

The Nigerian Revolution

(The following report was given by Comrade Bill Bland, Chairman of the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain, to the CONGRESS OF THE NIGERIAN LEFT held on October 5th, 1968).

Comrade Chairman and Comrades !

May I thank you first of all for the invitation to the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain to address your Congress.

In order to construct a socialist society - whether in Nigeria or in Britain - noble aspirations are not enough. We need the guidance of political science, without which these aspirations cannot be turned into reality.

Because scientific socialism was founded by Karl Marx and developed above all by V.I. Lenin, we call it Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism is the theoretical elaboration of the practical experience of the working people of all lands.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS IN NIGERIA

In recent years the peoples of Africa have made world-shaking advances in throwing off the shackles of colonial rule. But the achievement of state independence - even if it be a real and not a sham independence - cannot solve the social problems of the African working people. For that a new planned socialist system of society is necessary.

For us in Britain, which is a developed capitalist country - an imperialist country - the road to socialism is a relatively straight-forward one: the working people, led by the working class, must destroy the state power of the British capitalist class in a socialist revolution and replace it by a new state expressing the power of the working people, a state which will proceed to construct socialism.

In a colonial-type country such as Nigeria the road to socialism is more complex. As Lenin made clear fifty years ago, the revolutionary process in such a country embraces two stages. The first stage is that of national-democratic revolution, directed against foreign imperialist domination and the elements within the country who support this domination. Only when this first stage has been completed is it possible to proceed to the second stage, that of socialist revolution.

THE BUILDING OF AN ANTI-IMPERIALIST UNITED FRONT

The working people in the developed capitalist countries such as Britain, who are struggling for their social liberation from imperialism, are struggling against the same enemy - in the shape of the imperialists - as are the peoples of the colonial-type countries such as Nigeria, who are struggling for their national liberation from imperialism. Every blow which the working people of the developed capitalist countries strike at the imperialists helps the struggle for national liberation of the peoples of the colonial-type countries. And every blow struck by the latter helps the struggle for social liberation of the working people of the developed capitalist countries. Thus, the working people of the developed capitalist countries are, objectively, the allies of the peoples of the colonial-type countries.

But, to be effective, this alliance must not be confined to mere verbal expressions of solidarity, but must be cemented organisationally so that a coordinated international strategy may be elaborated. In our mutual interest, we must begin the task of building a great, invincible, world-wide anti-imperialist united front, embracing the peoples of the colonial-type countries and the working people of the developed capitalist countries. It is our sincere hope that this Congress will endorse this principle, which we regard as one of the greatest importance for the future of the peoples of the world.

THE ROLE OF RACIALISM

The imperialists naturally fear more than anything the growth of organised solidarity between the working people in the developed capitalist countries and the peoples of the colonial-type countries, and they strive in every way to disrupt and hinder the growth of such solidarity.

The European imperialists have long fostered "white racialism" as a basic ideology of their colonialism. With the development of militant struggle on the part of the non-white peoples of the world in recent years, a new form of racialism has come into prominence. This ideology -

which I will call "black racialism" - preaches that the "white race" - workers and capitalists alike - is the enemy which must be fought. But it is not the white workers in Britain who dominate and exploit the people of African countries; it is the wealthy finance capitalists who, through international concerns like Unilever, exploit not only the people of Nigeria but also the workers of Britain - white and black. Whatever the sincerity of those who put forward the ideology of "black racialism", it serves the interests of the imperialists just as does its complement, "white racialism" - for both disrupt the essential unity that must be built between the working people of the imperialist countries, no matter what the colour of their skin, and the peoples of the colonial-type countries.

It is our hope that this Congress will go on record in strong opposition to all forms of racialism, for in our view "white racialism" and "black racialism" are equally reactionary and pernicious.

CLASSES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE NIGERIAN REVOLUTION

Many African politicians have claimed that social classes do not exist in Tropical Africa, and that Marxism-Leninism has therefore no relevance for Nigeria. While it is true that social classes in Nigeria are still in a comparatively early stage of their development, and that the class differentiation which exists is partly concealed by a cloak of tribal patriarchy, nevertheless social classes do exist in Nigeria and the key to the elaboration of a successful revolutionary strategy for Nigeria lies in making a correct analysis of these classes and their role in the revolutionary process.

