

MARXIST-HUMANISM

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The indigeneness of the roots of African and American Marxist-Humanism is questioned by everyone. The African Revolutions, having written the most exciting pages of post-war history, have indeed given African Socialism an advantage over American Socialism and have secured the recognition of its philosophy. Independence has made the views of African spokesmen for Socialism "official". In capitalist America, on the other hand, Marxism — not only in its Communist transformation, but in its original form which Marx called "a thoroughgoing Naturalism or Humanism" — is treated as a "foreign doctrine".

Unfortunately, until recently, even among Socialists, both the Humanist and the American roots of Marxism were the least known parts of that great theory of liberation. Precisely because we cannot live in the past, nor behave as if the one world we live in can level all countries to using the same "program", it is imperative that we master the Marxist dialectic method of approach to the specific problems of our day. Marx found, for example, that he had to separate himself from the self-styled Marxists in the United States who tried to evade the whole issue of the Civil War by saying they were opposed to "all slavery, wage and chattel". Marx was actively and unashamedly on the side of the North, because he recog-

¹ I happened to have been the first to publish the English translation of the Early Humanist Essays of Marx as an Appendix to my book, *Marxism and Freedom*. The following year (1959) the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, brought out the official translation, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. This was followed by Erich Fromm publishing them in a new translation plus his interpretation, *Marx's Concept of Man*. Since then, books on the subject have been legion. None, however, have concerned themselves with the American roots. When the French first discovered these essays in the mid-1940's and published them, it was natural that Humanism, and not Americanism, concerned them. For the American interpreters to keep disregarding these roots is a different story.

nized the world importance of the Civil War and because he found there the human forces that would compel the transformation of that war from one for Union to one for the abolition of slavery. These forces were: the Negroes, *en masse*, as they carried on the slave revolts and the daily activities of organization and thought; and the white Abolitionists.²

What is critical in this crossing of the paths of Marx and the Negro and White Abolitionists is that, despite the dissimilarity of organization and guiding philosophy between the Working Men's International Association, headed by Karl Marx and standing for a new world classless society, and the Abolitionists who were concentrating on the immediate need to abolish slavery in the United States, there were these overriding similarities: a) the spontaneous feeling for the idea of immediate freedom; b) the independent working-out of the problem in a specific country so that the freedom of labor and the freedom of a minority coincided (or, as Marx put it, "Labor in the white skin cannot be free so long as labor in the black skin is branded").

One basic reason that made the history of Marxism in the United States sad reading after the death of Marx is its incapacity to face the reality of "the Negro Question". Thus, in 1922, the great Negro poet, Claude McKay travelled to Moscow to explain how the American Communists and Socialists "fought very shy of it (the Negro Question) because it is a great element of prejudice". Yet, he added: "When in 1920 the American Government started to investigate and

² Marx called their speeches more important than "battle bulletins". Here is one by Wendell Phillips:

"And by the South I mean likewise a principle, and not a locality, an element of civil life, in fourteen rebellious States. I mean an element which, like the days of Queen Mary and the Inquisition, cannot tolerate free speech, and punishes it with the stake. I mean the aristocracy of the skin, which considers the Declaration of Independence a shame and democracy a snare — which believes that one-third of the race is born branded and spurred, and the other two-thirds ready saddled for that third to ride... I mean the intellectual, social aristocratic South — the thing that manifests itself by barbarism and the bowie-knife, by bullying and lynch-law, by ignorance and illiteracy, by the claim of one man to own his brother... That South is to be annihilated. (Loud applause.) The totality of my common sense — or whatever you may call it — is this, all summed up in one word: This country will never know peace nor union until the South (using the word in the sense I have described) is annihilated, and the North is spread over it... Our struggle is between barbarism and civilization". (*Speeches, Lectures, and Addresses by Wendell Phillips*, Boston 1922.)

