

DEMOCRACY AND AFRICA

A DISCUSSION

In the *African Communist* No. 19 (October-December, 1964) Mokwugo Okoye and P. Tlale opened a discussion on this theme. The colloquy is continued by a well-known British Marxist authority on Africa.

SOME COMMENTS ON ONE-PARTY SYSTEMS IN AFRICA



Jack Woddis

THE CONTRIBUTIONS by Mokwugo Okoye and P. Tlale on Africa, democracy, the one-party systems and the State, which appeared in the October/December 1964 issue of *The African Communist*, raise some very interesting questions which are the subject of current discussion throughout Africa and beyond. Much of the ground covered in these articles is generally accepted in Africa, and is appreciated by Marxists elsewhere. The comments I wish to make are not aimed at replying to any of the points made in these two articles, but rather to carry the argument a bit further and to examine more closely what is now happening in some of the African states.

My general views on the one-party systems in Africa have previously appeared at length, partly in my book, *Africa, the Way Ahead* (London, 1963), and more fully in *Marxism Today*, August 1963. In this latter article I stressed that there are two main types of single party independent African states—those which are progressive, and which are striving to complete the national democratic revolution and open the door to socialism; and those which express the striving of feudal and reactionary bourgeois elements to hold down the masses in the interests of the new ruling classes which are co-operating with imperialism. I pointed out that in a number of mass parties in Africa, which had led the people to independence, *a new stage had begun in which the differing class tendencies within the single party are contesting for leadership and mastery.* I then posed the following problem:

The question of a single party or of two or more parties is not one of abstract, absolute principle. The decisive factor is what is to be the character of a single mass party? What will be its composition, its leadership, its policy, its ideology? In the conditions of present-day Africa, and because of the favourable world situation in which the forces of socialism are increasingly determining the direction of the march of all mankind, *it is possible that in a number of African states we will see the emergence of a new kind of mass revolutionary party, anti-imperialist in inspiration, embracing all the progressive forces of the nation, and progressively being won for the ideology of scientific socialism.*

I stressed at that time that one could not be dogmatic as to how these single parties would develop in Africa. It seems to me that what is necessary now is not so much a general analysis of what might or might not take place, but a concrete examination of African reality, a serious study of the actual changes taking place in a number of the one-party systems in African states.

P. Tlale, in his article, refers several times to the importance of the broad coalition of forces which carried through the struggle for independence and which is now faced with the task of completing the national democratic revolution. Thus, for example, he refers to 'the determination of the coalition of classes in the national front to pursue their revolution even after the transfer of power' (p. 69) and to the 'broad unanimity that has been achieved in the greater majority of the newly-independent states in favour of a non-capitalist path forward and for policies of a socialist nature' (p. 71). I have no quarrel with these formulations, which I think are correct, as far as they go, but I think one must study more closely the dialectics of change within the alliance and within the one-party systems themselves. P. Tlale correctly points out that 'when the time comes to tear up the roots of imperialism and introduce agrarian and other reforms, the difference in class interests comes more and more into the open' (p. 73). What

seems to me specially *significant is that these differences are already finding expression and are resulting in important changes within the one-party systems.*

GHANA EXAMPLE

In Ghana, for example, as far back as April 8th, 1961, President Nkrumah found it necessary to issue his famous Dawn Broadcast in which he sharply criticized those leaders of the Convention People's Party who, he said, 'are tending, by virtue of their functions and positions, to become *a separate social group aiming to become a new ruling class* of self-seekers and careerists'. In a special message to a Seminar held at the Kwame Nkrumah Institute of Economics and Political Science, Winneba, on November 24th, 1962, Nkrumah drew attention to the new phase of struggle on which Ghana was embarking, and pointed out that in the struggle to 'liquidate the remnants of colonialism and imperialism', the people of Ghana would find that they had '*brought into focus the contradictions in (their) society*'. He then referred to '*certain individuals, and even groups, who, as a consequence of our struggle for independence and social transformation, have acquired some pretensions to economic power, and are so put out by our declared intentions as to want to obstruct our actions*'.

The opposition of these forces, and the growing drive of the masses and Government of Ghana to reconstruct their society, has resulted in profound changes beginning to take place within the Convention People's Party. Ghana celebrated last year the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the Convention People's Party. This party was established as a militant fighting alliance of all the patriotic classes in Ghana, and its main aim was 'Self-Government NOW'. Having won its independence in 1957, successfully beaten off various imperialist plots and intrigues, and embarked on its far-reaching Seven-Year Plan, which is expected to lay the basis for socialism, Ghana is now entering a new phase of her struggle.

