

Notes on **Révolution, Gibson and Vergès**

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Behind the production of the new international periodical *Revolution* printed in Montreux, a traditional resort town on Lake Geneva, were two internationally-known Communists. Nils Andersson, head of the “La Cite” publishing House in Lausanne, an authorised distributor of Chinese publications and the magazine’s director Jacques Vergès (1925-2013).

Vergès, a Reunion-born, half Vietnamese activist, a former French resistance fighter, communist party member, had worked in Prague for the International Union of Students before returning to Paris acting as a lawyer for the Algerian Fronte Liberation Nationale militants. He parted company with the PCF French Communist Party for its failure to support the FLN struggle. After a short time with the Moroccan and Algerian Foreign Ministries, after the liberation moved to Alger setting up the glitzy magazine *Révolution, Afrique, Amérique latine, Asie* in January 1963. The Chinese, who were much interested in Algeria as a way into revolution and influence in Africa, contacted Jacques Vergès, invites him to China where Mao Zedong briefs him on African Maoist organizations.

Inspired by a two week visit to China in March 1963, by July, Vergès produced an English version of “Revolution” with the emphasis on the ‘Chinese model’ leading to his departure from Algiers, ordered to relinquish the editor’s chair by the Algerian government. He eventually moved to Switzerland after initially returning to Paris.

The French language monthly covered a wide scope of material; economic interpretations and poetry and political propaganda articles and comments on art,

ideological documents and jazz. Attractive with a modern layout and a wealth of pictures and drawings.

Writing in the weekly paper of the Norwegian Socialist People's Party Torid Skarad, noted observed

“A fiery red cover with a black fist clutching a rifle and an editorial that indicates knowledge of the political and economic liberation struggle, insight into Africa's history and sidelights on other parts of the world, above all the “Third World”ⁱ

Here was ,described by the *Christian Science Monitor*ⁱⁱ a “slick voice”, anti-imperialist in orientation as it reels off all those associated with it (such as Mohammed Babu of Zanibar) and under Verges a supportive voice for the Chinese arguments in “Marxist disputes”. The local Swiss media warning against Verges' activities and presence in Switzerland, wrote:

“Jacques Verges is Peking's man in France.....responsible for the most important publication in French supporting the Communist doctrines and concepts of China.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Francois Fejto the Hungarian political scientist, judged *Révolution*,

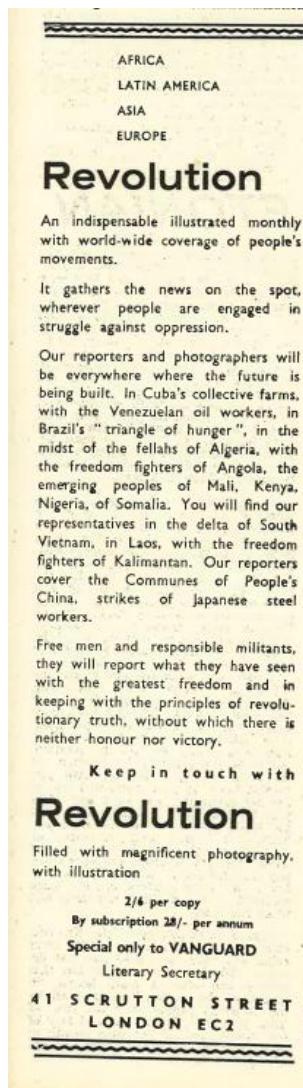
“the best-produced and most effective publication of the pro-Chinese movement in France. Thanks to its English edition and forthcoming Spanish edition, the review's field of action stretches from France to Africa and even to the American continent. *Révolution*, with its articles contributed from all parts of the world, is looking more and more like a liaison journal for the groups and movements of the Maoist International now coming into existence.”^{iv}

While only the first French issue was printed in Switzerland, and then bound in France, all issues of the English editions were printed, bound and mailed from Switzerland.

The appearance of *Revolution* occurred in the context of moves during 1963 toward the creation of separate, international (often rival Afro-Asian bodies) that were not under revisionist control.

