

"AFRICAN SOCIALISM"

OR

SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM?

by
Idris Cox

"The People's Political Force has to rid itself of confused thinking on what socialism is. More concretely, it must unfurl the banner of scientific socialism and stop chasing illusions like African Socialism, Arab Socialism, pragmatic socialism, democratic socialism and such other beautiful phrases that cover up a multitude of anti-socialist sins"
—"The Spark" April 3, 1964.

THE newly independent states are still faced with big problems. Experience has proved that political independence alone cannot remove the heritage of colonialism. Moreover, imperialism finds new ways in which to tighten its economic grip, retain its political influence, and exercise its domination. The independent states will have to wage an ever sharper struggle against the strategy of neo-colonialism.

The timeliness of this warning was revealed soon after when President Abbe Youlou of the Republic of Congo (formerly French) was overthrown in August, 1963 and President Maga of Dahomey was forced to resign in October, 1963. In both cases the armed revolt against them was supported by the trade unions.

THE NEXT STEP

What is the next step forward for the independent African States? This is now the subject of intense discussion, not only in Africa, but in the new states in Asia, in the socialist world, and even in Britain.

Will the new African states take the path of capitalist development, or will they advance on the socialist

road? Can they find a "neutral" road which is neither capitalist nor socialist?

Some of the new African states are only just emerging from tribal society, and are only in the earliest stage of building a new nation. Will they be able to "jump" stages of economic and social development and by-pass the path of capitalist development?

Is there a "new" path of capitalist development in the new African states. In most of them the economic grip of overseas monopoly firms is still strong.

The aim of the imperialists was not to build up an independent and balanced national economy, but to extract the maximum amount of natural and mineral wealth, drain away colossal profits, and get the maximum benefit from the declining prices of raw materials and primary products in return for increasing prices for the capital and manufactured goods exported to these countries. This is still the aim and practice of imperialism.

Colonial rule has always been the biggest obstacle to the growth of an independent national economy. The

acceptance of continued imperialist domination will not promote the economic development of the new African states. There is ample evidence in Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and even Nigeria, that only after achieving political independence has it been possible to embark upon the rapid growth of an independent and balanced national economy.

Capitalist development in Europe depended a good deal, and still does, on the exploitation of colonial resources, just as slavery in the southern states was a big factor in the growth of U.S. capitalism.

NATIONAL CAPITALIST

The African national bourgeoisie (national capitalists) is still small, extremely weak and undeveloped, and scarcely exists as an organised class force. Apart from a few small factories it engaged mainly in trade, generally taking second place to the big overseas monopoly firms. It has no colonial possessions and cannot embark upon colonial expansion. Even if it were possible to do so, it would be resisted even by the

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most politically backward of the African masses.

This makes clear that the "traditional" path of capitalist development is not possible in most parts of Africa. At the same time, there is some degree of capitalist development (mainly in South Africa, the Rhodesias, and the Congo), but in most countries of tropical Africa industrial development is based more and more on the public sector rather than the private sector, and agricultural production is based more and more on co-operative methods.

What prospects are there of an advance towards socialism?

Most African national leaders proclaim that socialism is their aim. To advocate the growth of capitalism would seriously weaken (or even completely destroy) their political influence among the masses.

Socialism is the new gospel to win the support of African peoples.

African conditions, together with its class relations, are so different that socialism is interpreted in many different ways. In Africa the opposition to the path of traditional capitalist development in Western Europe is a strong and positive factor, but its negative aspect is the temptation to throw overboard all the positive lessons of the political struggles in other parts of the world.

It is argued that rival classes do not exist in African society. With the achievement of political independence (together with absence of a developed national bourgeoisie) it is claimed that all Africans have common aims. It is argued that there are no rival political parties. This gives rise to the one-party system as a form of government in several independent African states.

This separation from the rest of the world, idealisation of traditional African society, blurring over the class differences, together with separate national ambitions of bourgeois elements, has led to a great variety of "socialist" concepts in Africa.

Thus, there is the "Arab socialism" of President Nasser, whereas in Tunisia (another Arab country) there is "Neo-Destour socialism"—Neo-Destour being the name of the ruling party, meaning "new life". There is the "Negritude" preached by President Senghor of Senegal, often presented as a variety of "African Socialism". The National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) presents the concept of "Pragmatic Socialism" (the old hand-to-mouth process) and the Action Group of Nigeria sets the aim of "Democratic Socialism"—much in the same way as the right-wing leaders in Britain.

Most widespread is the concept of "African Socialism"—something different from the Social Democratic concepts in the capitalist countries and also from the scientific socialism of Marxism in the socialist world. Even within the concept of "African Socialism" there are different varieties, ranging from the "tribal socialism" of Julius Nyerere, President of Tanganyika, to the mixed economy "democratic socialism", presented by Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta in the recent election programme of the Kenya African National Union.