Her political leaders have stressed that, in this new phase, the role of the party will be enhanced and its function will change too. This has been underlined in an important editorial article in the Ghana weekly, *The Spark*. The article points out:

The C.P.P. grew up as the instrument of the will of all sections of the people fighting for national independence. They were united into an irresistible force by the party which, steeled in action, won the political revolution, taking control of the state and all aspects of its operations out of the hands of the imperialist occupiers of our country and established independence.

But now, says *The Spark*, Ghana faces new problems.

Our aim is socialism and there are different milestones along the road to it. On that road programmes and stages change. The party must see these

changes coming, prepare the people for them and adapt itself to new conditions, too. It must play its role as a vanguard party, co-ordinating, mobilizing and directing the initiative of our people. As the aims of the party become more complex, the party has to grow to meet this challenge.

The article goes on to stress three main ways in which the party must be transformed. First, its aim and function:

Today the party is changing from the Party of National Independence to the Party of National Reconstruction and Socialism.

This requires the 'party to be, in Kwame Nkrumah's words, 'the political vanguard of the people'.

Secondly, its composition. The party, as a vanguard party, will only grant the honour of membership to the most active, dedicated and honest people:

The criteria for membership are the grasp of socialist ideology, the level of political consciousness, devotion and dedication to the socialist cause, ability to organize, influence and guide the masses in the general direction of socialism, transparent honesty, unadvertised self-sacrifice and a life of simplicity.

In order to create such a party, it says, care must be taken to control the *class* composition of the party:

The truth must always be borne in mind that a party made up mostly of white-collar workers, civil servants and middle-class intellectuals will certainly not attain the national goal of socialism. Such an achievement can be the handwork only of the most revolutionary elements in our society, namely the workers, the peasants and the revolutionary youths. Therefore, much as we gladly welcome intellectuals and middle-class elements, who make the grade, into the fold of the one national party, the bulk of the membership must be made up of workers, peasants and the revolutionary youths. This objective we can achieve only through a careful regulation of admission into the party.

Thirdly, the article stresses the need to strengthen the ideological content of the party:

Conviction is based on sound understanding and every party member must be helped to learn about the scientific basis of our revolutionary theory.

This theory, it states, is 'Marxism applied to the African situation, which will equip every party member to deal with problems in a scientific way, in a creative and correct way'.

THE ALGERIAN F.L.N.

The new role of the party was also one of the central themes in the remarkable report made by Ben Bella to the Algerian F.L.N. Congress in April last year. Ben Bella opened his speech by emphasizing the significance of the Congress, the first full Congress of the Party on the soil of independent Algeria.

Up till now, we have kept going above all on the revolutionary drive of our masses, on their spontaneous action. Our forms of organization have been dictated by the demands of the situation and not worked out in any rational manner. In this sense, the present Congress constitutes a point of departure.

Ben Bella then analysed the most important changes that had taken place in the previous eighteen months. The Decrees of October 23rd, 1962, and of March 18th, 1963, annulled the purchase, sale or allocation of vacant properties, and ordained the return to the nation of land abandoned by the *colons*. This prevented the big Algerian landowners, the national bourgeoisie and war profiteers from enlarging their economic base and increasing their political power.

These decrees also opened the way to the initiative of the workers who occupied the farms and factories of their former masters and assured the continuity of production. Thus the workers' own self-management had become an accomplished fact, and this was recognized by the Government in its Decrees of March 22nd and 23rd, 1963, which gave legal sanction to the action of the workers. This meant, too, the emergence of a socialist sector of the economy. In October, 1963, large estates were nationalized, and this was followed by the taking over of the last land-holdings of the French settlers. A number of industrial enterprises, too, were taken over by the State.

Thus, in a very short space of time, the economic base of the former occupying power has been heavily diminished, and the door to the growth of the Algerian capitalist class considerably closed. This has created favourable prospects for Algeria's march towards socialism.

In this new phase, said Ben Bella, a new programme became essential, a programme which maps out a line of action which can be summed up as: 'A new economy. A new State. A new Party.'

