

MARXISM—THE SCIENCE OF CHANGE

TOUSSAINT

'That which is willed happens but rarely. In the majority of instances the various desired ends cross and conflict with one another . . . are at the outset incapable of realisation . . . or the means of attaining them are insufficient . . . The end of the actions are intended, but the results which actually flow from these actions are not intended, or ultimately have consequences quite other than those intended.'

Friedrich Engels (*Ludwig Feuerbach*)

WHAT IS NOW HAPPENING IN AFRICA stands as testimony to the validity of these words of one of the great founders of Marxism during the last century. In Engels' own day, who would have been bold enough to prophesy that imperialism's impregnable colonial fortress in Africa would be bursting apart in revolution and upheaval within the short space of some seventy years? The intentions of the imperial conquerors of the continent were clear; to destroy the independent kingdoms and tribal societies of Africa; to subjugate the people to a regime of such overwhelming force that nothing could ever overthrow it; to harness the human and natural resources of the continent for the production of raw materials and super-profits for the factories and factory-owners of Europe. Seemingly nothing could stand in the way of those intentions.

Yet today it is clear that the ultimate results of the conquest and of the social order imposed by the conquerors has been vastly different from what was intended. Following its nose blindly, without understanding, imperialism succeeded only in creating a Frankenstein monster for itself in Africa. In place of the intended destruction of the independence of the peoples, it has developed modern nations capable of controlling independent modern states. In place of a continent of docile plantation labourers and semi-serfs, it has brought into being an urban working class, a proletariat imbued with revolutionary ideas. In place of the bottomless reservoir of cheap labour and cheap raw materials, it has created the beginnings of modern industrial economies. And consequently, the dream of permanent mastery over Africa is *being forced to submit to the real end results of the conquest of Africa*—to the growth of vast national liberation movements reflecting the rapidly developing national consciousness and will to independence and self rule of all the peoples of the continent.

GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH

Such blind and clumsy blundering without reckoning the great social forces which every society sets in motion is not peculiar to imperialism, or to Africa. History shows that similar experience through equally tortuous and misunderstood paths, has been the lot of every ruling class. Even today, in the very beginning of the age of African independence, there are signs that what is willed by leaders and desired by the people does not always flow from the actions which they take to achieve them. Liberation too, can end in a way not intended. Where the intention of the liberation movement has everywhere been to democratise Africa, already parts of liberated Africa show signs of a drift towards individual dictatorship. Where the intention was to break the economic stranglehold of imperialism, already far-reaching concessions to foreign imperialist investment in resurgent Africa are being made. Clearly held intentions, or even good intentions are not enough for those who would make their own history. They need more than sincerity; they need also a deep understanding of history, and of how it is made.

It is not for lack of sincere intention that Nkrumah's socialist beliefs, for example, become subordinated to the 'practical' need to open the Volta River project to American monopoly control and consequent deep penetration in all Ghana's economy. Nor is it for lack of sincere desire for independence that all French colonies in Africa except Guinea have chosen to remain in the French Empire rather than plough the hard furrow of independence.

Sincerity alone is not enough; even the most sincere of men and organisations must either understand the social forces which move society onwards, or become the blind tools of forces which they cannot understand and therefore cannot control or bend to their will.

'Active social forces', writes Engels (*Socialism—Utopian and Scientific*) 'work exactly like natural forces—blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand and reckon with them. But when once we understand them, when we grasp their action, their direction, their effect, it depends only on ourselves to subject them more and more to our own will and, by means of them, to reach our ends.'

As we shall attempt to show from time to time in these pages, Marxism is the science of the social forces around us. Marxism alone enables us to reckon with them, and thus to subject them to our will. In less than one hundred years, Marxism has developed to become one of the great guiding social theories of our time. It has become the basis by which almost one-third of mankind in the socialist countries regulate and control their own destiny. Yet even now, the black-out screens erected by imperialism against this science have been so effective and

complete, that the fierce light which Marxism sheds on such problems as now confront the people of Africa is scarcely appreciated by those who need it most.

LAWS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Accordingly, the whole process by which historical development defeats the highest hopes and sincerest intentions even of apparently all-powerful rulers remains largely mysterious and inexplicable to enlightened men and women in Africa. The process cannot be explained, as so many people still try to explain it, by seeking out the mistaken policy or the wrong decision of a statesman or colonial administrator as the source of the disaster. But from the standpoint of Marxism the process becomes clear and understandable. Marxists would explain the course of social development not from the ideas which men may hold, but from the material conditions of the life of that society, from the laws which govern its workings and which give rise to its ideas, as well as its social and political institutions.

