

AFTER THE COLONIAL REVOLUTION

— by MICHAEL HARMEL

The spectacular fiasco of British and French imperialism in Egypt may be taken as marking a historical turning-point. The Suez Canal was the last ditch for the West-European colonial system. The great silent revolution of the mid-Twentieth Century, the emancipation of hundreds of millions of non-European peoples from their alien European overlords, has passed the point of no return. True, in accordance with their nature, the imperialists will doubtless attempt to retain what is left of their empire. They will continue expending their resources and spilling blood in order to hold what they have in Africa. They will attempt to secure, through economic penetration and financial control, what their tanks, planes and troops are unable to conquer. The United States of America has fairly openly announced its intention of entering to occupy the "vacuum" left by the departure of its NATO allies from their former colonies.

But these attempts are certain to be frustrated. The process which began in China and India after the Second World War has gone too far and too fast to be stopped. Anti-imperialist solidarity among the victims of colonialism is strong — as witness the historic conference of Bandung. The achievement of self-government by the peoples of the rest of Africa, Asia, and other dependencies, colonies and semi-colonies can no longer be delayed for any length of time.

NEW PROBLEMS FOR COLONIAL LEADERS

So long as foreign rule remains in a country, its people and their leaders are naturally obsessed by a single problem: how to get rid of it. It has been truly said that "A man suffering from national oppression is like a man suffering from cancer — he can think of nothing else."

It follows that nearly all the political energy, organising skill, devotion, courage and sacrifice of the colonial peoples has been absorbed by the struggle for national independence. There seemed to be little purpose in elaborating detailed plans and policies for the morrow of independence, so long as independence itself was at issue. Indeed, there may well have appeared to be dangers in the formulation of detailed plans. A movement for national liberation naturally seeks to gather groups and classes with divergent long-term interests for the common struggle against outside rule. "We have capitalist, working class and peasant elements among us," the argument runs. "Each may have its own conception of the ideal way to

run the country after emancipation. But all of us stand to gain from the expulsion of imperialism. Let us attend to that matter first. Afterwards we can argue about new political and economic foundations. Before we can settle how to run our country, we must first have the power to run it."

There is a measure of truth in this argument. But it is by no means the whole truth. The process of winning national independence is not completed by the formal handing-over of a country's government to a democratically-elected parliament or national assembly. A thousand strings, economic, political, traditional, still tie the former colony to its former masters. Poverty, illiteracy, a servile mentality, outworn tribal and feudal institutions, a deformed and backward economy — all of them the heritage of imperialist rule — drag down the country, prevent its people tasting the fruits of freedom, and endanger its new-won political independence.

Liberation leaders cannot afford to ignore such problems. Unless they have worked out a realistic and clearly-formulated programme of action for the day after self-government they stand in peril of betraying the glowing hopes and aspirations of the masses who fight for freedom, and throwing away the struggles and sacrifices of generations of patriots.

The measure in which the newly-independent countries strike out along a bold and radical programme of social and economic reform will be the measure in which their independence is real and not merely formal and fictitious. The experience of countries such as Pakistan and the Phillipines shows that failure to institute and effect rapid, planned economic development, to raise living and cultural standards of workers and peasants, is accompanied by renewed imperialist control and penetration in the form of conditional "aid" and subjection to unequal military "treaties" in which colonialism is perpetuated in a new guise.

ATTRACTED TO SOCIALISM

Moreover, the process of winning liberation itself is no simple process. The desire for freedom and independence is one thing; its accomplishment another. Experience has proved that victory in the difficult, arduous and complicated struggle for national emancipation demands from the leaders of that struggle a thorough study and knowledge of advanced modern political theory, of the experiences, successes and failures of movements for the emancipation of oppressed nations and classes in other countries.

