

# The Forces of the African

by  
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## Revolution (5)

THE majority of African traders, to this very day, are still petty traders and part-time traders. In any large African town one can see hundreds, in fact, thousands of small traders—some with a few goods spread on the bare ground, some with a stall, some with a small shop. Kumasi, in Ghana, has 8,000 traders. In the Onitsha covered market, in Nigeria, there are 3,000 shops. The great majority of African traders are very poor, making a few pennies a day, some more fortunate, making a few shillings.

A large number of them are part-time traders, earning a little extra money from their surplus vegetables or from handicrafts. Among them are many women. D. McCall (see "Social Change in Africa", edited by A. Southall, 1961) describes how in Koforidua, Ghana, he counted in the market "nearly 3,000 sellers on a market day. This did not include the numbers of women selling at the various cross-roads and in the streets." He estimates that not less than 70 per cent of the adult female population was engaged in selling.

Some traders sell, locally, others act as wholesalers, buying from the foreign importers and, with the aid of their lorries, selling up country. Some traders in West Africa are also cocoa farmers, who utilise part of their profits from cocoa to launch out into trading, and, conversely, ploughing back some of their trading profits to expand their cocoa production.

From amongst these thousands of African traders a considerable differentiation has taken place. Studies by Peter Garlick of African traders in Kumasi and Accra show that amongst the 150 traders who are the biggest men in Kumasi, a turnover of £5,000 to £20,000 a year was quite common, and a number reached £100,000 a year. Over 60 of these traders (at the time of the enquiry, 1959-60), were doing some direct importing from overseas, and most were employing up to 3 or 4 assistants (often relatives), and some were employing more. An analysis of 251 African traders in Ghana by Garlick shows 6 in the turnover class of £20,000-£25,000 a year, 19 between £25,000 and £50,000, 9 between £50,000 and £75,000, 4 between £75,000 and £100,000, and 6 in the £100,000 to £200,000 class. A further 55 were between £5,000 and £20,000. This means a total of 44 out of 251 who could be classified as rich traders, and a further 55 as middle size.

### AFRICAN TRADERS

African traders are also widespread now in East Africa, despite the competition from the Asians who still hold a large share. A Uganda government report shows that in 1953 there were 11,600 African traders. Most of them, however, were poor and probably the bulk were part-time traders. An analysis in 1952 showed that the net annual profit of these Uganda traders was £50 or less. A small minority of course, have more profitable business. Describing the emergence of what he terms a 'kulak' or 'rural exploiter' in Uganda, J. H. Boeke (*International Social Science Bulletin*, 1963) writes:

"They increase their landed property; they change agriculture into a business undertaking based on capital; they enter into share-cropping contracts or farm out their lands; they act as money-lenders and buy up the native market crops; they are traders rather than peasants and shirk manual labour... They are gradually usurping the place of the Indians in retail trade."

In his study on *Road Transport in Nigeria* (1958), E. K. Hawkins says that while foreign transport firms dominate in the freight trade, African firms dominate in passenger traffic and in the carriage of internal trade. The African capitalist, says Hawkins, "has asserted himself, notably in the field of road transport, but also in retail trade, building and contracting." He further notes that "a number of Africans have become prominent" in Nigeria in tyre retreading,

woodworking, the supply of building materials and printing.

Similar developments have been noted in the Ivory Coast, in Senegal and Cameroun. J. L. Boutillier, in his study on the Bongouanou region of the Ivory Coast, shows how some of the richer peasants have in the past decade begun to invest their profits outside agriculture, buying cars and lorries, becoming transporters and traders, setting up village stores and sometimes going in for money-lending as well. A report on Senegal describes how the better-off cultivators are taking up trade; some of them having already given up cultivation in order to live entirely by trading. In Cameroun, the Bamilike are particularly active in trade; in some of the areas where they are heavily concentrated, a quarter of them are occupied in trading. Describing the activities of traders in the cocoa region of the Cameroun, Jacques Binet (*Budgets Familiaux des Planteurs de Cacao au Cameroun*), writes: "The traders represent the wealthy section of the population."

In general, these developments were already under way before the most recent period. That is to say, an African capitalist class was emerging in agriculture, in trade, and in transport, and in some cases, branching out to small-scale light industry.