Prior to Marx, the whole view of the changing course of society—that is, the whole view of history—was founded on the belief that the causes of historical changes lay in the changing ideas of human beings. It was also believed that the most important of all changes in history and the determining ones had been political changes. It followed logically therefore, that the causes of change were to be sought mainly in the ideas of the great political figures—in the ambitions of kings or the crusading zeal of clerics, in the policies of conquerors or the theories of their advisers. In this historical belief, Marx wrought a revolution. He showed, simply, that the first activity of men in society is to produce their physical needs, to feed and clothe and shelter themselves; and since that is so, men's ideas about the kind of society they needed could not determine the manner of their productive efforts, but must on the contrary reflect it.

'Whatever is the being of a society,' writes Stalin, summarising this materialist conception of history, 'whatever are the conditions of the material life of society, such are the ideas, theories, political views and political institutions of that society.'

(Dialectical and Historical Materialism)

In the light of this materialist conception, the whole process of changing political ideas and institutions ceases to be mysterious and incomprehensible, and becomes instead an orderly, understandable course of development. The laws which govern this development can accordingly only be discovered from a study of the manner in which society produces its worldly goods. On the basis of such a study, as Stalin puts it:

'Social life, the history of society, ceases to be an agglomeration of "accidents" and becomes the history of the development of society according to regular laws, and the study of history becomes a science . . . as precise a science as, let us say, biology.'

Africa today stands in vital need of such a science. Here we are in the midst of a vast, sweeping social change. The old social order of colonial Africa is being destroyed, territory by territory. A new social order based on independence is coming into being. The rallying cries of 'Freedom!' and 'Equality!' and 'Independence!' move millions of people to deliberate political activity.

Here in these slogans are expressed the clear intentions of the leaders and the masses of Africa alike. But how are those intentions to be secured? How are the social forces of the New Africa to be harnessed to ensure that the end result of liberation is what is intended? How is the freedom, equality and independence of Africa to be built as we want it, and not to end in disastrous chaos as the result of the blind and destructive working out of uncontrolled social forces?

THE SOCIALIST PATH

Many of the leaders of African liberation, inspired by the example of countries led by Marxist revolutionaries, proclaim socialism as the path which Africa must follow. But not even sincere socialist convictions are enough, unless they are based on understanding of how and by whom and in what circumstances it can be achieved.

'Since the historical appearance of the capitalist mode of production,' Engels wrote seventy years ago, 'the appropriation by society of all the means of production has always been dreamed of, more or less vaguely, by individuals as well as by sects as the ideal of the future. But it could become possible, could become a historical necessity only when the material conditions for its realisation were there. Like every other social advance, it becomes practicable not by men understanding that the existence of classes is in contradiction to justice, equality etc., not by the mere willingness to abolish these classes but by virtue of certain new economic conditions.'

More than any others in Africa today, those whose aim is to lead Africa along the path to socialism need the understanding of society. They need to know the course of social development and the laws within which men can make their own history as they wish to.

What then are the laws of social development revealed by Marxism? Stated at their briefest, they are these:

- * that the starting point of social change is not in the ideas that society holds, but in the way society produces its goods;
- * that relations between men and thus between classes in society rise in conformity with the state of development of the forces of production;

- * that since the forces of production constantly develop and improve, the social relationships of a former time constantly lag behind present needs;
- * that accordingly, sooner or later the old social order becomes an insuperable obstacle to the further development of the new forces of production, and must be changed;
- * that the old ruling classes tend to resist all change in the social order, and conflict between them and the classes seeking change is therefore the state of existence of all class society;
- * that this class struggle is the moving force of social and political change in class society.

It is popularly believed that Marx invented the theory of the class struggle. But the class struggle was not invented by Marx or anyone else; it was revealed from the studies of past history by historians whose minds were not so clogged with the kings and conquerors as to be unmindful of all else.

'No credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them,' Marx himself wrote. 'Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle . . . What I did new was to prove: that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular phases in the history of production [i.e. the phase of privately owned means of production—Ed.], that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.'