Marxist-Leninists, of course, use the term "class" with the scientific meaning of a stratum of society which obtains its livelihood by a relation of ownership or non-ownership to particular means of production. Thus, we have in Nigeria a semi-feudal class, which lives by exploiting rights derived from membership of a privileged aristocracy; a capitalist class or bourgeoisie, which lives by the exploitation of employed labour; a petty bourgeoisie, which lives on the fruits of its own labour; and a working class or proletariat, which lives on the wages of employment.

With the breakdown of the tribal commune, the petty-bourgeois peasantry - by far the largest class in Nigerian society, forming some 85% of Nigeria's 50 million population - is in the early stages of differentiation into a rich, capitalist stratum at one extreme and an agricultural proletariat at the other. The capitalist class has already - as in most colonial-type countries - become differentiated into a comprador bourgeoisie (dependent upon foreign imperialism) and a national bourgeoisie (not dependent upon foreign imperialism).

Both the semi-feudal aristocracy and the comprador capitalists are dependent upon foreign imperialism for their wealth and position, and their interests are therefore opposed to the genuine independence of Nigeria from imperialism. They are prepared to support the movement for national liberation only so far as the replacement of colonial rule by neo-colonial rule, in which transformation they are promoted from the role of managers for imperialism to that of (purely nominally) "independent" rulers on behalf of imperialism.

The national capitalists find the development of their wealth and power hindered by foreign imperialist domination and have, therefore, an interest in securing genuine independence for Nigeria. They can, consequently, play a progressive role in the national-democratic revolution and have been, up to now, its vanguard.

All the above classes, which are exploiting classes, are of course opposed to the socialist revolution, which will end the exploitation of man by man in any form.

The whole of the peasantry is a social force objectively for the national-democratic revolution, and all but the handful of capitalist peasants are a social force for the socialist revolution. The numerical size of this class is such that neither stage of the revolution can succeed unless it is brought into action against the forces of reaction.

The working class - the most revolutionary, the most organised, the most disciplined class in society - has an objective interest in furthering both the national-democratic and socialist stages of the revolutionary process.

The leading role in the national-democratic revolution at a particular stage of its development may be usurped by the semi-feudal and comprador elements; in this case the result is a spurious neo-colonial "independence" such as that of Nigeria from October 1960 to the military coup of July 1966.

Alternatively, the leading role may be taken by the national capitalists; in this case the country may be led to secure a genuine independence, but there the revolutionary process must be held back, for the aim of the national capitalist class is to build a capitalist society in which they, and not foreign capitalists, secure the fruits of exploitation of the working people; this has been the position in Nigeria since the coup of July 1966.

Finally, the leading role may be taken by the working class, in which case the national-democratic revolution may be carried through without interruption into a socialist revolution, thus avoiding the centuries of capitalist exploitation which, in different circumstances, the

working people of Europe have had to endure.

Whether the working class can win the leadership of the Nigerian national-democratic revolution depends upon whether it can win the leadership of the peasant and urban petty bourgeois masses from the national bourgeoisie. Certainly the million-strong Nigerian working class has demonstrated - for example in the General Strike of 1964 - that it has the power, the militancy, the unity and the organisation to play this leading role. But just as an army needs a General Staff to lead it to victory in war, so does the army of the working class needs its General Staff to lead it to victory in revolution, and this General Staff can only be a disciplined vanguard Party basing itself on Marxism-Leninism.

POLITICAL PARTIES

A political party is an organisation which represents the political interests of a social class.

It is true that the main political parties which existed in Nigeria prior to their suppression by the military dictatorship in 1966 appeared to be associated with specific regions of the country, even with specific major tribes: the Northern People's Congress (NPC) with the Northern Region; the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) with the Eastern Region; and the Action Group (AG) with the Western Region. But one must not confuse the real interests which a political party represents and serves with those it claims to represent; the latter merely denote the sections of the people to which its electoral appeal is directed, and this appeal may be purely demagogic.