³ *Fourth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report of Meetings held at Petrograd and Moscow, November 7-December 3, 1922*. Published in Great Britain. Mr. McKay's speech appears on pp. 250-61.

to suppress radical propaganda among Negroes, the small radical Negro groups in America retaliated by publishing the fact that the Socialists stood for the emancipation of the Negroes, and that reformist America could do nothing for them. Then, I think, for the first time in American history, the American Negroes found that Karl Marx had been interested in their emancipation, and had fought valiantly for it.

Two decades later — when Nazi Germany invaded Soviet Russia in June, 1941 — the American Communists did worse than not face the Negro Question: they turned their back on it. "Hitler is the main enemy", wrote the *Daily Worker*, "and the foes of Negro rights in this country should be considered as secondary". The Communist New York Councilman, Benjamin A. Davis, appeared on the same platform with Mayor La Guardia during the 1943 riots and asked the Negroes to go home. Just as they opposed A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement to gain fair employment practices for Negroes, so they slandered the Negro Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, by their claim that it meant full support for the present imperialist war. No wonder the Negroes who had joined the Communists in their thousands during the Depression, and such famous people as the Scottsboro Boys, now tore up their cards, never to return. The result was that by the 1950's, during the dangerous McCarthy period, the American Communists were so isolated both from white American labor and the Negroes, that the Government could attack them with impunity.

In 1956, the year of the Hungarian Revolution, the American Negro opened a new page in his long struggle for full freedom, directly in the South itself — the Montgomery.

* Not only was Frederick Douglass a leader of the Abolitionist Movement which did not stop its independent activity during the Civil War, but even though he unequivocally supported Lincoln just as soon as he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, here is how he summed up his measure of Lincoln at the unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument to Lincoln: "It must be admitted, the truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his association, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man. He was pre-eminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men... You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by force of circumstance and necessity. But... we entreat you to despise not the humble offering we this day unveil to view; for while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose."

Alabama, bus boycott. By 1960, when the African Revolutions culminated in the creation of new independent states, the American Negroes developed their struggle by "sit-ins" throughout the South. Coincidentally, there is a division in the actual contact between Negro-Americans and Africans who come here either as guests of the Government, a University, or even the labor movement. They still remain as far removed from the Negro worker as if they were still on their own continent and neither the white nor the Negro worker has the money to go to Africa. There is practically no possible people-to-people relationship through any international organization.

My recent trip to West Africa was, in great part, motivated by this state of affairs. The question concerning the link between African Socialism and Marxist-Humanism does not relate to the fact that it is hard to hear the voice of the "Second" America over the atomic din of the established authorities, but rather because of the contradictory statements made by African Socialists themselves. I do not mean that the voice of American Socialism is one voice; very far from it. Here, differences are shouted, emphasized and over-emphasized, while in Africa contradictory statements are made simultaneously with affirmations of pan-Africanism and a unity which is supposed to exist, although there are now two Blocs among the independent countries. Although there are sharp divisions between Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and the Nigerian Youth Congress in Nigeria, between Ghana and Nigeria, Senegal and Guinea, Mali and Togo, all insist that they are for pan-African Socialism. Unfortunately, this only means that pan-Africanism, far from illuminating what African Socialism is, helps to confuse friends more than enemies.

What is African Socialism? I asked this although I was not unacquainted with the writings of African leaders — Azikiwe, Keita, Nyerere, Nkrumah, Senghor, Touré... Long before my trip to Africa I was acquainted not only with their writings but with their aspirations and some of them were known to me personally in past associations long before their victories reshaped the map of the world. Nor did I ask this question because I considered that Western Socialism has any "superiority" over "newcomers". Quite the contrary. In two respects I agree with Professor Pierre Alexandre's article on "Marxism and the African Cultural Traditions" (*Survey*, August 1962):

a) that there "are some points of resemblance, not so much between classical Marxism and traditional cosmologies

as between the modern African interpretations of remnants of such cosmologies and Marxism as reinterpreted by Africans":

b) that it is not altogether unlikely that Africans would succeed in achieving a new synthesis of idealism and materialism "africanizing them into an original whole".

