

# Africa and Marxism - I

Are African Nationalism and  
Marxism mutually exclusive?

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TO SET UP AN ARTIFICIAL WINDMILL and then tilt at it is a common fault of academics: B. D. G. Folson's articles (*The New African* III, 4, 5) were an excellent example. "It is nowadays becoming increasingly rare to come across a Marxist who is not also a Communist" he begins, and then launches an attack on Russian foreign policy, Marxism-Leninism, and Marxism all at once. His statement is strangely inaccurate, quite apart from the fact that in an age of Khrushchevism, Maoism, Titoism, Castroism, and the diverse ideological positions of other Communist parties it is becoming increasingly difficult to define a Communist (unless you are Mr. Vorster, when it is easy). If Mr. Folson would look around his own campus of the University of Ghana he would find several Marxists of various persuasions, not to mention the British New Left, the American *Monthly Review* movement, the Italian PSIUP and so on. In the words of American Marxist Paul Sweezy:

Some who consider themselves Marxists approach the *Manifesto* in the spirit of a religious fundamentalist approaching the Bible. . . . It is, of course, not difficult to demonstrate to the satisfaction of any reasonable person that this is an untenable position. . . . It seems clear to us that in judging the *Manifesto* today . . . we should be guided by the same criteria that the authors used twenty-five, thirty and forty years after its publication. We . . . should go straight to the general principles. . . . *The Present History*, p. 5-6.

In considering the rest of Mr. Folson's article (as well as that of Pierre Alexandre (*The New African*, II, 6) it will be advantageous to set down these principles, recognising that, in the Marxist tradition, these should be applied to historical situations and not discussed as abstract propositions. The first of them, historical materialism, holds that the way people think and act is determined in the final analysis by the way they get their living, by their location within the productive process, that the

foundation of any society is its economic system, the means and relations of production, and that economic change is the driving force of history. "Man's ideas, views and conceptions", consequently, change with changes in the condition of his material existence and "ideas" do not have an independent rôle in the historical process, although, one may add, the structure of institutions, ideas, and purposes built up from economic grounds may take on a life of its own, because of the "inertia" attached to change on men's minds. (This may be so particularly when material change occurs at a rapid rate in comparison with the human life-cycle.) The implications of historical materialism are accepted today by a good many who do not call themselves Marxists, and a good many who do not realise this acceptance. The problems of "inevitability" raised by this principle will be dealt with later.

The second principle is that of the class struggle (where "struggle" should be interpreted to mean a fundamental clash of basic interests, irreconcilable within the system, and not as a continual open conflict). Classes are defined in a historically meaningful fashion, following the principle of historical materialism, by the relation of human beings to the means of production in the society—and thus are a quite different concept from the "classes of some schools of sociology who abstract groups of people according to other criteria such as income, etc." But even one of the chief exponents of a rival sociological school, Talcott Parsons, could say in 1949 "the Marxian view of the importance of class structure has in a broad way been vindicated".

Three other principles first spelt out in the *Manifesto* are more specific, and refer specifically to advanced capitalist societies, the inevitability of its replacement by socialism, and the means of achieving socialism. Capitalism is a system under which labour-power has become a commodity (in contrast to all other social systems) and in which the ownership of the vast majority of property has become concentrated into the hands of a few. Capitalism creates, therefore, a largely propertyless class which will overthrow it.

MARX INTRODUCED A USEFUL TOOL of analysis in *Capital*, which is nowadays best expressed in the form used by Paul Baran: potential economic surplus, he says, is "the difference between the output that could be produced in a given natural and technological environment with the help of employable productive resources, and what may be regarded as essential consumption" (*Political Economy of Growth*, p. 23). Comprised of excessive consumption, output lost through unproductive workers, output lost through irrational organisation, and output lost by unemployment, it gives, by its distribution and size, some nature of the exploitation and inefficiency of production in a society. (There are other types of surplus which may be used for other analyses: chapter two of Baran's book elaborates these.)

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IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DENY that some interpretations of Marxism have resulted in a dogmatic Marxism-Leninism which has been

introduced to Africans in a manner which Folson calls "imperialism of the mind", and also that in some socialist countries the aftermath of the revolution has included restrictions on personal security guaranteed by law as well as on intellectual freedom. But "the emergence of such political systems does not 'prove' that socialism is inherently a system of terror and repression. What it does mean . . . is that socialism in backward and underdeveloped countries has a powerful tendency to become a backward and underdeveloped socialism . . . it is the degree of maturity of a country's productive resources that determines the 'general character of social, political and intellectual life'" (Baran: *op. cit.*, p. 8). The cultural and ideological stagnation of the Soviet Union under Stalin transmitted itself to some extent into world Marxist circles, but since that time we have increasingly seen an attempt by Marxists to apply the principles of Marxism to the situations in which they live, in what one has called "an authentically historical rather than an 'inevitable' evolutionary approach". I think this may be what Folson means when he praises the work of Jack Woddis, for this is *to some extent* such an attempt, and Woddis would certainly not agree that he has abandoned historical materialism!

FOLSON DOES RAISE some deeper issues. The Marxist view, he maintains, denies Africans the ability to make their own history and to interpret it how they wish. He claims that Marxists make African history a "mechanical response to change in the economic structure of Western Europe". He claims that Marxism would "require" Africa to go through an historical evolution analogous to Western Europe. These and other points he makes are largely directed towards "Communism" but they do challenge all Marxists with real issues. Can one apply the categories used by Marx to Africa (when they were collected primarily from Western European data—though we must not forget Marx's study of India nor Engels' of the American Indians using Morgan's material)? How far have African leaders applied Marxism? Pierre Alexandre feels that the "theoretical problems arising from this [African] situation are not easy to solve in Marxian terms" and suggests that the predominant trend is towards "a kind of original synthesis". Is this "synthesis" Marxist, or should it be described as "bourgeois"? Is "African socialism" indeed a single synthesis? Are African nationalism and Marxism mutually exclusive categories? ●

(to be continued)

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## The Price of Withdrawal

*Truths white South Africans  
must learn from Algeria*

SEBARETLANE

"THE NATIVES COULDN'T RUN South Africa without the white people. Therefore, even if apartheid is unjust, and even if it goes on for years, the Natives couldn't kick us out, because if they did, they'd starve." Almost every white person in South Africa believes this, whether he be Nationalist, United Party, Progressive or Liberal. Yet, almost certainly, this view is incorrect, witness the last three years in Algeria.

I am not arguing here, and I hope that no one would argue anywhere, that a departure of the whites would be desirable. My simple theme is different: it is merely that the time has long passed when the presence of the white minority is necessary for the future of the human race in South Africa.

Algeria is so similar to South Africa in so many ways. It was, after all, only in these two countries that Europe really immigrated into Africa, that the European idea, the European economy, really took root. In both countries white domination was the order of the day. In Algeria domination took a more covert form than in South Africa, but, here too, only three years ago nearly every decision-making post in Algeria was held by a Frenchman. Forty per cent. of the farms (including *nearly all* the modern, mechanised sector) were in French hands. Nearly the whole of industry was French-owned. The key posts in the army, the police, and the civil service were occupied by French. Non-French doctors and professional men scarcely existed. Algerians were denied adequate education, and suffered much the same oppression and inferior status as is suffered in South Africa under apartheid. In short, the wealth and dignity, and the good things in life were a French monopoly.

Today, only three years later, this possessing, directing, and