(Letter to Kugelman)

Thus Marx laid the scientific basis for socialism. Earlier socialists had proclaimed their visions of the classless society as the result of the triumph of reason, as the 'perfect' social system to be imposed upon society by visionaries. Marx however showed how socialism was the certain end result of the social forces at work in capitalist society. He showed how the capitalist mode of production creates, willy-nilly, increasingly violent contradictions between the social relations of society and its forces of production—between the social nature of modern, mass-production industry on the one hand, and the private appropriation of all the products on the other. He demonstrated thus, for the first time, that the class struggle of capitalist society leads inevitably to the overthrow of the capitalist class, and its substitution by the industrial working class, the proletariat. He showed thus, even in the period when the working class of Europe was numerically as puny and insignificant as it is today in many parts of Africa, that the proletariat was the revolutionary vanguard of the new socialist order which must replace capitalism, at once the gravedigger of the capitalist system and the force capable of building a socialist order.

MARXISM IN AFRICA

Some African socialists claim that, however relevant and important the Marxist theory of the class struggle may be for highly-industrialised Europe, it has little significance for present-day Africa, which is only now emerging from feudalistic colonial conditions. President Sékou Touré has been quoted—perhaps inaccurately—to this effect. No one, least of all Marxists themselves, would claim that Africa's liberation proceeds along the clear-cut bourgeois-versus-proletarian class lines dealt with in many of the classics of Marxist writing. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin concerned themselves chiefly with the problems of the socialist revolution in Europe, only to a minor extent with those of Asia, and scarcely at all with what was still, in their times, the dark and backward continent of Africa. It would be idle to deny that Marxists have as yet only scratched the surface of the concrete study of Africa in the light of Marxist theory, and are only now at the beginning of their interpretation of its problems.

But to deduce from the scantiness of Marxist writings about Africa that Marxism therefore has nothing to offer the continent, would be to distort the vital core of Marxism. Marxist science is not a formula or a catalogue of dogmatic solutions to be applied to every situation like the catechisms. Above all else, Marxism teaches that every situation has to be studied concretely in the light of all surrounding circumstances; it teaches us to look not merely at things as they are, but as they are becoming in the course of their development and change. Clearly the precise understanding of the problems of Africa, even in the light of Marxism, cannot be gleaned from the writings of great Marxists about other countries. Understanding comes from the application of Marxist science to the concrete problems of Africa. Stalin, for example, writes in *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*:

'Out of the conflict between the new productive forces and the old relations of production, out of the economic demands of society, there arise new ideas. The new ideas organise and mobilise the masses; the masses become welded into a new political army, create a new revolutionary power, and make use of it to abolish by force the old relations of production and to firmly establish the new system. The spontaneous process of development yields place to the conscious actions of men, peaceful development of violent upheaval, evolution to revolution.'

Here in a generalised fashion, Marxism reveals the radical change currently under way throughout Africa. But without concrete study of Africa, such generalisation fails to explain precisely the source and direction of the change, its particular scope and its particular limits.

THE REVOLUTIONARY CLASS

Up to now, except in perhaps the Union of South Africa and Algeria, the process of development has been spontaneous, taking place without conscious understanding of the forces at work and thus without control by the leaders of the currents they set in motion. Only in such countries as South Africa and Algeria have there been substantial Marxist Parties, applying the science of social change to their own special conditions, and subjecting the active forces of social change more and more to their will. The reason for this is not that people in these two territories are more reasonable, greater seekers after truth than elsewhere. The reason is simple. Marxism is the world outlook of a particular class, the industrial proletariat. It is the science of how the proletariat can abolish the old relations of capitalist production and with it the whole of class society, and establish a new socialist order. Where the proletariat has developed first in Africa, there the ideas of Marxism have developed most powerfully; there Communism has become an influential political creed. 'The existence of a revolutionary idea', wrote Marx and Engels (*German Ideology*), 'pre-supposed the existence of a revolutionary class.'

That revolutionary class, small and formerly insignificant in most of Africa, now stands on the threshold of a dynamic advance. Whether the men and women of the liberation movements of Africa understand it or not, whether they even desire it or not is immaterial. The liberation of Africa is creating the conditions everywhere for the rapid emergence of the proletariat, divorced from the small property-rights of peasant life, living by selling its labour power. It is thus creating also the conditions for the dynamic advance of the ideas of revolutionary Marxism, which the whole liberation movement needs to carry it through to the ends which it has set itself. Just as the small but developing French bourgeoisie set itself at the head of all classes in the revolution of 1786, so too the working class, once it is imbued with the science of Marxism, once it is organised into a Marxist party, can set itself at the head of the African liberation movement. And in so doing, it will fight not for itself alone; but it will use its revolutionary spirit and its revolutionary theory to carry all classes forward to the achievement of their own aims—freedom, independence, equality.