The rapid development of the national liberation movement in Africa after the second world war was due to two main factors. First, the new world situation; secondly, the maturing crisis within Africa itself. The war itself had a profound effect on the African people. And the immediate post-war years, with the emergence of the socialist camp, and the winning of national independence through-out most of Asia, accelerated events in Africa still faster. The winning of independence by Ghana in 1957, and Guinea in 1958, had a further catalytic effect on the African people's struggle.

### "AFRICA YEAR"

Within African society, the twenty-odd years from 1939 to 1960 ('Africa Year') had brought about most significant changes. It had carried to a much further stage the destruction of local handicrafts and of traditional agriculture; millions more had been drawn into wage labour, much of it still migrant; African population in the towns had soared; an appreciable growth of an African capitalist class had taken place; a radical intelligentsia (sons of chiefs, sons of traders, sons of peasants) had emerged. The old forms of society were collapsing, and new class forces were being thrown up, forcibly and ruthlessly. And as they emerged within the crucible of colonialism, they began to press ever more persistently against the barriers which tried desperately to hold them back.

The interests of colonialism had hindered and delayed the economic development of the African territories, prevented their industrialisation, ruined their traditional agriculture and left them with a distorted economy. Thus, all national

development had been throttled and the whole people, including often the chiefs, were hurled into the struggle for national liberation as the essential pre-condition for the advancement of their own class and sectional interests, as well as for the common patriotic interests of all.

The workers the peasants, the African bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, have all played their role in this historic change. Without the participation of all these forces and without their high degree of national unity, it would have been impossible to mobilise the necessary strength to win through to independence, or to form such widely based national parties as now exist in so many African states.

### FORMATIVE STAGES

These parties, both in their formative stages and in the phase of achieving national independence, have been led mainly by the intelligentsia and petty-bourgeoisie. Any examination of the origins and occupations of the leading members of the African political parties, of the members of Government and Parliament, shows that this is so. Sections of the bourgeoisie, especially the trading bourgeoisie, have tended to be an anti-national factor, and, after independence, have sometimes become a main prop of neo-colonialism. The emergence of a richer stratum of African farmers and the creation of a new stratum which might be termed 'bureaucratic-bourgeoisie' (stemming from those petty-bourgeois elements who have utilised their new governmental positions to enrich themselves by inflated salaries, bribery, embezzlement and so on, thus accumulating sufficient capital to invest in land, speculation, trade, commerce, building, etc. and to deposit their gains in foreign banks) have been fostered by imperialism, in the hope that they, too, would become supporters of imperialism in its new guise of neo-colonialism.

A decisive role in the liberation movements has been played by the most far-sighted, patriotic democrats who, by relying on the mass support of the workers and peasants and by increasingly utilising the ideas of scientific socialism, have been able to ensure the successful advance of their countries. Such leaders are capable, talented men, men of vision and intelligence, with a basic desire to destroy all the hangovers of colonialism and to assist Africa to rise to her full stature—free, independent, enlightened, proud and prosperous. Men like Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita, Abeid Karume, Amilcar Cabral, Nelson Mandela and so on, who have played a leading role in their country's struggle for independence and who, in many cases, are now leading their countries out of the orbit of imperialism, can in no sense be regarded as representatives of the national bourgeoisie. In social origin, some may be from chiefly families; some from small bourgeois families—but others, like Karume or Nkrumah, or Cabral, or Lumumba, have come from the most modest origins. And the cause for which they have fought is not that of the national bourgeoisie but of the majority of their peoples, the workers and peasants.

What role has been played by the African peasantry? Franz Fanon has argued that "only the peasantry is revolutionary. It has nothing to lose and everything to gain." The African peasant says Fanon, is so exploited and ground down that, for him, there can

be no compromise with colonialism. No one will argue about the poverty of the majority of African peasants. But one cannot simply put all peasants into a single camp. As we have explained above, the significant thing about the peasants of Africa is that over the past decade or more, a considerable differentiation has taken place amongst them. On the one hand, a small richer section is emerging at the top, which often takes up trade and money-lending as well; this is, in a sense, a 'kulak' class in the African countryside. On the other hand, the impoverishment of the majority of peasants has increased, thus turning millions into migrant workers. It is the mass of poor peasants, many of whom have been engaged at some time in their lives in wage labour, which constitutes the most revolutionary section of the peasants. But they do not become spontaneous revolutionaries. Poverty and oppression, by itself, does not produce revolutions. What is decisive is the political understanding of the causes of the misery, and of the steps that have to be taken to end it. As Amilcar Cabral, leader of the national struggle in 'Portuguese' Guinea, has put it:

"Many people say that it is the peasants who carry the major burden of exploitation: this may be true, but so far as the struggle is concerned it must be realised that it is not the degree of suffering and hardship involved as such that matters: even extreme suffering in itself does not necessarily produce the conscious understanding required for the national liberation struggle."

