Africa and Communism

By R. PALME DUTT

May I at the outset express warmest greetings and congratulations to *The African Communist*, which is fulfilling such a great role in spreading the understanding of Communism in Africa.

There is no doubt that the ideas of Communism are taking deep root in all the countries of Africa today. Nevertheless, many misconceptions still exist. It may be helpful to try to clear some of these.

COMMUNISM AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

Some spokesmen of the national liberation movement try to counterpose Communism and national liberation, as if these were two opposing conceptions. This is unjustified.

Communism and the world communist movement from the outset, throughout the more than a century of growth and development since the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, has always fought in the forefront for the national liberation of all subject peoples oppressed by Western imperialism.

Marx said: “The nation which oppresses another nation forges its own chains”.

While Western apologists of capitalism offered mythical pictures of the origins of capitalism from thrift and savings, Marx showed how the foundations of capitalism in Western Europe and North America were built on colonial slavery, the slave trade and the plunder of Asia and Africa.

“The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. . . . The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder, floated back to the mother country and were there turned into capital” (Marx, *Capital*, I. ch.xxxi).

Marx and Engels gave enthusiastic support to the militant national movement of revolt of the Irish people, expressed in Fenianism in their day, against British imperialism. Marx said that the British working class would “never accomplish anything” until Ireland (that is, the colonial people ruled by Britain) won independence. Thus the thought of Marx placed national liberation in the forefront for the fulfilment of the aim of the victory of socialism.
Marx devoted some of his principal writings to India in the early eighteen-fifties, before the Indian War of Independence of 1857, and predicted the victory of Indian national liberation from British rule already before the formation of the Indian National Congress.

Marx exposed British imperialism in China, and in 1850 predicted that, when the European reactionaries sought to find a final bastion of reaction in China, they would discover on the Great Wall of China the inscription: “Republic of China; Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”. A brilliant prediction almost exactly a century before the final victory of the Chinese People’s revolution, led by the Chinese Communist Party, against imperialism.

Lenin carried forward these teachings of Marx in the era of modern imperialism in the twentieth century. Lenin exposed without mercy the pygmy West European so-called “socialists” (really servants of imperialism) who confined their outlook to Western Europe and North America and looked disdainfully on the rest of the peoples of the world as “backward”. Lenin on the contrary always brought into the forefront the struggle of the oppressed masses of Asia and Africa as representing the majority of mankind and the key to the future joint victory over imperialism. The victory of the Soviet revolution annulled all the unequal treaties of Tsarist imperialism and brought the first victories of national liberation of all the peoples previously oppressed by Tsarist imperialism. Lenin personally drew up the famous “Theses on the National and Colonial Question” of the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920. It was in Baku in 1922 that was held the first Congress of all the Oppressed Peoples of the East. The torch of the victorious Soviet revolution, and the inspiration of the teachings of Lenin and Communism, have swept forward the national liberation movement in all countries to new heights in our era and to the present extending victories.

Communists in all countries in the world, equally in the imperialist countries and in the colonial countries and newly independent countries still threatened by imperialism, fight in the forefront, in unity with all supporters of national liberation, for the complete victory of national independence, for the final defeat of all colonialism and neo-colonialism, and for complete economic and political independence from imperialism. This is no temporary tactical line, as enemies pretend. The record of the world communist movement over a century proves the contrary. British Communists, originally in the British Socialist Party in the eighteen-
eighties, and then in the British Communist Party since 1920, were fighting for the complete independence of India from British rule before even the leaders of the Indian National Congress had adopted this goal. The consistent Communist role in the forefront of the fight for national liberation from imperialism derives from the basic theory of Communism, which is directed to the aim of complete political and social and economic liberation of mankind through a classless society and sees national liberation as an essential step along this path.

COMMUNISM A WORLD THEORY

Critics sometimes say that Marxism is a West European theory, based on and applying to Western advanced industrial countries, but unsuitable for the very different conditions of African countries. This is an error.

When the Bolsheviks began to organise their party in Russia on the basis of Marxism, their critics used to say that Marxism was suitable for Western European industrial countries, but wholly unsuitable for a backward predominantly peasant country, like Tsarist Russia. The victory of the Bolshevik revolution proved them wrong.

When the Chinese Communist Party was founded at its first Congress of twelve delegates, including Mao Tse Tung, in 1921, their critics declared that Communism or Marxism was suitable for a European country like Russia, but wholly unsuitable for an Asiatic country, since Asian conditions and the “Asian soul” were different. The victory of the Chinese people’s revolution twenty-eight years later, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, proved them wrong.

Unabashed by their defeats, some of these critics now try to argue that the victory of Communism over one third of the world is all wrong and contrary to the principles of Marxism, since Marx, they declare, taught that the socialist revolution ought to have begun in the advanced industrial countries of Western Europe. This argument only betrays their ignorance of Marxism.