Wishful thinking will not eliminate class antagonism in Tanganyika. True, direct colonial rule has been abolished, but imperialism still retains its economic grip. Foreign monopoly firms still have a stranglehold on sisal (Tanganyika's main product) and make gigantic profits, many times bigger than the total wage-bill. Mr. Nsilo Swai, Minister for Development and Planning, recently explained that "Investment in the private sector amounts to 60 per cent". (Reporter, 5:10:63). The official *Industrial Directory* of firms in 1961 (large and small) gives a total of 1,999 firms. Wage disputes and strikes among sisal workers are frequent, and have increased in recent years. There is certainly no resemblance in this situation of depending "on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member".

Nyerere contrasts African "tribal socialism which knows nothing of class conflicts" with "European Socialism which was born of the Agrarian Revolution and the Industrial Revolution which followed it".

He asserts that the former produced the "modern capitalist" and the latter "the industrial proletariat", and that these two revolutions "planted the seeds of conflict within society."

If the term "agrarian revolution" refers to the breakdown of feudalism it certainly ignores the basic factors responsible for this change. Even more misleading is the topsy-turvy view that it is revolutions which plant the seeds of conflicts in society, rather than class conflicts creating revolutions.

In an attempt to justify the claim that classes do not exist in African society, Nyerere points out that the word "class" has no equivalent in any indigenous African language. Obviously, the word "class" appears nowhere in tribal society in Africa or elsewhere, for classes only appear when society breaks down. And there can be no doubt that tribal society is rapidly breaking down in Tanganyika.

Marxists have always been conscious of the positive as well as the negative aspects of tribal society. Contrary to Nyerere's idyllic picture, tribal society was essentially a primitive form of existence in which no surplus was produced above bare subsistence needs. There was no other way to live except by sharing things in common, and it was a community of poverty, not of wealth. At the same time, however, there was not an exploiting class, exercise of dictatorship, or political suppression.

Engels was fully conscious of these positive aspects of tribal society, and in his classic essay *Origin of the Family*, quoted with approval the perspective given by Lewis Morgan, in his authoritative survey *Ancient Society*:

"Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privilege and universal education foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes". Socialism is the transformation of

the positive features of tribal society to the "higher plane of society". From a low level of existence of new and higher relations will arise from the mastery of science and the laws of social development. The most positive features of primitive communism are transformed into scientific socialism, a stage to communism, and the pinnacle of human development.

Can the positive features of the old tribal society be preserved in the modern age during the transition from capitalism to socialism?

This depends on the speed with which Africa advances to socialism. As early as 1882, in his introduction to a new edition of the 1848 Communist Manifesto, Engels held out the prospect that the "mir" system in Tsarist Russia (under which more than half the land was owned in common by the peasants) might be preserved under certain conditions:

"If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a workers' revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of the land may then serve as the starting point for a communist development." (London, January 21, 1882.)

More than twenty years later, Lenin gave a clear analysis of the disintegration of the communal land system in Tsarist Russia and the creation of a new "peasant bourgeoisie" within the framework of the old feudal system. This was the situation confronting the 1917 Russian socialist revolution. It was not followed by victorious revolutions in the West, and for this failure, world humanity paid the price of the Second World War and faces now the threat of terrible nuclear war.

One of the first decrees of the new Russia was to give land to the peasants, and at a later stage the elimination of the "kulak" (rich peasant) through the system of collective farming. It established common ownership of land throughout the whole of the Soviet Union. The building of socialism has transformed the old mir system from a community of poverty into a community

of wealth, with advances in the field of science and technology which are the envy of the whole world.

In the light of its own specific conditions Tanganyika may take a different road to achieve these objectives—not back to "tribal socialism", but forward to co-operative and collective farms, mechanised agriculture, and scientific industrial development. This is the way forward to socialism.

LOOKING TO THE PAST

Among the more recent exponents of "African Socialism" is Mr. Tom Mboya, General Secretary of the Kenya African National Union, and a Minister in the Government. Writing on this subject in March, 1963, he explains:

"When I talk of 'African Socialism' I refer to those proven codes of conduct in the African societies which have, over the ages, conferred dignity on our people and afforded them security regardless of their station in life. I refer to universal charity which characterised our societies and I refer to the African thought processes and cosmological ideas, which regard man, not as a social means, but as an end and entity in the society." (*Transition*, Uganda magazine).

In one respect Mboya differs from Nyerere when he admits that "poverty existed, but it was not due to man exploiting man". If this assertion is true that the peoples of Kenya have always had "security regardless of their station in life", one wonders what they have been fighting for all these years! Why have they waged a ceaseless struggle for many decades against European land robbery; organised innumerable strikes in the past forty years, and created trade unions and political movements to wage the fight for independence?

On July 24, 1962 the *Financial Times* estimated that there were 300,000 unemployed in Kenya, and Tom Mboya (who was then Minister of Labour) declared that 31,500 Africans had been thrown out of work in one year alone ending in June 1961; and that "hungry men have to steal in order to live"

(Times, July 19, 1962). Not much security there, and certainly no sign of a classless society!

When it comes down to brass tacks, Mboya himself advocates measures which are in striking contrast to the "communal" principles of traditional African society, proposing loans for local and foreign capitalists, and that the government should stimulate private investment. Mboya contrasts "African Socialism" with what he describes as "Socialism of the Western type" on the one hand, and "a Marxian type of Socialism" on the other. He makes a fervent plea: "Let us go abroad to ask for loans and technical skills, not for ideals and ideologies".