I disagree that there is any advantage, absolute or relative, in having met Marx and Mao at the same time and having known Russia long after the Revolution had achieved the first workers' state in history. Even if Africans do not believe, with me, that Russia has by now been transformed into its total opposite — a state capitalist society⁵ — the fact still remains that Soviet Russia and the Chinese Republic are world powers rather than world philosophies, and ruling ideologies is not what Marx had in mind when he first elaborated his Humanist philosophy. This is precisely what he warned against when he wrote: "We should especially avoid re-establishing society, as an abstraction, opposed to the individual. The individual is the social entity... Communism is the necessary form and the energizing principle of the immediate future. But Communism, as such, is not the goal of human development, the form of human society".⁶

The point of affinity between African and American Marxist-Humanism is the present as it is related to the future — world developments and the unfinished revolutions to be brought to a conclusion on an international scale. It is for this reason I travelled to Africa, and not only to hear in person the views of the leaders, but to get to know the thoughts of the man in the street and in the bush, at this critical juncture of history. Let us first turn to the views of the leaders of three representative shades of pan-Africanism: Nigerian, Senegalese and Guinean.

When I interviewed Dr. Azikiwe, he said: "I don't think that the labelling of ideologies is a sign of progress in America which is supposed to be a shrine of democracy. It tends to stifle thought when you proscribe Communists." Our Consti-

⁵ This is not the place to develop my analysis of state-capitalism. Chapter XIII of my *Marxism and Freedom* deals with the first three Five Year Plans and their ramifications. French readers can consult my article, "Nouvelle Révision de la Théorie Économique Marxiste", in *La Revue Internationale*, October 1946, and "Bureaucratization et Capitalisme d'Etat" in *Arguments* No. 17, 1966.

⁶ *Private Property and Communism*.
⁷ I naturally interrupted him at this point to indicate that not only are Marxist-Humanists opposed to proscribing thought, including Communism, but are fighting the Government, as witness my editorial in *News and Letters*, "The state of Civil Rights, U.S.A., 1961". (July 1961.)

tion gives everybody the right to hold what views he pleases so long as it doesn't violate the law. Here, I'll read you Chapter III, Section 23 of our Constitution. We are flexible; we will look into all ideologies and take what suits Africa.

"I cannot divorce theory from practice. What philosophy we have has not been systematized in such a way as to make it appreciated outside our shores. Let me give you the basis. Our way of life is tied with land tenure. Here it is communal — the implication is that every person has a stake in the land. He cannot sell it but his sons are heirs. It belongs to them. You don't own it as individuals in the sense that you can sell it for profit and it becomes communalistic. We hold the land in common, thus we have no landless peasantry... and there is no permanent laboring class, although one is growing. Since there is no landless peasantry, or a permanent wage earning class, Marxian Socialism doesn't apply to us. African, Nigerian Socialism does. No doubt the theory should be systematized, but it has not yet been done".

He concluded: "The Welfare State, our own brand of Socialism, is not Communism or Marxism or a Fabian guild, but something to suit our way of life. To this we will stick. The Welfare State is rooted fundamentally in socialist beliefs. Most of our people believe in free enterprise but not that this should mean profit at all costs".

The complaint of the Nigerian Youth Congress was that it unfortunately *did* mean profit at all costs. A mass rally which I attended in Lagos, held by the Youth Congress and the Trade Unions, opposed the austerity budget demanded by the Development Plan. The speech that got the biggest applause was this: "If we unite, we shall force the hands of those we put into office... When Zik was our revolutionary leader we were moving ahead. The seeds of revolution in this country have been planted. No guns, but we can move forward. What is the use of being free? What are we free for? We are poorer than when Britain was the exploiter".

Very obviously, there was a difference of the conception of African Socialism between those in office and those on the outside. The same was true in Senegal, and, of course, there were differences between the Casablanca and Monrovia Blocs. But when I asked President Senghor about it, he replied: "The difference is not serious. What is serious is the division between the United States and the Soviet Union".