Thus, the real interests represented by the Northern People's Congress, founded in 1948, were those of the most reactionary class in the country, the semi-feudal aristocracy which had formed the main social prop of British colonial rule. The NPC's programme provided for the maintenance of the power and privileges of this aristocracy, and for the loosest federal constitution with maximum autonomy for the Regions - a constitutional arrangement which made it most difficult for the progressive forces to act against these semi-feudal elements. Because the influence of the aristocracy was greatest in the Northern Region, the most backward section of the country economically and culturally, before handing over "power" the British imperialists drew the regional boundaries and framed the constitution so as to give the Northern Region an absolute majority of seats in the Federal House of Representatives. And at the General Election of December 1959, just prior to "independence", the NPC accordingly gained 150 seats out of a total of 312.

Thus, when the British imperialists graciously hauled down the Union Jack in Lagos on October 1st, 1960, they handed over "power" to representatives of the same treacherous semi-feudal aristocracy on whom they had relied for more than sixty years for effective indirect rule on their behalf. The British monopoly capitalists continued to dominate and exploit the masses of Nigerian people for their profit. The 1960 "independence" of Nigeria was a spurious independence. Colonial rule had merely given way to neo-colonial rule.

The Action Group, founded in 1950, originally represented the interests of the capitalist class as a whole, with its appeal directed primarily towards the people of the economically most advanced Western Region. But as the national-democratic revolution developed, the differing attitudes towards it of the comprador and national capitalists respectively caused a split in the party. In 1962 a section of the Action Group, headed by Akintola and representing the interests of the comprador capitalists, broke away to form the United People's Party (UPP), leaving the Action Group, headed by Awolowo, to represent the interests of the national capitalists.

Unwilling to accept an Action Group government in the Western Region that now represented the interests of anti-imperialist national capitalists, the pro-imperialist Federal Government in May 1962 declared a state of emergency in the Region, dissolved the elected organs and appointed an Administrator with dictatorial powers.

In November 1962 Awolowo and other leaders of the Action Group were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment on trumped-up charges of "conspiring to overthrow the Federal Government", and the British government obligingly deported Enahoro to face a similar prison sentence.

On December 31st, 1962 the state of emergency in the Western Region was brought to an end, and Akintola was brought in to head the regional government.

Thus already, only two years after "independence", the neo-colonial regime had been compelled to use the most flagrant anti-democratic measures to hold back the developing movement for genuine national liberation.

In July 1963 the neo-colonial regime took a further measure to weaken the power of the national capitalists by carving a new Mid-West Region out of the already small Western Region.

The National Convention of Nigerian Citizens, founded in 1944, also originally represented the interests of the capitalist class as a whole, but with its appeal directed primarily towards the people of eastern Nigeria. But, as with the Action Group and for the same reasons, in 1962 a section of the party representing the interests of the comprador capitalists split away to form the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP).

In the months before the federal elections of December 1964, the main parties had come together into two rival blocs. One bloc, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) headed by the Northern People's Congress and the Nigerian National Democratic Party, represented the interests of the pro-imperialist semi-feudal aristocracy and comprador bourgeoisie. The other bloc, the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) headed by the Action Group and the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens, represented the interests of the anti-imperialist national capitalists.

The elections were so blatantly and obviously rigged that the Progressive Alliance called on its supporters to boycott the polls, and the final results gave the pro-imperialist National Alliance an absolute majority of 197 seats, against a total of 108 for its anti-imperialist rivals.

THE IRONSI MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

In late 1965 popular demonstrations against the regime grew to significant proportions. In January 1966 this unrest culminated in a revolt by a group of progressive army officers led by Major Nzeogwu, and the execution of leading reactionary politicians, including Balewa, Akintola and Bello.

The revolt was crushed by army units loyal to the neo-colonial regime which, in face of the obvious inability of the discredited civilian government to continue to rule, voluntarily transferred power to an army clique headed by the General Officer Commanding the Army, Major-General Ironsi. This military dictatorship proceeded to ban all political parties, dissolve the elected organs and appoint Military Governors for the four regions. The Military Governor appointed for the Eastern Region was a certain Lieutenant-Colonel Ojukwu.