Marx already in the eighteen-fifties, after the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Western and Central Europe, declared that the development of capitalism on a world scale had now transformed the perspective. The victory of the revolution, he wrote, could no longer be seen in terms of “this little corner” represented by Western Europe, but must develop henceforth on a world scale, so that the revolt of the peoples of the world against capitalist domination would bring “the death knell of bourgeois society”. Already in his
later years Marx was pointing to Russia as the starting point of the revolution: “This time the revolution will begin in the East” (Marx in 1877). Similarly Engels in 1890 declared that “Russia has become the vanguard of the revolutionary movement”.

Lenin tore to pieces the West European and American falsifiers of Marxism, who pretended that Marx taught that the socialist revolution must begin in the most advanced industrial countries of Western Europe or North America. He showed that imperialism would break first at its weakest point, in Russia, where there was already an advanced organised industrial working class, even though limited in numbers, guided by Marxism, and not corrupted by imperialist bribery and opportunism as in Western Europe and the United States.

After the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, representatives of the West European distortion of Marxism, like Trotsky, preached that the Soviet revolution could only survive if the socialist revolution conquered in the countries of Western Europe, and that this must be the next stage of the international socialist revolution. Lenin mercilessly dismissed this banking on a speedy socialist revolution in the West as “a fairy tale”. Assessing the prospects of the world socialist revolution, in the last article that he ever wrote, in 1923, Lenin declared that the next stage would see the victorious revolt of the oppressed masses of Asia and Africa, the majority of mankind, against imperialist domination, and that this would make certain the downfall of imperialism and the world victory of socialism:

“In the last analysis, the upshot of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe, and it is precisely this majority that during the past few years has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest shadow of doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured” (Lenin, “Better Fewer, But Better”, March 1923).

This is the true teaching of Communism on the path of the world revolution. The record of these past four decades has abundantly proved the truth of this prediction.

**COMMUNISM A GUIDE TO ACTION**

The fact that Communism is a world theory, whose principles apply to all countries, does not mean that Communism is a rigid formula to be applied to every country according to a single dogmatic scheme. There will be great variations according to concrete
national conditions. Communism is a living and creative scientific theory which draws its conclusions on the basis of the most careful study of concrete conditions in different countries. The Chinese Revolution did not exactly reproduce the Russian Revolution. The People’s Democracies in Eastern Europe brought new features. In our time the Cuban Revolution is revealing new forms of development, of great significance for all countries engaged in the struggle against imperialism. New forms are arising in countries like Ghana, Guinea and Mali, where the ideas of Marxism-Leninism are winning wide attention and increasing influence.

On the basis of theoretical understanding and the experience of all countries Communism is able to demonstrate certain principles of historical development from the existing class society to the future classless society, which are valid for all countries, whatever the differences in the specific forms of their realisation. Such are the teachings on the role of classes and the class struggle, the democratic revolution, the character of capitalism and imperialism, the nature of the state, the necessity of the power of the working people or dictatorship of the proletariat in order to build socialism, and the advance from socialism to communism.

Communism is able to give present guidance at each stage of the struggle, however different this stage in different countries, on the basis of its social theory and analysis of the role of classes. On this basis Communism is able to explain why there arise African traitors like Tshombe, who may have black skins and be African by race, but in reality belong to the imperialists; why the national bourgeoisie often vacillates; why the working class, in alliance with the mass of the peasantry and the revolutionary intellectuals and urban petty bourgeoisie, constitute the most consistent anti-imperialist fighters for the complete victory of the national democratic revolution, and for the advance to the tasks of national economic reconstruction and the building of socialism.

UNITY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION AND THE WORLD SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

Lenin said:

“Whereas formerly, before the beginning of the epoch of world revolution, the movement for national liberation was part of the general democratic movement, now, after the victory of the Soviet revolution in Russia and the beginning of the epoch of the world revolution, the movement for national liberation is part of the world proletarian revolution.”

The truth of this is demonstrated by the whole present epoch.
The understanding of this is vital for the success of every national liberation movement in every country.

Prior to 1917 every national revolt without exception was crushed by the overwhelming superior might of imperialism.

The victory of the Soviet revolution brought the first victories of national liberation, when the peoples formerly oppressed by Tsarism won their freedom and have today sped forward from the uttermost colonial backwardness, illiteracy and poverty to become industrially and culturally advanced nations in many respects on a higher level than many European capitalist nations.

The victories of socialism in the second world war, the establishment of the People’s Democracies in Eastern Europe, and the victory of the Chinese revolution, extending socialism to one third of the world, have permanently weakened imperialism and made possible the sweeping victories of national liberation during the present period. Thanks to the strength of the socialist third of the world, the majority of former colonial peoples, whose previous revolts were always crushed, have now been able to win the establishment of politically independent states, even though in isolation they would be weak and helpless.