What is Mboya's concept of socialism? In one sense he expresses agreement with Nyerere in stating that: "Socialism is a mental conditioning or an attitude of mind established in order to achieve rational relationships and harmony in society." Any capitalist would agree with this vague general formula, even when he spells it out in more detail:

"Socialism stands for equality of opportunity, security of income and employment, equality before the law, the rule of law, individual freedom, universal franchise, state regulation of economic life, state control of vital means of production and distribution. . . . (Transition, March 1963).

If the word "socialism" is left out, all supporters of the capitalist system will agree with these objectives. Even in imperialist Britain there is a considerable state regulation of economic life and state control of production and distribution.

WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

Scientific socialism is not a concept limited to geographical boundaries, either 'East' or 'West'. It is a universal concept of a new stage of society, applicable anywhere in the world, providing the objective factors have sufficiently matured to advance towards this new stage. It actually exists in one-third of the

world, and as a political aim in most of the remaining two-thirds.

Its basic tenets are universal in character, but the methods of reaching this stage and the application of its principles will be different in different parts of the world

To speak and write of "African Socialism" makes no better sense than dividing the sciences into geographical compartments, e.g. African mathematics, African chemistry, African biology, or African physics. Science is universal, but its application differs according to different situations:

There is only one socialism—scientific socialism—which belongs to the whole world, and not to one continent or one country.

"African Socialism" is a mirage, but there can be different roads to Socialism arising from the different conditions in the African countries.

1. Common ownership of all the means of production, distribution and exchange, and production for use, and not for private profit.

2. Planned methods of production based on harmonious relations between industry and agriculture, raising of living standards, and overcoming the inequality between town and country.

3. Application of science to all spheres of production, unleashing the inventive genius of human beings, and to make machines the servants of men and women.

4. Political power in the hands of the people, led by the working class and its Marxist party, and based on full democracy in all aspects of economic and social life.

5. Nations sovereignty and friendship with all nations, based on internationalism and not narrow bourgeois nationalism.

6. Equal rights for all men and women.

7. Encouragement and promotion of young people to take key positions of leadership.

8. Positive measures for the flourishing of the arts and scienc-

es, for scientific and technical education, and for equal opportunities for every child to advance in all spheres of education.

There is nothing specifically Russian, German, French, British, or American about these basic tenets of socialism, and nothing in them which is "alien" to any African country. They represent a stage in the advance of human society which would end all forms of imperialist domination, all forms of economic exploitation, and all forms of inequality.

True, in the vastly different conditions of Africa the forms and methods of a socialist society cannot be an exact copy of the existing socialist countries. The existing class relations, communal land ownership, the sense of African unity, pride in African history and culture will have to be taken into account.

The achievement of socialism is not only a matter of political theory and programmes, but also a class relations. Political independence was won by an alliance of class forces led by the progressive elements of the national bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, but workers and peasants were the biggest mass force.

TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM

The new stage demands a sharper struggle to achieve economic independence and end all forms of imperialist domination.

To justify this attitude, all kinds of spurious theories are put forward to bolster up the idea of African exceptionalism.

The new formula "African Socialism" can be used, and as is being used, not to advance the cause of socialism, but to hold it back.

Trade unions are urged to postpone wage demands, there is resistance to working class elements advancing to the leadership of the national movement and to the formation of Marxist Parties, on the plea that there are no less struggle in Africa.

The alliance of class forces (expressed in the national move-

ments which won independence) is still essential in the new stage of the struggle. But the advance to socialism is possible only if the working class advances to the leadership in the national united front. The spread of socialist ideas in Africa does not mean that socialism is the next item on the agenda of independent African states.

The advance of the working class elements into the leadership of the African national movements is essential even for the next stage of advance, which is the building of an independent democratic state. This is not a "third way", but transitional stage to socialism. The

transition may be of long or short duration, depending on the relation of class forces in the country, and especially on the strength and political consciousness of the working class. For, is the working class, with its revolutionary traditions which is the harbinger of socialism:

"Wherever the anti-imperialist front was under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist, the revolution did not stop at the bourgeois-democratic stage, but developed into a socialist revolution.

"Wherever the movement was headed by the bourgeoisie, or bourgeois influences pre-domi-

nated in the anti-imperialist front, the national bourgeoisie that came to power led society along the path of capitalist development, thus delaying the transition to a higher stage of the revolution". (Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, English edition, page 501).

This lesson needs to be understood in Africa today. If the principles of Marxism-Leninism are applied within the context of the struggle through Africa, there are good prospects of advance in the new stage of the struggle, for the growth of independent national democracies, and an advance towards socialism.

GEORGE PADMORE

For a projected biography of George Padmore, I would like to contact any persons who knew him and/or have letters or other papers which might be pertinent to my study. All materials will be handled with extreme care.

—J.R. Hooker, Ph.D., African Studies Centre and Department of History Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, United States of America.

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