The Ironsi regime represented the interests of an unstable class alliance between the semi-feudal aristocracy and comprador elements and a section of the national capitalist class: the Ibo bourgeoisie (to which tribe Ironsi and most of his advisers belonged). The Ibo capitalists were not only developing capitalist relations in the Eastern Region, but had spread a network of commercial interests under their control throughout the country. Because regional self-government was being used to hinder development along these lines, they opposed federalism and sought to establish a strongly centralised state under their domination. Thus, under the pressure of the Ibo bourgeoisie, the Ironsi regime in May 1966 abolished the Federation and its regions and proclaimed the country to be a unitary republic. By this move the Ironsi dictatorship lost the support of the semi-feudal and comprador elements, who wished to preserve their powers and privileges through strong regional governments and a weak central authority. They were thus driven into an unstable opposition front with the non-Ibo national capitalists.

While not attempting to change the country's neo-colonial status, the Ironsi regime accelerated the reorientation of its economy towards dependence upon the new imperialist bloc being forged in western Europe out of the Common Market, a bloc headed by West German and French imperialisms. On July 16th, 1966 Nigeria became the first Commonwealth country to enter (as an associate member) the European Economic Community, on terms which discriminated against Britain and aroused the outspoken opposition of the British government. This move brought the British imperialists into the plot to overthrow the Ironsi regime.

THE GOWON REGIME

On July 29th, 1966 - less than two weeks after the admission of Nigeria to the European Economic Community - army units rose against the Ironsi regime. Ironsi himself was executed and power was seized by a new military clique headed by the Army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Gowon.

The coup was planned by representatives of the semi-feudal, comprador and national capitalist classes in conjunction with agents of British imperialism. But the Gowon clique had learned from past experience that, in the existing conditions in Nigeria, a state could achieve stability only by basing itself upon the popular forces which had an interest in the completion of the national-democratic revolution, and it proceeded to take steps to restrict - though not to abolish - the influence of the foreign monopolies and their social prop, the semi-feudal and comprador elements dependent on foreign imperialism.

In line with this policy, one of the first acts of the new government was to release from prison the politicians representing the national capitalist class and bring them into the Federal Executive Council.

In January 1967 the Gowon government increased measures of control over the foreign oil companies, two-thirds of whose production comes from the eastern region. The British oil companies accepted these measures, but the French and United States companies denounced them as unacceptable and closed down their installations.

In March 1967 the government put forward a new constitution, re-establishing the Federation at this time as one of twelve states. This, and particularly the division of the northern region into six states, was designed to restrict the power of the semi-feudal aristocracy.

These progressive measures brought about the formation of a reactionary opposition front against the Gowon regime, embracing the semi-feudal and comprador classes, French and United States imperialisms, and a sector of the Ibo national capitalists whose plan to dominate Nigeria had been foiled by the July coup.

THE SECESSION OF "BIAFRA"

The reactionary forces began their counter-offensive in September 1966 by following the example of the tsars and fascists, who had found programs against national minorities a potent weapon to divide the people. With significant assistance of tribalist propaganda from the radio station in the adjacent French neo-colony of Dahomey, agents provocateurs proceeded to organise bloody massacres of Ibos living in the north and west, and of non-Ibos living in the east.

A mass exodus to their eastern homeland of more than half a million Ibos followed, while Military Governor Ojukwu forcibly deported non-Ibos from the Eastern Region. These steps prepared the way for the establishment of a break-away state in the east, based ideologically on Ibo tribalism, but dependent upon foreign, particularly French, imperialism. The semi-feudal and comprador elements in other parts of the country hoped that eastern separatism would lead to the overthrow of the Gowon regime and the transformation of the progressive federal state into a loose confederation which they could once again dominate.

The Gowon government made persistent efforts to retain the unity of Nigeria by peaceful negotiation, but Ojukwu has consistently made it clear that nothing except the loosest, most nominal confederation, giving the eastern region independence in practice, was acceptable to the forces for which he speaks.

On May 30th, 1967, therefore, Ojukwu proclaimed the secession from Nigeria of the Eastern Region as the "Republic of Biafra" - thus proclaiming himself the "Tshombe" of a new "Katanga". The Federal Government immediately and correctly declared this to be an act of rebellion directed against the national unity of Nigeria.

