farms and employ Africans as agricultural workers, some people own shops and carry on trade and some are owners or part owners of enterprises employing African workers.

Often the sons of these exploiting elements become intellectuals who enter the administrations. Even among the smaller bourgeois forces the most strenuous efforts are made to utilize their political positions to acquire further economic strength. This is especially true of some countries in West Africa. It is among such elements that the imperialists are most active, and in certain instances this has given rise to corruption and despotic rule.

In his book *Which Way Africa?*,* Basil Davidson (whose studies in African history have distinguished him as a particularly sympathetic and outstanding 'Africanist'), suggests that the formation and promotion to power of leading 'élites' or 'middle classes' was an important feature of colonial policy—a policy which the colonial powers 'thought wise and necessary'.

He explains:

For it is a fact, by and large, that such leading élites and middle classes have largely collapsed under the strain of political independence. Some have retired into profitable corruption, others into old-fashioned habits of colonial authoritarianism, still others into a more or less sterile defence of the status quo.

He cites what René Damont, the 'notably pro-African' French economist, found in parts of the former French African colonies—'to high salaries, there are often added fine villas splendidly furnished, or even palaces for Ministers, the whole of the upkeep being paid for by the budget'. And most telling is the confession of a peasant of the Kameroun countryside: 'independence is not for us, it's for the people

* Penguin, London, 1964.

in the towns'. In Guinea, President Sekou Toure found that 'among the party members, there are those for whom independence was first and foremost a chance to take the place of the *colons*'. In Ghana, Nkrumah found reason (in his famous dawn broadcast) to condemn luxury living and the personal dissipation of national wealth. Corruption in Nigeria was widely exposed in an enquiry into the affairs of the Western Region Marketing Board. The Commission of Enquiry showed that a number of people who could appropriately be placed in the ranks of the 'ruling circle', saw their country more as a vehicle of personal advancement, and as the Commission put it, 'we also came across evidence of reckless and indeed atrocious and criminal mismanagement and diversion of public funds'.

The tendency for 'middle class' leaderships to pursue undemocratic methods of rule, especially in their attitudes and policy towards trade unions and progressive elements is also widely apparent. These then are the senses in which it can be said that when the time comes to tear up the roots of imperialism and introduce agrarian and other reforms, the difference in class interests come more and more into the open.

It is this fluidity of internal class relations in many parts of independent Africa which bears heavily on the future course of the African revolution. And it can by no means be taken for granted, no matter how favourable the present situation, that all the independent countries under their present leaderships and the parties in power will choose the first line of development and pursue with vigour the advance of the revolution for a new and a national democracy. This then must be the context in which the single party state and democracy in Africa should be considered.

THE STATE AND DEMOCRACY

The origin of the state as an organized instrument of power is linked with the appearance of classes in society. There were no states, as we understand them today, in classless communal and tribal societies; and thus it was possible in such classless societies to obtain what President Nyerere has called 'agreement among the people', by 'the elders sitting under a big tree and talking until they agree'. Rather the modern state, with its heavy machinery of coercion—the army, the police and a vast body of laws and regulations—becomes an instrument of direction and government on behalf of the class in power. In relation to the opponents of the class in power, it acts as an instrument of suppression and coercion. This in the sense in which all states take the character of a *dictatorship*. What distinguishes one kind of state from another depends on who and which class is in

command of the dictatorship and against whom or which class it is imposed.

The bourgeois states of the West, whether they take the form of a constitutional republic or an open dictatorship of the fascist type, all remain the instrument in the hands of the class in power, that is, the capitalists. The modern bourgeois democratic republics, which are the result of the people's struggle against absolutism and monarchical rule, certainly possess representative forms of government, trial by jury and other democratic institutions. But the economic system of capitalism which prevails in such bourgeois republics is a system of exploitation of the wage earners who comprise the majority of the population. The state serves to sanctify and safeguard this system and thus suppress any real opposition that may come from the workers. The bourgeois state remains a dictatorship of the capitalist class despite the benevolent and representative character of its democratic institutions. By contrast, the socialist state, as is found in the socialist countries, is characterized by a dictatorship of the proletariat against the remains of capitalism and landlordism. Here, because the workers, who with the peasants, represent the vast majority of the population, the dictatorship takes the most democratic and popular form.