Repeatedly, in his speech, Ben Bella paid particular attention to the role of the masses as makers of history, to the initiative of the people as the indispensable basis of revolutionary change:

The largest and most deeply rooted participation of the Algerian masses has guaranteed the advance of the revolution and prevented it from getting bogged down in the rut of compromise. This alone can guarantee its future. Our duty lies in bringing to it the unity and clarity which symbolize a revolutionary party.

He went on to point out that 'the participation of the masses is a necessary condition for arousing their consciences', and that 'it is in the course of struggle, in all its forms' that the people will find the instruments and institutions which best allow them to participate. This involves, too, the development of the ideological struggle against mistaken ideas. Such a struggle is needed to help rouse the people's

conscience. 'If the struggle against reactionary ideologies is not waged mercilessly, the most radical masses remain powerless.'

Thus, the role of the party is decisive, 'the most important feature of our work'. Ben Bella pointed out that

At the beginning of the war of Liberation, the F.L.N. was made up of various currents, guided by different philosophies. . . . Today it appears in a new light, thanks to the revolutionary measures taken by those in power. . . . Today it is no longer a question of reviving the F.L.N. in its past form, but starting from what already exists, of forging an instrument capable of defending and promoting socialism on a massive scale . . . our country needs a driving force. This driving force is the single party, a party conscious of the interests of the working masses, a determined party which gives real support to all initiatives by the people.

Ben Bella spent considerable time dealing with the role of the party, on the need to fight for the line of the party, to base the party on the principles of democratic centralism, on the role of the party as the advance-guard of the masses, on the necessity for the cadres to maintain close links with the masses and to deal concretely with their problems.

Of special interest is his treatment of the party's social composition:

The social composition of the party raises some questions of principle. The draft rules lay down that a party member must not exploit the labour of others. With the progress of the building of socialism the exploitation of labour will recede. But we still have exploiters among us, and the spirit of exploitation. Our party cannot tolerate exploiters penetrating its ranks without the risk of degeneration and 'bourgeoisification'.

The draft rules also lay down that the party must draw its strength from the peasants and workers. That goes without saying. Socialism aims first at the liberation of these social forces. It is their democratic organisation, their activity within the party, which will make its strength. This year, we must make it a rule to accept only poor peasants and workers into membership, so as to strengthen the work of the party at the point of production.

THE CONFLICT IN GUINEA

In Guinea, too, there have been important changes within the Democratic Party, which reflect very much the conflict within the party between the new bourgeois forces who want to enrich themselves and hold up the advance of the country, and the majority who want to press ahead and make important changes. For the past few years there has been a considerable to-and-fro in relations between the main forces contending within the party. At the end of 1964 important decisions were taken to crack down against some of the bourgeois elements in Guinea; all private traders have had their import and export licences cancelled, trade has once again become (as it did at first after independence in 1958) a monopoly of the State Trading Corporation, and severe measures have been announced to tighten up against smuggling.

In drawing attention to the reasons for the new measures, President

Sékou Touré exposed the fact that for the past six years big traders had been engaged in black market operations, and in smuggling, and had made use of considerable funds outside the country. He also announced that there would be a check on the property in the hands of every Guinea citizen since 1958; all goods fraudulently acquired would be confiscated for the benefit of the people.

It is significant that simultaneously with the announcement of these new measures to restrict the bourgeoisie, it was also announced that *sweeping changes would be made within the party. Membership of the Democratic Party of Guinea will from now on be restricted to 'activists who have proved themselves'*. In future, no private traders or managers can occupy a leading post in the party either at the centre or in the localities. Central and provincial commissions have been set up to investigate and expose sources of enrichment, particularly among political and administrative leaders. Party members must now be over eighteen years of age, and engaged in productive work. A drastic reduction in party membership has already taken place; in the capital, Conakry, for example, membership is being limited to 30,000 people. Thus, formerly a mass party for national independence, embracing practically the entire population, the Democratic Party of Guinea, is being transferred into an advance guard party of revolutionaries, with its edge turned against the trading bourgeoisie who have been endeavouring to take advantage of the situation in Guinea. The conflict between the two trends in Guinea is not yet resolved, but anyone wishing to understand the one-party system there must take this conflict into account.