THE CIVIL WAR

The union of tribes into nationalities, the transformation of nationalities into nations - this is a historic process which is still proceeding in Africa. It is a process which is being strenuously resisted by the imperialists and their African dependents who, not wishing to see the emergence of powerful African nations, seek in every way to promote inter-tribal conflicts as part of their strategy of "divide and rule".

When they are forced to abandon open colonialism, the imperialists intensify this strategy - striving to continue and expand their exploitation and domination of the African masses through the formation of tiny, mutually antagonistic, neo-colonial states whose "independence" can never be more than purely nominal. Thus, the formation of a unified Nigerian nation must be seen as an important aspect of the national-democratic revolution in Nigeria.

Marxist-Leninists are not pacifists, but revolutionaries. Certainly we aim to build a society where wars are a relic of the barbaric past, but we understand that such a society cannot be constructed without the violent overthrow of the reactionary social forces which block the way. Thus, in analysing the character of a war, whether it be just or unjust, Marxist-Leninists assess the social classes involved and the effect which the outcome of the war will have on society.

The federal government now represents the interests of the national capitalists of Nigeria, and at this stage of the Nigerian revolution this class is capable of playing a progressive role in the national-democratic revolution. On the side of "Biafra" are ranged the most reactionary forces of Nigerian society, which seek to keep Nigeria as a loose confederation of small tribal areas easily dominated by imperialism. It is true that British imperialism has given some half-hearted support to the federal side, but the British government has emphasised that the purpose of this very limited support is to assist it to "influence" the federal government. The "Biafran" military stand, on the other hand, was possible only as a result of the arms supplied by the French, United States and Portuguese imperialists. And as the area under "Biafran" control has been steadily whittled away under the blows of the federal troops, the character of the "Biafran" authorities as mere puppets of foreign, principally of French, imperialism has been increasingly exposed.

In our view it is essential that all progressive Nigerians, no matter to what ethnic group they belong, should see the true character of the civil war - despite the suffering which all wars cause to innocent people, suffering which in this case has been deliberately aggravated by the "Biafran" authorities as a propaganda weapon - as a just and progressive struggle on the part of the federal government to maintain the national unity of Nigeria, as a part of the national-democratic revolution against imperialism.

CONCLUSION

This, then, is the analysis of the recent history of Nigeria given to us by the compass of

Marxism-Leninism. In our view it turns this history from a jumble of haphazard events and personalities into a pattern which makes sense and which provides the key to action for Nigerian socialists.

The only way forward - to the completion of the national-democratic revolution in Nigeria and its transformation into a socialist revolution - lies in the recognition that, if there is to be any real advance, the working class must take the lead in the revolutionary process. And, in order that the working class of Nigeria may fulfil this historic role, it requires a General Staff - an organised, disciplined vanguard party based on Marxism-Leninism. In our view the creation of such a Marxist-Leninist party of the working class is an urgent task of the highest importance for Nigerian socialists.

Whatever diversions and obstacles the Nigerian working people have to meet and overcome on the road to socialism, British Marxist-Leninists will be solidly with them and will share their joy at each forward step they make.

May I, therefore, conclude with three short slogans which, above all, express the sentiments of the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain in relation to the struggle of the Nigerian people :

FOR UNITY AGAINST IMPERIALISM !

DOWN WITH ALL RACIALISM !

FOR A FREE, INDEPENDENT AND UNITED NIGERIA WHICH
WILL TAKE THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM !

* * * * *

(Under the item on the Agenda entitled "The Black Revolution",
Comrade Bland made a further statement on behalf of the M.L.O.B.)

May I say first, Comrade Chairman, how much Comrade Baker and I have gained in knowledge of the problems of the Nigerian workers and peasants as a result of listening to the contributions that have been made at your Congress.

We are indeed delighted to find the wide measure of agreement which delegates have expressed on the analysis of the Nigerian Revolution made to the Congress on behalf of the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain. Because opposition has been expressed - and expressed strongly and in some cases with great emotion - to only one point in the M.L.O.B. Report, that is, on my reference to the need for a repudiation of "black racialism", I should like to devote the whole of my second and final statement to this controversial question.