It is natural that their struggles, studies and hard experiences should influence modern leaders of oppressed nationalities to become strongly attracted towards socialism. Socialist theory, in its essence, is vigorously and radically opposed to imperialism, national oppression or racial ideology in any shape or form. Internationalist and revolutionary in its nature, it holds that the working class in emancipating itself must at the same time emancipate all other subject groups and classes. It would be difficult to overestimate the profound impact of the Russian socialist revolution, with its outspoken anti-imperialist content, upon the awakening millions throughout the colonial world. The consistently anti-colonialist stand of

the socialist countries at UNO and similar bodies has of course made a deep impression wherever people fight for emancipation and self-government.

The trend towards socialist theory also springs out of the practical experiences of movements for national freedom in many colonial countries. Such movements were often founded many years ago by middle-class intellectuals and professional people. Usually constituted more or less as debating chambers along Western "parliamentary" lines, they confined themselves to dignified protests, memoranda and deputations. They had little conception of mass struggle and action, and no intentions of leading any such thing. They believed that an appeal to reason and humanitarian feelings of the imperial powers would be effective in securing reforms, for they neither demanded nor believed in the possibility of self government. Such methods proved entirely ineffective. It was only when new, usually socialist-inclined young leaders, entered these organisations, strongly stressing the need to arouse and mobilise the masses of workers and peasants, and advancing dynamic slogans of independence and self-government, that the national movements advanced towards their striking successes of the post-war years.

TWO PATHS — ONE GOAL

In their irresistible advance towards independence, which weakened imperialism has been unable to check, the colonial countries of Asia and Africa which have achieved political independence over the past decade have followed two main paths of advance. In the case of China, Viet Nam, and Korea the anti-imperialist movement was led by Communist and Workers' Parties which drew their inspiration from the teachings of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, adapted of course to the special historical and local factors of each country. In the case of India, Indonesia, Burma and other countries, the movement was headed by predominantly nationalist and middle class organisations, though Marxist and workers' leaders played important roles.

These differences have been carried forward in the differing internal policies carried out in these two groups of countries in the period since their gaining of political independence. Full information is lacking to make any sort of detailed examination of these various differences, which would indeed be highly instructive. Despite this lack of full information, however, it is possible to discern certain main patterns and tendencies.

Before examining their differences, however, it would be well to emphasise certain striking similarities of all the emergent countries of Asia and Africa, a common outlook so strikingly revealed at the historic Bandung Conference. Although this common outlook can be summed up in the word "anti-colonialism", the word hardly suffices to describe the overwhelming solidarity and one-ness of purpose shared by the leaders of hundreds of millions of people, whatever their wide diversity of political outlook, ranging from Nasser to Mao Tse-Tung. All of them stand at the head of newly-formed states, determined to consolidate, maintain and fully realise their hard-won independence; to wipe out the legacy of backwardness left by imperialism; to develop their country's human and natural resources as rapidly as possible.

It is in the methods by which they propose to gain these ends, rather than in the ends themselves, that we must seek the differences that show themselves in the newly-independent states.

NATIONALISATION NOT THE KEY ISSUE

"Nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange," is the way socialism (or as they prefer to call it, the "co-operative commonwealth") is defined in the aims of the British Labour Party. The South African Labour Party has a similar formulation. Transformation of privately-owned capital resources into common property is of course, as is well known, a vital and important part of socialist doctrine. But it is by no means the whole of socialist doctrine, nor is it confined to socialists. The South African Railways and Harbours are state-owned and operated but that by no means implies that the various Union Governments which decided and continued, from time to time, to control and operate them are, in any sense of the world, socialist. Every modern Government has, through the logic of events, had to transfer certain services to public ownership. Only in the United States of America, with its fanatical devotion to "private enterprise" (where as a matter of fact the big monopolies practically own and control the State) do we find such vital services as light and power and telephones still run by private concerns. And even in America the Government runs the Post Office. These publicly-owned services by no means constitute socialism, or even steps in that direction.

Modern scientific socialism, as explained by all its leading thinkers, does not consist of a single dogma about "nationalisation" or anything else. It is rather a broadly conceived approach to the problems of social development and change, seeing in history as in nature, inner conflicts as the key to growth; finding in the contradiction between historically-evolved classes (which in turn derive from the different relationships of each class to the principal means of production) the key to human progress.