### THE PEASANTRY

N. Numade, a leader of the liberation movement in South Africa, has likewise rejected the theory that the peasantry can lead the African revolution.

"Aroused, and given dynamic leadership, the Africans of the rural hinterland will prove an invincible and determined army of freedom fighters. But in the nature of things, we cannot often hope or expect to find the leadership of the African revolution emerging from the heartlands of tribal society."

This is not to ignore the role that the mass of poor peasants have played in the struggle. Without the poor peasants the armed struggles could never have been maintained in Cameroun; in Kenya (during the Emergency), in Portuguese Guinea, in the Congo, or in Algeria. Nor could the important struggles have been developed in South Africa—in Pondoland, Sekhukhuleni and Zeerust. Without the decisive support of the peasants, Sekou Toure and the Democratic Party of Guinea would never have won an overwhelming vote for independence in the 1958 referendum. But the leadership for these struggles usually came from the towns, from the new classes—the workers, the petty-bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia. And among the poor peasants themselves, as we have previously seen, the migrant labour system has meant that most adult male peasants have experienced wage labour, thus imparting a semi-proletarian element into the very character of the poor African peasants. In many cases, especially in the English-speaking territories, it can be said that the peasant has often participated in struggle against colonialism not as a peasant in the countryside, but as a worker in the towns. Accra, Lagos, Freetown, Jos,

Johannesburg, Durban, Mombasa, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanga, Jinja Kampala, Wankie, the Copper Belt, Freetown, Bathurst—all have been the scene of bitter struggles against colonialism, of demonstrations and strikes in which scores of people have been killed and hundreds wounded and arrested. And taking part in these struggles have been, overwhelmingly, the migrant workers, that special phenomenon of so many African towns, the worker-peasant or peasant-worker, with a foot in both worlds.

### THE YOUNG UNEMPLOYED

An important role in these struggles has also been played by the young unemployed, those who have recently arrived from the countryside but who have found no employment, and who therefore live, in the traditional African way, with, and at the expense of, their relatives in the towns. These men are no longer strictly speaking peasants, nor have they become workers. Some of them become declassed, sink into apathy or crime, and, as brutalised layabouts, often provide the forces for the lower ranks of colonial armies and police, for the vicious thugs who beat up Lumumba, for the criminal gangs in the township of South Africa. But others, who are increasingly being joined by young school leavers who cannot yet find jobs, become a powerful base of the youth wings of the national parties, and make an important contribution to the national liberation movement.

The African working class, though still a minority of the African people, and a relatively young class, most workers being of the first generation, has played a most decisive role in the struggle for national independence. The migrant labour system, while delaying the creation of a permanent, stabilised, modern proletariat, has drawn millions of workers into the experience of wage labour.

In many cases the workers have joined trade unions, taken part in strikes, become members of political parties, marched in political demonstrations and voted in elections. Thus, in the busy market-of-ideas of the urban centres they have become new men, with enlarged horizons and an awareness of class interests and class solidarity, and a new national consciousness. On return to the villages they have taken with them their new-found knowledge and experience. The migrant worker is also a migrant peasant, and the African worker-peasant, with knowledge of both worlds, is able to bring to the countryside the spirit and political consciousness that has grown in the towns.

### MIGRANT LABOUR SYSTEM

Thus the very migrant-labour system, the curse of Africa, has become the basis for an alliance between workers and peasants for the essential foundation of a powerful national liberation movement.

The very conditions under which they lived under colonialism acted as a most rapid educator of the African workers. Every day of their lives, the African workers came up against the realities of European exploitation. Ironically enough, the very absence of large African companies—a natural consequence of colonial oppression—has turned the African workers in an anti-imperialist direction. It was the European monopolies who paid them starvation wages and resisted their demands for a better life. It was

the European rulers who daily insulted and humiliated them in a thousand and one different ways: It was the European government officials and advisers who backed up the employers against the workers and their unions. It was European-led police and troops who fired on the strikers, and arrested their leaders. European warders controlled the prisons, and European judges passed sentence. Thus the politics of national independence were driven into the heads of the African workers by their everyday experiences. Inevitably they came to realise that no fundamental change in their lives, no social and economic advance, was possible without political change; and that the essence of this political change had to be national freedom and the ending of the rule of the white overlords.