DOES THE PHENOMENON OF "BLACK RACIALISM" EXIST ?

Some Comrades here have denied that there could be such a phenomenon as "black racialism". Black people, they said, are in general oppressed people, and racist feelings cannot exist among oppressed people. Would that this last statement were true, but it does not bear serious consideration. The Jews have been for centuries one of the most persecuted and oppressed ethnic groups on the face of the earth; yet there are Jews in this country who scream "Keep Britain White!" just as there are black people who are virulently anti-semitic.

We must never forget that the imperialists of the world are a mere handful of people, and that they have to hold down millions upon millions of oppressed people. No weapons, no army, no police, can ever be strong enough to do this. The supremacy of the imperialists rests, more than anything else, on their ability to "divide and rule", on their ability to set Catholic against Protestant, Moslem against Christian, white against black, Ibo against Yoruba.

All of us here understand how "white racialism" serves the imperialists. It diverts the anger of the white working people away from their real enemy, the imperialists, away from the real cause of their social problems, towards a false "enemy", towards a scapegoat, in the shape of their fellow workers with darker skins. But the imperialists need not merely to set white worker against black worker, they need to set black worker actively against white worker. This is the role of "black racialism". Because the majority of imperialists have white skins, it is not a difficult task to present to black people the idea that people with white skins are the "enemy". And the more white workers who can be misled into marching behind Powell, the more substance there can be made to appear for this false view. "White racialism" breeds "black racialism", and as "black racialism" develops it intensifies and extends "white racialism". Both are monsters feeding on each other. The notion that "white racialism" is reactionary while "black racialism" is progressive and even revolutionary is a complete illusion. All forms of racialism are equally reactionary in that they help the imperialists to "divide and rule".

That darker skin pigmentation gives no biological immunity to the virus of racialism is, alas, illustrated by the fact that even at this Congress of the most politically advanced Comrades of the Nigerian Left in Britain, even from delegates who declared their adherence to Marxism-Leninism, statements have been made which have borne a distinct racist tinge.

Several delegates have spoken of world imperialism, the principal enemy of the working people of all countries, under the name of "white imperialism". What does this epithet imply? It implies that if black capitalists are able to develop into finance capitalists, into imperialists, all will be fine. It implies that the Japanese imperialists are not enemies of the working people, because their skins are not white. It suggests that imperialists behave in the barbaric way they do, not because their class position as imperialists forces them to do so, but because they are white. This linking of imperialism with white skins lends support to the ideas of "black racialism", to the notion that there is an objective association between white skins and reaction.

Again, two delegates referred to "the white man's way of thinking". Is there such a thing? Does a white worker think the same way as his white millionaire boss? Does a white fascist think the same way as a white Marxist-Leninist - or even as a white liberal? Here again we have a phrase which lends support to the ideas of "black racialism" by suggesting that reactionary ways of thinking are objectively associated with white skins.

The Chairman has made it clear that this section of the Agenda is devoted to consideration of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. Yet it appears on the order paper under the title of "The Black Revolution". The term "black revolution" is clearly designed to be counterposed to "white imperialism" - and it is as misleading and as dangerous in its implications as the latter term. These concepts distort the world-wide struggle against imperialism into a false framework of racialism. It is true that the great majority of the black people of the world are oppressed by imperialism - but so are the great majority of white people. Whether one is a revolutionary or a reactionary has nothing to do with skin pigmentation. There are white revolutionaries as well as white reactionaries. There are black traitors in the service of imperialism as well as black revolutionaries. The people of Vietnam are daily striking heroic blows which weaken the whole basis of imperialism and their skins are not black. Not many miles from here the people of Northern Ireland live under a repressive colonial dictatorship and are raising their fists against it as I speak: are they to be discounted because their skins are white?

"BLACK NATIONALISM" ?

One Comrade made the point that the manifestations to which I have referred were manifestations not of "black racialism" but of "black nationalism".

