

The South African Communist Party recently issued a new Draft Programme for discussion by its members and supporters in preparation for its adoption sometime later this year. The earlier programme of the Party was adopted in 1953. But the great sweep of world events since that date—the successive defeats of world imperialism and the continuous accession of strength of world socialism, the giant advance of colonial liberation and, in particular of African liberation—all these have required that the Party revise and recast its programme to fit the new times in which we live.

The African Communist will publish the new programme of the Party when it has been adopted in its final form. In the meantime, we print below an article written by one of those who is taking part in the discussions on the document, which deals with matters of more general interest than just this programme alone.

REFLECTIONS ON READING THE DRAFT PROGRAMME

The publication of its draft programme by the South African Communist Party represents a milestone in the history of Marxism-Leninism in our country. The document is an example of Marxism-Leninism applied to South African conditions. It directs the powerful searchlight of the Marxist method to South Africa, and explores the main features of South African life, both past and present. And whilst it deals specifically with South Africa it can be said that this document is as undoubtedly *African* as it is Marxist-Leninist.

Theory is the generalisation of experience. And in South Africa Marxism has a long and rich experience spanning a period of well over half-a-century. Early in the present century the Labour movement in South Africa was in the throes of a conflict common to the whole international working class. The dominant opportunist trend in the Second International had its counterpart in the right-wing leadership of the Labour movement in our country. Similarly the progressive trend centred round the Russian Bolsheviks led by

V. I. Lenin had its representatives in South Africa in the persons of the talented Marxist, Ivor Jones, and Bill Andrews and others. The First World War which broke out in 1914 brought these conflicts to a climax and split the Second International. This was reproduced in South Africa. The opportunists supported the imperialist war whilst the progressives opposed it. It is from the latter section that the core emerged which subsequently founded the Communist Party of South Africa in July, 1921.

In 1917 the Great October Socialist Revolution ushered in a new phase in human history. The salvoes of that revolution were heard in our country. In July 1921 the Communist Party of South Africa was founded.

From that moment the physiognomy of the fight for freedom in our country was altered. The Communist Party participated openly in all the great struggles up to the time it was outlawed by the South African government in 1950. Powerful African theoreticians of international standard were produced by the party. The whole movement for liberation was provided with numerous fine cadres from the ranks of the Communists. The freedom movement acquired a general staff.

The draft programme endeavours a scientific summary of the experiences of the movement in South Africa and the conclusions to be drawn therefrom. The whole of democratic South Africa is at present discussing the draft as fully as possible under conditions of extreme repression and illegality. No doubt numerous criticisms and suggestions for changes in formulation and emphasis will emerge some of which will find expression in this journal. We do not intend in this article to do this.

It does seem, however, that the occasion of the publication of the draft programme is as good a time as any to examine once more certain attitudes that are persistently peddled in Africa today regarding Communism.

WHAT IS FOREIGN?

We are told ad nauseum that "Communism is foreign". This statement provokes the retort: "Where is it indigenous?"

It is generally accepted that the founders of scientific Socialism—Communism—were Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Both were German. The ideas of Marx were developed, enriched and put into practice by the Russian Communists led by V. I. Lenin. The Russian Communists organised the great October Socialist Revolution, founded the first Socialist state the Soviet Union which is

now confidently marching to Communism. The next great event in the history of our times was the great Chinese Revolution led by the Chinese Communist Party. This event occurred in the period following the Second World War when a whole number of Socialist States arose in Asia and Eastern Europe. A few years ago a socialist revolution broke out for the first time in the Western hemisphere—in gallant Cuba.

In view of all this the question becomes even more pertinent—what precisely is intended by the charge that “Communism is foreign.” We are not so innocent as to believe that those who repeat this charge are sincere in what they say. Nevertheless they do mislead a large number of honest people, particularly and, in some ways, paradoxically in continents like Africa which have for centuries been dominated by foreign imperialist interests and ideas.