This is certainly true if one is concerned with the world power-struggle. I, however, was concerned with relations

among Socialists as well as with the world ramifications of the development of the theory of African Socialism. I had been especially attracted by his June 1959 speech at the Constitutive Congress of his African Federal Party where he singled out "Marx's positive contributions which are: the philosophy of Humanism, economic theory and dialectic method". Of these he chose Humanism as the most basic. His May 1962 statement about the affinity between Russian Communism and American Capitalism was both true and hilarious: "The program of the 22nd Russian Communist Party Congress is like that of the United States — completely materialistic — a civilization of Frigidaires and T.V. You have Communism, you have American Free Enterprise, and you have the Plan in Western Europe.

"Each ideology has a truth, but only in part. Where is the ideology which is not all material, which permits room for the spiritual? That is our ideology. I think I should say in all justice that we use the socialist method. We are Socialists and use the democratic method which preserves liberty. That is why, here in Senegal, we have a dual direction: a) economically, through the plan; b) culturally, we are for Negro Africa blending with Europe. Here " (turning to the wall of his presidential room) " is a beautiful painting that is authentically African, but the Senegalese artist is a product of the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris.

"I think that the division between Monrovia and Casablanca is a superficial division. We are for the unity of the two African Blocs. The vocabulary they use now is that of East and West, but in Africa, the problem is not one of class, or state capitalism; the problem which is supreme is that of the new cultural existence. We want a culture that is African. The division between Monrovia and Casablanca is not the real problem.

"When President Sékou Touré calls for full re-Africanization, the problem is one of Negritude. But Africa is economically greatly retarded and the need is for the scientific technology that Europe has and the efficiency of America. We have a dual problem, a situation of under-development and the problem of Negritude. It is a problem of method. It is necessary to have a method with which to approach this reality.

"Negritude is not pure resurrection. It is a modern adaptation of African history and culture. We take the technique of Europe in order to permit the creation of a new civilization for the Africa of the 20th century.

"There is a socialism, but the socialism in Europe is *dépassé* because the African reality is spiritual. In Marxism there is determinism, scientific and discursive reason, and Humanism. The revolution is scientific and it is philosophic. Einstein is 20th century, but so is the artist 20th century. 20th century culture is more than scientific. Communism is not the whole truth. It is abstract and scientific. In this, Capitalism resembles Communism.

"Culture for Black Africa today means taking science from Communism and Capitalism, and from Africa poetry and philosophy. From this point of view, both in the United States and the USSR there is not this sense of reality. We want a culture that is African, the conclusions of the *Phenomenology of Chardin*."

To this writer, who is a Marxist-Humanist, the trouble with President Senghor's Humanism is that it is general and abstract where it should be concrete and specific. The fundamental difference between Senegalese Socialism and that envisaged by Marx does not reside in the difference between "spiritualism" and "materialism" but that between theory and practice. To me, the tragedy of the African Revolutions appears to stem from the fact that its leaders are so weighed down by the awareness of the lack of technology and the need to industrialize rapidly that they turn for aid almost exclusively to the powers-that-be in the technologically advanced countries, instead of to the proletariat in those lands. Let me make it clear at once that I am not in the least opposed to any African country accepting aid from any source whatever, be it from de Gaulle's France, Kennedy's America or Khrushchev's Russia. Western imperialism has plundered Africa for centuries, plundered it both of its manpower and its natural resources and it is high time for at least some of this African wealth to return to the countries of its origin. This, however, is not the main issue for Socialists; the point at issue is firstly the relationship to one's own people, the very ones who made independence possible; secondly, to the underlying philosophy of freedom which is not to be degraded to a changing tactic dependent on the relationship of forces with the enemy; thirdly, and, above all, to the world proletariat which is equally desirous as Africa to put an end to the crisis-ridden, capitalist world which is at present hell-bent for nuclear destruction.