But nationalism is the ideology of nationhood. Can it seriously be suggested that the Negroes of the United States, the West Indians, the Australian aborigines, the Nigerians, form a single nation? Of course not. What these peoples have in common is primarily a relatively dark skin pigmentation. What they have in common is one of the factors making up what we loosely call "race". All statements which seek to associate imperialism and anti-imperialism with white and black skins respectively are racist in character, not nationalist.

Nationalism is the ideology not of the working class but of the capitalist class. Whether in a particular society at a particular time nationalism is progressive or reactionary depends on whether the capitalist class of that society is playing a progressive or reactionary role at that time. When a capitalist class is participating in a national-democratic revolution against foreign imperialism and feudalism, its ideology of nationalism may play a progressive role. When a capitalist class has gained political power, its ideology of nationalism always plays a reactionary role; it is used to secure the cooperation of the working class in building a capitalist society based on its exploitation, to damp down the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class in the name of "national unity", and to arouse hostility towards peoples of other nations against which the capitalist class has aims of aggression.

While nationalism may be progressive in certain places and at certain times, racialism is always and everywhere reactionary. Because nationalism may sometimes be progressive, to call what is in reality "black racialism" by the name of "black nationalism" helps to conceal the essential ugliness of "black racialism" beneath the cloak of a false, euphemistic name.

"BLACK POWER"

Comrades have drawn attention to the positive achievements of the "Black Power" movement in liquidating the sense of inferiority which imperialism strives to impress upon the minds of black people in order to keep them in subjection, in making them conscious of their nobility and potential strength.

But this development is necessary among all exploited and oppressed peoples. There are "Uncle Toms" among the white working class, who still metaphorically touch their caps humbly to the "governor".

The negative feature of the "Black Power" movement - and it is a negative feature which is coming increasingly to overshadow the positive achievements I have mentioned - is that it has performed this task on the basis of a policy of racial segregation, a policy which has not been unaccompanied by the private and even public expressions of anti-white racist sentiments.

Why do the white racists of the United States and South Africa strive for racial segregation, for apartheid? In order to "divide and rule". In order to separate black workers from white workers, black students from white students, and stave off their united action against

their common enemy. And here we have the "Black Power" movement demanding racial segregation, demanding apartheid, in the name of "anti-imperialism"!

Progressive Americans have fought long and hard for the right of Negro young people to enter colleges on equal terms with white young people. And here we have the "Black Power" movement demanding racial segregation in education, demanding separate "black" colleges for black students. Will such "black" colleges, under U.S. imperialism, be provided with the same finance, with buildings and equipment of the same standard, with teaching staff of the same qualifications, as colleges for white students? Of course they will not. And by demanding the separation of students on the basis of race, the "Black Power" movement is - however sincere its adherents may be - helping to perpetuate U.S. imperialism by splitting a section of the revolutionary forces which can alone destroy it.

Comrades in the discussion have pointed out that black workers in this country often receive less wages than white workers for the same work. They suggested that this was because white

trade union leaders did not care about black workers. In fact, they don't care a damn about white workers either. The whole trade union bureaucracy in this country has become a mere agency serving the capitalist class and trying to keep the working class "in order". The whole trade union movement needs to be rebuilt from the level of the factory floor, and this is a task which requires the united action of all workers, irrespective of the colour of the skin. Is it in the interests of white workers that there should be black workers who are prepared to or forced to accept sub-standard wages? Of course it is not, for this tends to lower the wages of all. But we have the "Black Power" movement demanding separate trade unions for black workers, thus helping the capitalist class to split the working class, assisting them to play off one section of workers against another to the detriment of both.

While strenuously denying that there was the slightest tinge of "black racialism" in the "Black Power" movement, two Comrades in the discussion endeavoured to prove that there was, in fact, an objective basis for such "black racialism". White workers, they declare, share in the exploitation of black workers. This is pernicious nonsense. A skilled worker generally receives higher wages than an unskilled worker, but we do not suggest that the skilled worker exploits the unskilled worker. Both are exploited - often, indeed, the skilled worker is exploited more intensely than the unskilled worker in that he receives in wages a smaller share of the wealth he produces. The fact that the standard of living of workers in Britain is, on the whole, considerably higher than that of workers in Nigeria is not because the British workers share in the exploitation of the Nigerian workers, but because the more advanced technique of production in Britain yields a higher output per worker. It is rising productivity which has been the main factor in the rise in the standard of living of British workers over the past fifty years; and it should never be forgotten that, despite this rise, the exploitation of British workers has increased during this period in that they receive a smaller share of the total wealth they produce than they did fifty years ago.