It is natural to expect that our people will react very strongly against suggestions that *only* foreign ideas are good. They will desire at all times to stress the importance of ideas, social formations and developments which are indigenous to Africa. This is especially so because of the arrogant assumption of the Imperialist ideologists that Africa has made no contribution to world culture and progress. This arrant nonsense which has no historical or serious scientific basis must, of course, be firmly rebuffed. But sometimes we go to the other extreme and convince ourselves that everything that existed in Africa before it came under European Imperialist rule was good. We paint an idyllic picture of pastoral tribal conditions; and speak vaguely of past civilisations which surpassed anything seen in the world at the time. Even in the draft programme of the South African Communist Party a little of this type of emotion is expressed; and one can very well understand it. Capitalism is represented as a system of unrelieved gloom as compared with the past, and its objectively revolutionising role is slightly under-estimated.

But the whole point is that it is precisely the Imperialists who have been doing all this harm to Africa. They have sought to denigrate indigenous African culture. And it is they again who are most vigorous in presenting Communism as an idea foreign to Africa which must be resisted. And we suggest that, paradoxically, some Africans accept the word of Imperialist propagandists who characterise Communism as foreign. *Implicit in this is also the suggestion that the other widespread social formation in the world, namely, capitalism, is indigenous to Africa.* It does not require

much thought to realise that no social formation is ever indigenous or foreign to any particular country or continent.

AFRICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

This leads directly to the next popular fallacy that finds much currency in our continent today. This is that both capitalism and communism are foreign and that therefore some sort of indigenous economic system exists or must be invented to meet the needs of Africa. This desire to find an alternative to imperialism and communism is in some instances a surrender of political integrity to the imperialists. Why should there be invented an alternative merely for the sake of avoiding Communism and thus, presumably pleasing the imperialists.

Communism and for that matter capitalism were not inventions designed to find an artificially developed alternative to other social formations. As far as Communism is concerned it is based on a profound study of actual nature NOT of Europe or Asia but of the whole world. It is a world outlook. Is it really logical from any point of view for any idea to have validity in a particular continent only? Does African socialism mean we must also have Asian socialism, American socialism, Australian socialism etc? Is not this carrying the undoubted continental links that bind African people to absurd limits?

No less absurd is the attempt to propagate a type of socialism founded on so-called religious lines as being adapted to the traditions of Islam or to Arabism. In the long five-and-a-half hour speech before the National Congress recently General Gamal Abdel Nasser did not reveal precisely what the nature of this kind of socialism was.

It is not alternatives we must search for but the truth. The basic ideas of Marxism are of international validity. It is a science. Water does not have a different chemical formula depending on where one happens to be living. It might taste differently because of the type of rock on which it flows or the chemicals dissolved in it. But it remains water, with the same basic chemical formula. The same might be said of Marxism-Leninism. It can be applied to any country, but naturally the history, culture and national characteristics of a people will produce varieties of socialism. But this must not be the excuse for prostituting the idea altogether and changing its basic character.

Some misconceptions of Communism, we must admit, are assisted by the dogmatic errors on the part of some Communists. Thus the

attitude of some African leaders owes its origin to the mistakes of certain European Communists on matters affecting Africa. They have then concluded, wrongly, that these mistakes invalidate Marxism-Leninism. It must be made quite clear, first of all, that mistakes by certain communists are due not to their race but to their faulty understanding of Marxism-Leninism. It is wholly wrong to identify Marxism-Leninism with the race or nationality of the Communist who makes an erroneous analysis and reaches a wrong conclusion. This is racialism in reverse—it is reactionary.

The question which will gain the allegiance of the world—Capitalism or Communism—is a problem which we have to decide as much as anyone else. To be neutral in this matter is to try quite uselessly to evade the responsibility of Africans to participate in the solution of world problems. It is to abdicate a position which we are entitled to hold. This question of Communism is not something about which anyone can be neutral because in the final analysis it is a choice between truth and falsehood. To keep out is to accept the place which the imperialists desire us to be in. It is to surrender to the cultural imperialism which says Africans do not and cannot understand world problems and need to be guided.

Communism has proved by means of facts that it is the truth for our times. We must study its ideas from the original sources—from Marx, Engels, Lenin. We must judge its ideas not second-hand but from its practice in the Soviet Union and the world Socialist system as a whole. Communists have no doubt which system the African people would choose given the opportunity to decide freely without hindrance.

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