Of all the African Socialists, Sékou Touré is the one who appeals most both to the Left in Africa and in the United

States because of the historic sweep of his deeds and the passion of his views. His little country's "No" to mighty (but not almighty) de Gaulle electrified the world with its daring as well as the challenging philosophy it threw out. Audiences in the United States, as in Great Britain, Italy and Africa itself, would invariably be inspired by such quotations as: "The science resulting from all human knowledge has no nationality. The ridiculous disputes about the origin of such and such a discovery do not interest us since they add nothing to the value of the discovery. It can therefore be said that African unity offers the world a new humanism essentially founded on universal solidarity and co-operation between peoples without any racial and cultural antagonism and without narrow egoism and privilege. This is above and beyond the problem of West Africa and as far removed from the quarrels which divide the highly-developed countries as are the conditions and aspirations of the African people".

The confidence in the African masses — "all peoples are capable at any time of administering themselves and of developing their personality. There are no minor peoples, except under slavery or foreign oppression" — had the sweep of Lenin on the eve of the Russian Revolution when he maintained that "only from below" can the revolution become invincible. But, in the "rediscovery of the African personality", in contrast to the discovery of the genius of the Russian proletariat, which was "merely" the beginning of the international revolution, this great African leader excludes all "foreign" ideologies: "Africa cannot agree, without detriment to the respect for her personality, her civilization and her proper structure, to become an organic structure of any system of states or ideologies whatsoever". As if Marxism were not the *unity* of theory and practice, President Touré maintains that "philosophy does not interest us. We have concrete needs".

In a word, particularism, rather than humanism or internationalism, predominates in Touré's "full re-Africanization". The ideology of "Freedom NOW", which elicited the elemental creativity of the masses that reshaped Africa, and thus the world, in less than a decade, will surely need a more international content for the forward movement of humanity. I felt this as I daily met young Africans who were more

* I am using the English translation which appeared in *Africa South*, April-June 1960, Capetown.

concerned with new human relations, new world relations, that is to say, a totally new human dimension. In the Gambia, for example, new world relations meant, to youth, not those of government to government, but of people to people. The Young Workers' Movement asked me to speak about socialists the world over, specifying the Freedom Riders in the United States, the Zengakuren of Japan, the Young Socialists of Great Britain and the Nigerian Youth Congress. Here is a country, the last of the British colonies in West Africa, that was undertaking the first step toward self-government in May 1962. It looked to independent Africa, wanted to be part of the pan-Africanist movement, but was not afraid to admit that pan-Africanism had become "an umbrella" for a contradictory variety of African organizations. These youths asked, with true humility, whether *just because* they were the last to gain freedom in West Africa, they could not separate Black Africa from the socialist movement, the working people in America, Europe, Russia and the Orient, in order "to create a new world on human beginnings".

A Freedom Rider in the United States expressed the same thought: "I feel that because the Negro question has always been the most critical one in the United States, Civil Rights is the name of freedom in this country, for both black and white, and for both student and worker. Since the mid '30's there has been no other movement which has expressed such creativity and determination to be free *now*. This is why I think that... the fight for freedom will not stop until we have torn up the old, from root to branch, and established truly new human relations based on new beginnings".

The spontaneity, breadth of vision and courage of the young Southern students in "sitting-down" inspired picketing in the North and reached a climax with the Freedom Rides because both Whites and Negroes came to the South. These struggles are now supported by all radical political tendencies, including revolutionaries as well as pacifists, Trotskyists, Socialists, Anarchists and Marxist-Humanists. No doubt there are also some Communists because Red-baiting has raised its ugly head.