Let us, therefore, be clear that there is no objective basis for either "white racialism" or "black racialism". The peoples of the colonial-type countries and the workers in the developed capitalist countries are brothers in exploitation by the great capitalist trusts of imperialism. They have a mutual interest in combining to destroy their common enemy - imperialism. "White racialism" and "black racialism" are subjective prejudices which help imperialism to "divide and rule". It is the task of Marxist-Leninists and all genuine revolutionaries to lead black and white working people to learn from their own experience the falsity of these prejudices, and this can best be done by organising united action in the common cause of the liberation of all exploited and oppressed people.

I repeat the view of the M.L.O.B. - which is the view of Marxism-Leninism - that unless the Nigerian Left repudiates the outlook of "black racialism", under whatever name it may be presented, it will - no matter how sincere its exponents may be in their intention - quickly degenerate into a Nigerian Right.

Available Soon:

**PROGRAMMATIC MANIFESTO OF THE
MARXIST-LENINIST ORGANISATION OF
BRITAIN**

Price 7s.6d. from Literature Dept. 34 Upper
Tollington Park, London N.4.

"DOGMATISM" AND "SYMPATHY"

One Comrade suggested that the view of the M.L.O.B. on this question was not that of Marxism-Leninism but of "dogmatism". We have heard similar allegations in recent years from countless revisionists who seek to pervert Marxism-Leninism into an ideology which serves the interests of imperialism. Of course the world continually changes, and the policies of Marxism-Leninism must always correctly reflect this change. But this must never be made the pretext for throwing overboard essential basic principles - and the principle "Workers of all lands and all oppressed peoples, unite!" is an essential basic principle of Marxism-Leninism which is as valid today as it was a hundred years ago.

Another Comrade made the point that it was much "easier" to build a movement among black people based on "black racialism" - although he declined to use this term. Of course it is always easier to stir up and inflame prejudices than to liquidate them. But we are not interested in building any kind of movement among black people, and a movement which is built up on the basis of reactionary prejudices will be a reactionary movement, not a genuine movement of anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle.

Several speakers endorsed the principle of inter-racial unity as a correct long-term aim, but defended "black racialism" as a short-term aim which would help in the development of inter-racial unity at a later date. This is a delusion, Comrades. The more effectively you inflame the prejudices of "black racialism" now, the harder and not the easier will it be to liquidate those prejudices at a later date.

It was also suggested that the line of the M.L.O.B. on this question showed "a lack of sympathy" for the plight of black people. If by "sympathy" they meant compassion and pity, we would not insult this Congress by expressing such condescending feelings. If you had wished for a fraternal delegate who would have wept and wrung his hands over the plight of the black people, there are hundreds of liberals who would have been delighted to perform. Such sentiments do not help forward revolutionary struggle. If by "sympathy", however, they meant unshakable fraternal solidarity, this we bring you in full measure. And it is because all forms of racialism hinder and disrupt the development of that solidarity that we raise our voice against them.

There have indeed been some highly emotional speeches made at this Congress, and emotion can play a useful and valuable role in revolutionary struggle. We need to hate our enemies and cherish our friends. But it is necessary first to analyse coolly who are our friends and who are our enemies. Without this, one may be so blinded by anger that one strikes out at one's friends and allies and helps one's enemies.

We have indeed learned much from the deliberations of your Congress. But we did not accept your invitation in order to discover your views and merely agree with them for the purpose of trying to ingratiate the M.L.O.B. with you. That is the role of opportunists, not of Marxist-Leninists.

We have listened attentively to the arguments that have been presented against the viewpoint of the MLOB on this question, and must say that it has strengthened and not weakened our conviction that, if it is to go forward to fulfil its historic role of leading the Nigerian working people to liberation from imperialist domination and the establishment of a socialist Nigeria, the Nigerian Left must repudiate all forms of racialism.

I thank you for listening to me.