Today even tiny and weak newly independent States can successfully defy the threats and aggression of great imperialist powers, because the strength of the socialist camp stands by their side. This was shown in the Suez War, when the once all-powerful British and French imperialists had to abandon suddenly their aggression against the much smaller and weakly armed Egypt, following the Soviet Note to Britain (the so-called “Rocket” Note). Similarly, the heroic Cuban people were able to defeat the U.S.-organised invasion; and the mightiest imperialist power, the United States, has so far hesitated to launch full-scale war against little Cuba, not because they lack the strength or the will, but because they fear the firm solidarity of the Soviet Union and the anti-imperialist majority of the world on the side of Cuba.

Similarly, in the task of economic reconstruction after the victory of political independence the socialist countries are able to give practical help on an increasing scale to the newly independent nations to overcome the backwardness of colonial economy and build up their economic independence through industrialisation. Imperialism has always strangled the economic development of colonial peoples, holding them back as sources of raw materials and as markets to exploit, and hindering industrialisation. Nowadays the imperialists try to boast of their “aid” to newly independent states,
but an analysis of this "aid" would show that the overwhelmingly greater proportion of it is either military, to draw the newly independent states into imperialist military blocs, or subsidies to counter-revolutionary governments, to hold the people down, or expenditure to facilitate exploitation by the big imperialist monopolies. Only in the most recent period the example of socialist aid in industrialisation and reconstruction has compelled the imperialists to attempt a very little in this direction in competition; but the proportion of this is minute compared to socialist aid. Further, the terms of imperialist "aid" are always onerous and in practice accompanied by conditions to compel policies acceptable to imperialism, such as entry into imperialist military blocs or other imperialist combinations like the Common Market. Socialist aid enables the newly independent States to resist such blackmail pressure.

In all these ways the co-operation of the socialist countries and the newly independent States is vital for the success of national liberation and the maintenance of national independence of the new States.

**IMPERIALISM'S MAIN IDEOLOGICAL WEAPON IS ANTI-COMMUNISM**

Imperialism seeks in every way to disrupt the national liberation movement, and to disrupt the co-operation of the newly independent States and the socialist countries, that is, to disrupt the anti-imperialist majority in the world.

The resolution on Neo-Colonialism adopted by the Third All-African Peoples’ Conference in March, 1961, exposes this new technique of imperialism, after recognition of independence, to seek to maintain "an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical means".

The main ideological weapon of imperialist neo-colonialism is anti-communism.

This is always the familiar weapon of reaction. This was the principal weapon of Hitler and fascism, expressed in their "Anti-Comintern Pact". This is today the principal propaganda weapon of United States imperialism, expressed in their "cold war", which is the successor to the Anti-Comintern Pact and uses similar slogans.

The purpose of this strategy is obvious. If the national liberation movement can be divided into supporters and opponents of communism, then imperialism can win its aims by taking advantage of this division. Therefore the imperialists flatter the opponents of
communism, calling them wise and statesmanlike, and giving them every support.

Similarly, if the imperialists can disrupt the anti-imperialist movement of the world, by hindering the co-operation of the socialist countries and the newly independent States (using such fraudulent slogans as “Keep Africa Out of the Cold War” or “Beware of Russian Imperialism”), then the still weak newly independent States would be isolated and at the mercy of imperialism.

For this purpose the imperialists use all kinds of deceitful and sophistical arguments and slogans in order to conceal their real disruptive aims. They seek to distort the positive progressive slogans of the African liberation movement in order to give them a reactionary disruptive content.

For example, “Pan Africanism” as a term has been promulgated by such honoured leaders of African liberation as Dr. Dubois and President Nkrumah to denote the necessity of African unity against imperialism and to express the noble goal of a United Free Africa, replacing the artificial partition and balkanisation imposed by imperialism. But this great aim of All-African liberation, expressed by the All-African Peoples’ Conference, is twisted by the agents of imperialism to mean a kind of isolationist African separatism or racial exclusiveness, such as would cut off the great African liberation movement from the world anti-imperialist movement, including the Asian, Latin American and socialist countries.

Similarly, the conception of the “African personality” or “African socialism” has been put forward by spokesmen of African liberation to denote the just aim of the re-emergence of African culture from the destructive suffocating stranglehold of imperialism and to indicate that the advance to socialism in Africa will correspond to concrete conditions and not simply reproduce the experience of European or Asian countries. But again the reactionary agents of imperialism seek to turn this just conception into a theory of African exceptionalism, that is, to argue that the scientific laws of social development, expressed in Marxism, which apply to all other countries in the world, do not apply to Africa. In this way also the attempt is made by reactionaries to conceal their policies of maintaining the old social order under empty phrases about what they are pleased to call “African socialism”.