There are more reactionary laws on the books against American workers than against any "foreign enemy". From

* *Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves* by Mary Hamilton, Louise Ingram and others.

the Taft-Hartley Law to the Smith and McCarran Acts anything that remotely resembles independent thought is classed as "subversive" and "un-American" and, in the South, the authorities have attempted to use these laws against the NAACP. One may be sure that in the present centennial celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation, not a single word will be uttered officially which will show how deep are the American roots of Marxism. Yet the period when Marx's path crossed that of the Abolitionists was the period when the most glorious page in American history was written: not only was it a principled fight for the abolition of slavery but the *human* relationship the Abolitionists established among themselves broke down the division between black and white, men and women, mental and manual labor. It is precisely such basic phenomena that produced Marx's "Americanism", which led him to attribute to both American Revolutions the rôle of *loresin* for the French Revolution of 1789 and the Paris Commune of 1871. John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry was not only a great act of courage. It signalled, Marx wrote, a new stage in *world* history. Under its impact, new organizations — the Working Men's International Association — were established, and Marx's greatest theoretical work, *Das Kapital*, was reconstructed.

After Marx's death, American Socialism followed a path which, both through sectarianism and opportunism, has brought it to its present state of theoretical and organizational weakness. Nevertheless, the exciting period of Negro struggles, begun in 1956 and still going on, and their world impact as well as the inspiration they draw from the African freedom movements, could open a new page in world relations. A new international, even though at first it may have to be limited to international correspondence, is of prime importance. The dynamism of the ideas emanating from the African Revolutions is an excellent beginning, but for it to become the threshold of a new universalism, for an age and not only for a continent, it cannot separate practice from theory, nor the particular from the universal. Precisely because Lenin was preparing not only for the Russian Revolution but for a new *world* stage of consciousness, his "rewriting" of Marx's *Civil War in France as State and Revolution* achieved a new concrete universalism: that the population "to a man" must run production and the state, or there would be a "return backwards to capitalism". This is exactly what did happen: the failure to extend the Russian Revolution from below first

to Berlin and then to Peking and the colonial world, doomed the Russian Revolution itself. Four decades have gone by since then, and a new stage of world consciousness has been reached which not only combines politics and economics but also philosophy, for it reaches down to humanity.

What tiny Guinea accomplished with its daring "No" was to re-establish the human factor as decisive. This, and nothing else, was new in action and new in thought. This is the Humanism of Marxism, translated in our epoch first by the Hungarian Revolution, then in the Afro-Asian and Latin-American worlds, and finally among the Negro-Americans. This is the reason why the politically "backward" American worker, who has no mass labor party like his European brethren, is battling automation¹⁰ at the point of production itself. The American wildcat striker who demands human and not automatized production is ready for that same new dimension which is essential if we are to avoid the nuclear holocaust which is threatening us.

Despite the Russian Communist attack on Hegel's mysticism¹¹, that mystic, under the impact of the French Revolution and with his encyclopaedic mind full of thousands of years of history which he defined as the "progress of consciousness to freedom", anticipated the concrete reality of today when he wrote: "The self-determination in which alone the Idea is, is to hear itself speak".

Speak, then, independent Africa, undaunted by two world power-blocs fighting for world domination. You have gained your political self-determination, are struggling for economic independence, and are also free to express the self-determination of the Idea because the accumulated thought of centuries has been fructified by the elemental creativity of the masses and today's revolutions. Just as the fight for freedom on the part of the Hungarian revolutionaries (who had been raised on Marxian theory only to be betrayed by its usurpers) has made them theoretical Marxist-Humanists, the plunge into freedom has made the African revolutionaries

¹⁰ *Workers Battle Automation* by Charles Denby.

¹¹ When the Russian Communists first opened the attack on Marx's *Early Essays* (*1'opozny Filozofii*, 1955) on the ground that the young Marx was still allegedly under the influence of "the mystic Hegel", it was known that, far from being an abstract dispute, the question of Humanism had been raised by Imre Nagy (*On Communism*) in his appeal against his expulsion. Only the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 made this public.

the activist Marxist-Humanists of today. The Marxist-Humanists of other lands are ready to listen and, with your help to establish that new international which will be free from state control and will aspire to reconstruct the world.

NAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA : A naturalized American, Secretary of Trotsky from 1938 to 1939.



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