TREND TO SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM

Another important manifestation of the conflict between the two trends in the one-party systems is seen in the ideological conflict between the advocates of 'African socialism' or 'Arab socialism' on the one hand, and those who stand by the concept of *scientific socialism*. The Party Rules adopted by the Convention People's Party of Ghana, shortly after independence in 1957, spoke of 'African socialism' as the party's aim. But when it became increasingly obvious that this term was being used by those who wished to separate Africa from other socialist countries, and to prevent the creative application of generally valid Marxist principles to African conditions (and, even more significant, as a mask behind which neo-colonialism and *capitalism*, not socialism, were to be fostered), the C.P.P. abandoned the term. Thus, the new programme of the C.P.P. adopted in 1962 says that its ideology 'is based on scientific socialism'.

In Mali, too, the ruling party, the Sudanese Union, bases itself on

scientific socialism. The 1964 Congress of the party adopted a resolution, calling for the setting up of a Higher Party School whose syllabus would take account of 'the specific historical, economic, cultural and social features of the Mali Republic, Africa and the whole world, the history and principles of the party, and the *principles of scientific socialism*, without the knowledge of which no leader can effectively solve the problems of building socialism in our country'.

This Party School is being established in Mali with the assistance of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In a letter to the C.P.S.U., at the end of January 1965 expressing his thanks for this help, President Modibo Keita wrote: 'Our party regards as an invaluable advantage the possibility of using the priceless experience and support of the C.P.S.U., which, having built up socialism, is leading the Soviet Union to a Communist society.'

Of special significance, too, is the speech of President Nasser to the U.A.R. National Assembly, on November 12th, 1964, in which he no longer referred to 'Arab socialism', but stressed that 'it is the working class which represents the socialist system', and went on to explain in these terms:

There is another point: scientific socialism as we perceive it and as defined by the Charter is the proper formula for proper progress. I wish to stress this point. It has been said that scientific socialism is heresy and Marxism. I have heard it myself and I think many of you have heard it, too. 'What does scientific socialism mean?' some people ask. 'Ours is an Arab socialism, not scientific socialism.' This is of course untrue. When we read in the press that a football team has lost, we say that in order to win in the future it must train scientifically. This principle applies to everything in life. If we want to have a proper and successful socialism it must be applied scientifically.

In Congo (Brazzaville), too, where there is an entirely new situation since the overthrow eighteen months ago of the puppet Youlou régime, the trade union centre and the party refer to scientific socialism as being the basis of their activity.

In Uganda no one-party system yet operates, but within the main national party, the Uganda People's Congress (U.P.C.), one can see expressions of the same battle raging between the supporters of scientific socialism and those who, behind a mask of 'African socialism' or 'democratic socialism', are striving to prevent Uganda taking a path away from capitalism and towards socialism. This conflict broke into the open last year, at the April Congress of the U.P.C., when the right wing, on the basis of anti-communism (and by a number of underhand tricks to inflate their voting strength at the Congress) managed to secure the removal of the General Secretary, John Kaconge, a founder of the party and an open exponent of scientific

socialism, and so strike a temporary blow against the most consistently anti-imperialist trends in the party.

In Tanzania, too, there are advocates of scientific socialism. Here, the banner of scientific socialism has been raised in *Vigilance Africa* (*Tuwe Macho*), a new fortnightly journal which carries a banner head — 'For Scientific Socialism and African Unity, Against Colonialism and Imperialism'. This is still, however, a minority trend within the Tanganyika Africa National Union (TANU), the ruling party.

The developments in the single parties of Ghana, Algeria, Guinea and Mali, as well as the developments taking place in Congo (Brazzaville), and in the U.A.R., constitute a valuable enrichment of the treasure-house of knowledge of the international working class and socialist movement, and a creative addition, in very practice, of revolutionary theory.

It had previously been believed in some circles that African peoples wishing to advance to socialism would have to set up their own Communist Party, organizationally and ideologically separate from the single national party. The formation of such Communist Parties has taken place in some African countries, and may become necessary in some others. *But experience shows that in a number of African states, as the peoples drive from independence to complete their national democratic revolution and advance towards socialism, possibilities can arise which facilitate changing the class composition, character and ideology of the single, mass parties, transforming them from broadly based national parties into consciously socialist parties based on Marxism-Leninism, and increasingly led by the working people.*

All who are seriously concerned with developments in Africa should study closely the further evolution of the African political parties, the relation of forces within them, and the pronouncements of their leaders. It is only by a regular examination of the actual experiences of these parties, and by constantly re-checking and re-assessing what is actually taking place, that Marxists can really contribute to our understanding of the African revolution.

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