It is particularly futile to attempt to seek the differences between socialists and non-socialists in colonial countries by their approach to this question of nationalisation alone, for the need for some degree of nationalisation is inevitably accepted by all colonial leaders.

Alien imperialism has its principal means of domination, exploitation and control in colonies precisely through its ownership of the principal means of production — mineral resources, plantations, and other resources. All colonial patriots, whether Right or Left, capitalists or workers, must if they are at all clear-sighted and earnest seek to wrest these resources from foreign control and restore them to their rightful owners. And the only sensible means of doing this (for the colonial masses could hardly be expected to fight to transfer their countries' resources into the hands of local private capitalists!) is nationalisation. When Nasser nationalises the Canal, or Indonesia the Dutch rubber-plantations, this is not done out of any abstract adherence to the doctrines of Karl Marx, but because it is an obvious, glaring necessity if independence is to be anything more than an empty symbol.

Similarly, to take an analogous example, when our own Freedom Charter speaks of the need to transform monopoly-owned resources into public property, it is not because the framers and supporters of the Charter are all socialists (they are not by any means), but simply because all the other provisions of the Charter, looked at from any realistic point of view, are bound to be ineffective, illusory and unthinkable, so long as the keys to the country's economy remain in the hands of the present gold- and land-monopolists who, in their hunger for cheap labour and through their commanding influence, are responsible for all the ills which beset our land and which the Charter seeks to cure.

CHINA AND INDIA

It is therefore not merely in nationalisation but in question of general approach that we must examine the differences between the two paths of development in the newly-independent countries.

China is not yet a fully socialist country. Private capitalism is not prohibited; indeed, within certain well-defined limits it is encouraged. Yet it is plain to any unbiassed observer that the path of development differs not only in degree but also in its nature from that followed, say, in India.

In China, unlike India, all the principal big industrial enterprises and all banks and financial institutions are State-owned. A far-reaching programme of land-reforms has been carried out in the countryside, and the vast parasitic landlordism, typical of colonial Asia has been eliminated. The country is consciously moving towards socialism, through a sweeping programme of reforms, of great and imaginative construction projects, which have won the enthusiastic co-operation of the masses of the people.

We cannot account for these differences merely by pointing to divergencies of outlook among the various individuals who head the newly-liberated countries. Socialism, as pointed out above, has exerted a tremendous influence over two generations of colonial people, both the leading intelligentsia and the masses. It is no accident that nearly all the outstanding figures in the new ex-colonial states — men like Nehru of India, Nkrumah of the Gold Coast, Bandanaraike of Ceylon, U Nu of Burma — are socialists.

In his "Autobiography", Jawaharlal Nehru writes that Marx: "seems to me to have possessed quite an extraordinary degree of insight into social phenomena, and this insight was apparently due to the scientific method he adopted. This method, applied to past history as well as current events, helps us in understanding them far more than any other method of approach."

Kwame Nkrumah, as is well known, has also proclaimed on a number of occasions his adherence to Marxist socialism.

"Capitalism is too complicated a system for a newly-independent nation," he writes in his autobiography "Ghana," "Hence the need for socialism."

Yet the fact is that in India today plans for economic progress are steadily blocked by the powerful local vested interests which have grown up in the country, which have financial ties with foreign imperialism and whose leaders enjoy an important role in the counsels of the dominant Congress Party. Liberation has not brought about a marked improvement in the condition of India's millions of workers and peasants. I do not wish to give the impression that India's emancipation has meant nothing to the common people. Emancipation from alien imperialism has opened the door to undreamt of advances for the nation. But these glorious prospects must await a far more radical and dynamic Government policy if they are to be realised.

GHANA

Similarly, in Ghana Dr. Nkrumah's statement to Cedric Belfrage, that the country's economy "has not been penetrated and dominated by imperialism" contrasts strangely with his admission that "foreign concerns control gold and diamond mining and commodity imports" (he should have added banking and finance, and also the domination of Ghana's main export trade, cocoa, by Lever Brothers.) All he can point to as being controlled by local enterprise is retail trade and peasant cocoa farming.