### AFRICAN WORKING CLASS

The experience of the African working class, the growth of their understanding and of their organisations, and the great struggles they have waged have, in a very real sense, been the forerunners of the present national movements which are sweeping the continent. It is above all the workers who, by their great strikes and demonstrations, have revealed to all Africans the system of imperialist exploitation under which they live, have inspired and encouraged the whole people by their determination and self-sacrifice, and have shaken up the whole imperialist edifice by their repeated blows against their oppressors. The workers' struggles have given rich experiences to the whole people. They have revealed the real character of the colonial system, what it is, what it is prepared to do, its strength and its weakness. Above all, the experiences of the workers' battles have shown what must be done if colonialism is to be eliminated.

Understandably, therefore, the U.G.T.A.N. (Union Generale des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire) had no hesitation in declaring at its 1959 congress that the "decisive role,

in the struggle against colonialism, for the conquest and consolidation of independence", belonged to the "African working class and its trade unions."

### PATRIOTIC CLASSES

The African revolution has been the historic achievement of all the patriotic classes—workers, peasants, petty-bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie. An important role has been played by professional workers and intellectuals, sprung from all these classes and from chiefly families which have also, in some cases, participated in the struggle. Peasants and workers provided the main forces of the struggle, but the actions of the workers have been of decisive importance. In a number of countries, sections of the African bourgeoisie, (sometimes, as in Nigeria, in alliance with feudal leaders), have been able to snatch the fruits of victory, and have taken the reins of power. In these cases the door is wide open to the activities and intrigues of neo-colonialism. In other cases, the most progressive and patriotic sections of the intelligentsia, increasingly allied to the working class, have emerged as the leading force in the new States, and, as in Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Zanzibar, are taking firm and decisive steps away from colonialism and towards socialism. In some African states, such as Congo (Brazzaville), recent changes give hopes of a similar development. A considerable number of African states, however, including Kenya, and Tanganyika, are in a stage of transition, their governments being the scene of contest between petty-bourgeois and intellectual sections who wish to make a more marked turn away from imperialism, and on the other hand, sections of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie who lean heavily on the imperialists. In these cases, the working class has not yet been able to bring sufficient pressure to bear to make the outcome of the struggle certain.

Africa is entering an important new phase, one in which she is facing an imperialist counter-offensive, as shown by the recent events in the Congo, Malawi, Tanzania and Rhodesia. Already there is a group of states in which the working class is playing a key role, and which are moving out of the imperialist orbit. There is no doubt that in the coming few years more African states will take this path and make possible the hastening of Africa's transition to socialism.

## LAW IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

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work i.e. the right to guaranteed employment and proper payment; rest and leisure; maintenance in old age, sickness, and disability; education; equal rights for women in all spheres of life; equal rights irrespective of nationality or race in all spheres; freedom of conscience; freedom of speech, of the press, or assembly, of street processions and demonstrations; rights of organisation in trade unions, co-operative societies, etc.; invincibility of the person, of the home of correspondence; and the right of asylum for foreign political refugees; with in every case the fullest express statement of the means whereby these rights were all guaranteed in practical reality; and at the same time (b) their duties to: abide by the Constitution, to the laws, to maintain labour discipline, to perform public duties, to respect the rules of socialist intercourse, to guard socialist property, to do military service, and to defend their country. Lawyers, too, must change; it

they must justify one in saying of them in a few years what was said of the Soviet advocates to me on my second enquiry, as I told you. They have to begin, I think, by holding themselves to be not a group or class apart or above, but as part of the people, of the new majority-ruling-class, serving the people and their interests.

(Purely as my personal opinion, I would like to see Ghanaian lawyers give up of their own notion the wearing of wigs—a sort of status symbol of a group apart and above, a piece of an old government machinery that came from a country apart, and stood above—and to give up the wig just because they now think of themselves as one with the great body of their countrymen.) (May all this happen in Britain too).

I think of all these changes as exciting and hopeful. They may impose novel tasks and duties on lawyers-unwelcome perhaps—to some to whom all that is new is strange. But no great advance was ever made without hard work, and lawyers like many others—must advance with the times or become out-of-date and anti-social. I am sure lawyers do not wish to bring that fate upon themselves, and that they will take care not to do it.