

# PROBLEMS OF THE AFRICAN REVOLUTION

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*GEORGE MAXWELL*

'It is high time that Communists should openly in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies and meet this nursery tale of the spectre of Communism with a manifesto of the party itself.'

Communist Manifesto, 1848.

SO RAPID AND SO FUNDAMENTAL are the changes that are sweeping over the continent of Africa and its peoples that it is perfectly proper to describe them as revolutionary. The whole of Africa is in revolt. In place of formerly dependent and colonial territories are new and vigorous independent states. In those territories where freedom has not yet been won powerful national liberation movements are waging resolute and determined struggles against imperialism.

In 1950 there were only four independent states in Africa—Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and the Union of South Africa. The following year Libya became independent; in 1956, Sudan, Morocco and Tunisia; in 1957 Ghana; in 1958 the Republics of Guinea and Algeria came into being. Today independent states embrace one-third of the area and half the population of Africa. By next year Nigeria, the Cameroons, Togoland and Somaliland will join the ranks of independent states. The above is a measure of the speed of advance in the African revolution.

After the retreat of imperialism from Asia at the end of the second world war the apologists of imperialism dreamt of years of empire in Africa. This continent was looked upon as a relatively safe area for long-term investment. Western imperialism counted on years of unrestricted exploitation of African raw materials. They all reckoned without the people of Africa itself.

It must however be said that imperialism in retreat is not imperialism routed. It is correct for us to celebrate the emergence to independence of African states as a defeat for imperialism. This is because independence is not the result of magnanimity by the imperialist states themselves. They never 'grant' independence. It is forced upon them by the strength of the national liberation movement. Yet independence in the juridical sense is not the end of the road. The technique of formal independence is one that is widely used by imperialist states. The technique is to substitute for direct imperialist rule, indirect rule

directed towards the objects of imperialism which remain the economic exploitation of the world in the interests of a handful of monopolists and financiers. In 1920 Lenin described the technique thus:

‘It is necessary constantly to explain and expose among the broadest masses of the toilers of all countries, and particularly of the backward countries, the deception systematically practised by the imperialists in creating, under the guise of politically independent states, states that are wholly dependent upon them economically, financially and militarily.’

(Lenin, *Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, June 1920.)

The people of Africa must therefore look beyond the proclamation of independence to discover whether or not *real* freedom has been achieved.

Freedom can only be real when national independence is coupled with a social and economic revolution carried out in the interests of the masses of the people.

Such changes cannot be won except through a national struggle led by the only revolutionary class of our times—the proletariat and the party, the Communist Party.

Developments in Africa have reached a stage at which in each country a Communist Party must be built to shoulder its responsibilities as leader and teacher of the African revolution.

Guided by the all-conquering science of Marxism-Leninism the African revolution can be decisively completed and a beginning made with the building of genuine People’s Democracies as a prelude to the achievement of Communism in Africa.

If the working class and its political party—the Communist Party—do not assert their independent and leading role the African revolution cannot achieve complete victory.

Up to the present the national liberation struggle in Africa has been by and large inspired and led by the bourgeoisie. The imminence of independence throughout most of Africa heralds the end of the positive contributions by the bourgeoisie. In our era the bourgeoisie is not a revolutionary class except when it participates in the colonial revolution against imperialism. Even in this latter case the bourgeoisie cannot be thoroughly and consistently revolutionary. As soon as a certain point is reached in the revolution against imperialism the bourgeoisie and other reactionary social forces compromise with imperialism to preserve their own interests at the expense of the people.

The attitude of the leaders of some of the newly independent African states to Communism is an indication of their changing role which is now rapidly becoming that of partners of imperialism against the toiling masses. In those countries the repressive legislation directed against the working class has been taken over from the former colonial

regimes and utilised by them for the same purpose. In these countries the Communist Party is illegal and communist literature is banned. The economic and social position of the people in many such countries remains basically the same as it was under the direct rule of the imperialists. The bourgeoisie have fulfilled their historic role in the African revolution and cannot carry it any further.

In these conditions it becomes necessary for the scientific outlook of Marxism-Leninism to become part of the African revolution. Concretely this means that in the more developed countries, where the bourgeoisie has grown, the conditions have matured for the formation of Communist Parties.

In all African countries, particularly in those that are independent, the task must be carried forward of organising the workers as a class. This task can only be carried out effectively under the leadership of the Communist Party. Only thus can the working class achieve hegemony of the African revolution. Communist currents and tendencies must now be crystallised into the formation of Communist Parties no matter how small. In this way Marxism-Leninism can be wedded with the practice of the African revolution.

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WE WELCOME Comrade Maxwell's article as a thoughtful contribution to an important field of discussion. It contains many true and important passages. At the same time we think that some of his statements about the role of the national bourgeoisie in Africa are too sweeping. In general, it should be said, imperialism has inhibited the growth of a big indigenous capitalist class, especially in areas of extensive White settlement. It is wrong to assume that the whole of the African capitalist class will be content with formal political independence, after which they will compromise with imperialism at the expense of the people. An important section of this class may well continue in a national united front, together with workers, peasants and patriotic intellectuals, to the building of a genuine people's democracy. Reactionary forces, such as tribal chiefs, who owe their positions to the continued influence of imperialism, may be more likely to side with imperialism against the progressive forces, including the national bourgeoisie. We agree with Comrade Maxwell that the task of the advanced workers in the more developed countries is to form their own independent Communist Parties. But our view is that the principal task of these Parties in the present historical period is to take part in and strengthen the national united front, together with the peasants, the patriotic intellectuals and the democratic sections of the national bourgeoisie, in order to win

and secure political independence, as well as to institute a radical programme of land reform and economic development which will make independence a reality. In a word, to use his own expressive phrase, to carry through the *African revolution*.

(Editorial Board).

‘Developing capitalism knows two historical tendencies in the national question. **FIRST:** the awakening of national life and national movements, struggle against national oppression, creation of national states. **SECOND:** development and intensification of all kinds of intercourse between nations, breakdown of national barriers, creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.

‘Both tendencies are a world-wide law of capitalism. The first predominates at the beginning of its development, the second characterises mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society. The national programme of the Marxists takes both tendencies into account, and demands, firstly, equality of nations and languages, prohibition of all privileges whatsoever in this respect and also the right of nations to self-determination; and secondly, the principle of internationalism and uncompromising struggle against the contamination of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism, even of the most refined kind.’

LENIN: Remarks on the National Question.