Despite the Ghana Prime Minister's assurance that his country will find its own road to socialism, there seems to be little emphasis at this stage on the sweeping economic reforms which would be an essential preliminary to the taking of that road.

Both Nkrumah and Nehru are outstandingly capable men, far over-towering in stature the contemporary mediocrities who head, for example, the British, French or American Governments. Their ability and sincerity are beyond question. How, then, can we account for their failure, so far, to take even the first steps towards the implementation of their professed socialist principles?

IS IT PRACTICAL?

An older generation of socialists would reply that socialism is impractical in countries which have not passed through the fire of capitalist development; that semi-feudal and pre-feudal societies afford neither the productive nor the social base for so huge a leap forward.

Modern theorists would deny that so dogmatic an assertion has any validity, in an historical era when a third of mankind has already adopted the socialist way of life and is willing and able to offer powerful assistance in overcoming the consequences of colonial backwardness. While conceding that the emerging colonies have special problems, and that transitional forms are necessary, they would claim that peaceful transitions and swift and purposeful progress in a socialist direction can be made — provided certain conditions are present.

But such conditions imply far more than a formal acceptance of socialist principles by individual leaders of organisations which themselves are not of a socialist nature. They imply the replacement of the imperialist governing and administrative apparatus not by a new bureaucracy which, though preserving the outward appearance of democracy, leaves effective control in the hands of local vested interests; but by a popular democracy, both local and national, which places power firmly in the hands of the common people, particularly those who, employed for wages or salaries, have no special axe to grind.

MASS PARTICIPATION

Leadership in such a transition would have to be exercised by a political organisation which, not merely in its upper levels but throughout its membership, is trained in and dedicated to scientific principles; is alive to and vigilant against the inevitable attempts of socially unprogressive classes to retard or set back development; is ceaselessly active to overcome the inertia and survivals of outworn habits and methods of thinking, and to arouse the enthusiasm and understanding of the masses without whose conscious participation so radical a transformation could never be carried through to success.

Precisely this conception seems to be lacking in the approach of Kwame Nkrumah, brilliant and talented a leader though he has proved himself to be. Recently, we learnt to our surprise and disappointment that his Government still retains the ban on scientific socialist literature, imposed by the former British authorities. His reason (*New Age*, May 16, 1957) is that

"Marxism, properly understood, is a guide to action, but people here are often confused by it."

From the socialist point of view this lack of confidence in the common people — strangely reminiscent of the Church of the Middle Ages who would not let the people have the scriptures, but only the priests' interpretation of them — is incompatible with the spirit of collective discussion, leadership and mass participation in politics which is necessary for the great effort of transforming society.

It is true that Ghana, like other countries, must as Kwame Nkrumah says find her own road to socialism. But that road will be the accomplishment of the people themselves, not that of some superior being who aspires to do their thinking for them.

Men like Nehru and Nkrumah, however excellent their intentions, will find their aspirations for socialism hampered and frustrated by the fact the organisations which they lead are not informed and inspired by a common outlook and philosophy; that they become in fact prisoners of the conservative forces and classes which, in the absence of such an outlook, are bound to prevail.

PROFOUNDLY SIGNIFICANT

Yet it is a profoundly significant sign of our times that in practically every colonial country, it is the socialist leaders — whether brilliant individuals like Nehru and Nkrumah, or entire new-type organisations built on socialist foundations from the start — who have come to the fore.

The truth of the matter is that the age of nationalism, which was intimately bound up with the rise of capitalism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, is over. Nationalism, which was a liberating and fruitful fount of democratic and progressive thought in its day has turned into reactionary imperialism and vicious racialism.

The patriotic liberationist nationalism of oppressed peoples has many of the splendid features of the early democratic upsurge of the past uprising against feudalism in Europe two centuries ago. But life is teaching us that, faced with the vicious enemy of imperialism, simple nationalism is no longer enough.

We live in the era of Socialism, the era of the common man. And the future belongs to those leaders and movements who are bold and flexible enough to grasp that central truth of our times.