Between these two types of state systems, stands the 'state of national democracy'. This represents that form of the state which is most appropriate in the colonial and semi-colonial countries following their revolution. Such a state is democratic because it exists under the joint dictatorship of several anti-imperialist classes, that is, the vast majority of the people. United by the struggle against imperialism and colonialism, such a state is able to meet and solve all the complicated questions of economic and social reform, of industrial development and of raising the living standards of the people. That is, such a state satisfies the unique historical condition in which the colonial and semi-colonial countries find themselves after liberation. And as experience has shown only such a state system can ensure really universal franchise, irrespective of race, creed, property or education, which can create organs of government elected to represent each revolutionary class (as did exist in the national fronts of liberation), which can express the people's will and inspire the spirit of a new popular democracy. Such a state system will necessarily be a transitory one: the further development of the revolution, the winning of greater freedoms for the people, that is, freedom from want, from the lack of education and skills and from the lack of opportunity, will necessarily add new features to the state system, all of which will inevitably be linked to the class changes that must evolve in the alliance of the anti-imperialist forces in power.

Thus in the pursuance of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal progressive revolution, the African people have the choice between such state of national democracy or that of the type ruling in the bourgeois countries. There can be now little doubt that in several African countries the balance of choice is moving increasingly in the direction of states of national democracy in which the joint dictatorship of the anti-imperialist and progressive classes are or will be in power. In Algeria, the Front of National Liberation encompasses all the main anti-imperialist forces and is forging ahead with its revolutionary programme. Similarly, in Ghana, the Convention People's Party under the leadership of President Nkrumah, pursues revolutionary and anti-imperialist aims which are fashioning and determining the role and character of the state structure. The states of Guinea and Mali also possess these features.

The choice of such a state system and such a popular democracy brings in its train a certain logic to the further development of the African revolution. The tasks before such a state call for increasingly non-capitalist and socialist measures; the state will take new and considerable initiatives in all branches of production and exchange, it will introduce more and more co-operative forms of enterprise, redistribute the land of the colonial elements (as have taken place in Algeria) and give the peasantry a new and a fuller place in society. In other words, the revolution pursues paths which gradually but decisively reduce the elements of exploitation in society, thus ensuring not only maximum economic growth, but willing participation of the entire people in all the tasks of economic and social reconstruction.

For Africa to choose the alternative of the bourgeois state amounts in fact to choosing continued dependence on imperialism. Such a choice must mean that the state becomes the instrument of those capitalistic and feudal classes most dependent on the foreign imperialists. It is they, too, whether through single parties or otherwise, would constitute the dictatorship. But the main feature of such dictatorships in the ex-colonial countries always turns out to be dependence on imperialism. In any case the opportunities for the free growth of an independent class of national capitalists in Africa are severely limited. In most of the countries concerned, the imperialist monopolies are not only the biggest employers of labour but dominate all the important branches of the economy.

The local bourgeoisie can thus function only under the seemingly indirect control and influence of these monopolies. The example of Latin America is most pertinent in this respect. Despite the existence of 'independent' regimes all of them, with the exception of revolutionary Cuba, are virtual colonies of the United States. As Woddis

has put it, 'feudalism, illiteracy, disease and stifling dictatorships—that is the end of the former Latin American colonies striving to take the capitalist path', while the United States drains off some \$1,500 million a year in profits from these countries. That, too, would be the fate of independent Africa taking the road of bourgeois dictatorships and capitalism—a fate which Tshombe seems bent on bringing to the Congo at the behest of the imperialists.

WHERE THE WORKERS STAND

These then seem to be the kind of considerations which enable Marxists to judge and formulate policies towards the one-party state system developing in Africa. These considerations call for concrete analyses of the aims of the revolution in the post-independence period in each country, the policies of the single-party in power and the class character of the state and the party's leadership. Hence, in applying Marxism to the African situation, there can be no mechanical and blind acceptance or rejection of the concept and the system of single-party states as such.

Today, the role of the emerging class of workers, allied closely with the mass of the peasantry, is central to the struggle for a correct choice of the path forward in Africa. If the workers find that their activities are limited within the single party: that, should the emerging capitalist forces join with imperialism, no matter how indirect, and assume dictatorial control of the party, then it is as inevitable, as it becomes necessary, that the working class would seek to establish a new front of the progressive anti-imperialist forces to defend their own interests and those of the nation and work for real freedom and independence. On the other hand, where the anti-imperialist forces join together and maintain a popular dictatorship through a single-party system, the working class will not only participate, but undoubtedly become the central and leading core of the struggle forward for complete liberation and social and economic progress.