Again, the aim of non-alignment and positive neutrality expresses the just and united policy of the newly independent states to refuse to accept the policies of the imperialist cold war or be drawn into imperialist military blocs. But here also the attempt is made by the
spokesmen of imperialism to twist this just conception into the spurious theory of the so-called “Third Front” equally opposed to “both camps” or “both world blocs”. This is a spurious theory, since it is only imperialism which seeks to draw the newly independent States into military blocs. There is no socialist NATO and CENTO and SEATO; the Warsaw Pact is only the common defence of the socialist states formed after NATO in order to meet its threats, and with the proclaimed proposal, constantly repeated, for the simultaneous dissolution of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact and their replacement by a European Security Agreement. Hence the propaganda of “equal opposition” to imperialism and socialism represents once again the attempt to disrupt the anti-NATO imperialist majority of the world for the benefit of imperialism.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

The immediate task before the peoples of Africa is not yet the construction of communism. This can only be the outcome of a considerable intervening development to create the conditions for it.

The immediate task is to win complete national independence from imperialism. Over wide regions of Africa, in Southern and Central Africa, colonial slavery still continues. In some regions, as in Congo, Angola and Algeria, imperialism still conducts the most violent armed aggression. The struggle of the people in these regions against imperialism is the common struggle of all African peoples. Also in the newly independent States imperialism still maintains many kinds of indirect influence, penetration or continuing exploitation, as shown in the All-African Peoples’ Conference resolution on Neo-Colonialism. Thus it is obvious that the first task in Africa today is to win complete economic and military independence from imperialism.

The second task, bound up with the first, is the task of national economic and social reconstruction. This calls for a vast programme to end the backwardness and poverty of colonial economy, carry through agrarian reforms, develop industrialisation and raise the standards of the people.

All this can only be successfully accomplished if this reconstruction goes hand in hand with broad democratic development, not necessarily in the sense of western parliamentary institutions, but in the sense of drawing in all sections of the people into creative initiative and activity.

Such are the aims expressed in the conception of independent
national democracy, as set out in the 1960 Declaration of 81 Communist and Workers' Parties.

In this way, through the development of independent national democracy, of full independence from imperialism, the conditions are prepared for the advance to socialism.

All these tasks require a united national front, drawing in all progressive sections and classes ready to play their part in the cause of national liberation: the national bourgeoisie, working class, peasantry, students and intellectuals and urban petty bourgeoisie.

Does this mean that the question of communism and the formation of Communist Parties can only arise at a future stage of development?

No. Also in the present struggle for national liberation and for national reconstruction Communism and Marxism, the politics of the working class and the toiling masses of socialism, has a vital part to play. (1) to represent the interests of the working people at each stage. (2) to fulfil the role of the working class as the most consistent anti-imperialist fighter and combat all betrayals and surrenders to imperialism. (3) to help to guide the movement forward at each stage to the further aim of socialism.

The fulfilment of this essential task requires corresponding organisation. The essence of Marxism-Leninism is the unity of theory and practice. Communists are organised in Communist Parties all over the world. There are now over 80 Communist Parties in the world, covering most countries. The Communist Parties play their part in the common struggle and advance of their peoples: in the battles of national liberation in the colonial countries; in the common struggle against imperialism and for national reconstruction in the newly independent states; in the battles against imperialism and for socialism in the imperialist countries; in the construction of socialism in the newly established socialist countries; and in the transition from socialism to communism in the Soviet Union.

In several African countries Communist Parties already exist. In many others the conditions are becoming manifestly ripe for the formation of Communist Parties. Of course this does not mean that a Communist Party can be formed in a given country by a wave of the hand, without regard to the previous political conditions, the development of the national movement and working class movement, from whose midst it must grow. In some newly independent States the united national movement has developed in the form of a single Party, within which the ideas of Marxism-Leninism have increasing influence. In such circumstances it may
be that the evolution of such parties towards a programme of Marxism-Leninism can represent a special form of development. The question of a Communist Party is not the question of a name, but of the reality. For this further stage of political development the most careful consideration by every African has now become increasingly urgent.

It would of course be highly inappropriate in an article of this character to attempt to discuss the concrete conditions of development in each particular territory in Africa. These problems can only be solved by those engaged in the struggle on the spot. What is evident is that the extension of the understanding of communism, the study of Marxism-Leninism and formation of groups for the study of Marxism-Leninism or of such journals as *The African Communist* and *World Marxist Review*, and through these the developing of corresponding political organisation, whether finding its fulfilment in the immediate formation of Communist Parties or through the development of parties advancing to acceptance of the principles of Marxism-Leninism, has become a vital need for future political development in Africa.

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