At a conference held in Djakarta in April to set up a new Afro-Asian journalists' association, the Soviet delegates—on the insistence of the Chinese—were restricted to observer status and were refused membership in the new body (five months later the Chinese boycotted a Mediterranean conference cruise organized by the Prague-based International Organization of Journalists). In September a Peking branch of the World Federation of Scientific Workers was established, and it was announced that the new "Peking Center" was planning a symposium of Asian, African

and Latin American scientists for August 1964. On October 3 a Peking communique on the occasion of a visit by African students announced that a conference would be convened (no date was given) to consider the creation of a "three-continents" student organization, an obvious rival to the Prague-based International Union of Students. Another Djakarta meeting at the end of October prepared for an "Asian-African workers' conference," to be held in the Indonesian capital by "the early part of the middle of 1964"^v



There was no infrastructure to support an international journal, like the Prague-based "*World Marxist Review: problems of peace and socialism*" which publicised statements from the supporters of the CPSU perspective. The appearance of a substantial 80-120 paged lavishly produced with colour cover monthly, aroused considerable interest in September 1963. The first French language edition was distributed from Lausanne underlined the transnational political appeal – eventually published in three language (English, French and Spanish) editions. International coordination for the European parties was ad hoc and the by-product of shared involvement in solidarity work or pro-Albanian or Chinese activities. The appearance of the non-party magazine *Revolution*, however short-lived a publishing venture, could act as important conduit of information, both an organizers' and discussion forum for the young anti-revisionist movement.

Advertised in *Vanguard*, newspaper of the Committee to Defeat Revisionism For Communist Unity Vol.1 #5 June 1964

Vergas told Newsweek,

"Revolution has two aims: One aim is to ensure contact on a political level – and a perfectly legal one – between all revolutionary movements in the world. Two - to fight, within the socialist movement, modern revisionist tendencies which sacrifice revolution to collaboration with imperialism." ^{vi}

One cover feature an uncomplimentary photograph of a straw-hatted Khrushchev, adorned, "We, the Whites...." Issue #5 reflected its 'Third Worldism' political coverage containing an exclusive interview with Malcolm X on the colonial war in the USA, the revolutionary reminiscences of Cuba's then Minister of Industry

Che Guevara and the text of China's head of state, Liu Shaoqi (old style, Liu Shao-Chi)'s "How To Be A Good Communist".

Production of *Revolution* was transferred to Paris after the intervention of the Swiss government. In March 1964, issue seven was banned in France because of the publication of an article calling for the independence of the French overseas territories. In April 1964 (with issue No. 8) *Revolution* reflected a greater engagement with the developing French anti-revisionists, with a call for French militants to co-ordinate their activities and for a national conference of "Friends of Revolution" to be organised at the end of 1965.

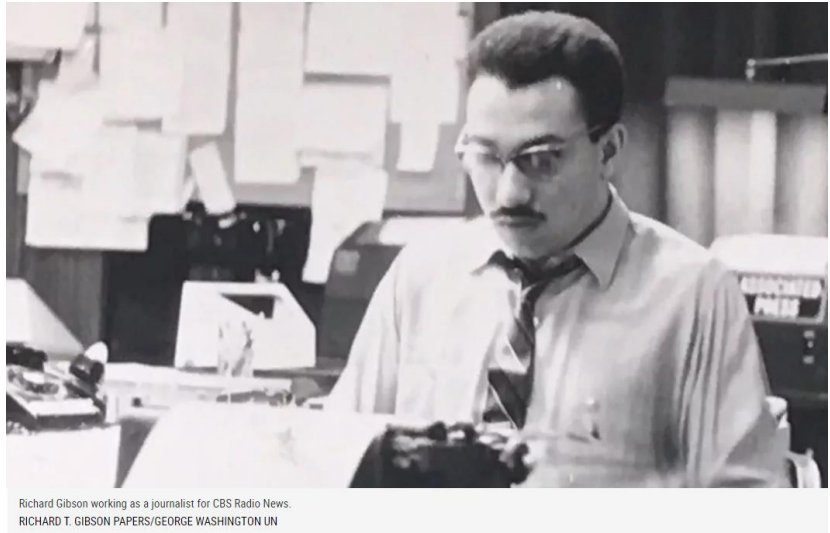
With speculation of circulation around 30,000 and claims that the publication was "subsidised by a \$70,000 grant from the Red Chinese Embassy in Bern" ^{vii} the CIA's man within *Revolution*, Richard Gibson, claimed that the "top sale of any issue only came to 7,500 copies" ^{viii}

Nil Andersson remarked upon the subsidies received:

"Regarding the publication of CCP texts at the Cité-Éditeur (the editions I directed), China bought 300 or 500 copies, the Chinese Embassy telling me who to send them to. In other cases, there was more funding. For example, the Beijing publishing house had subscribed 10,000 subscriptions to the English edition of *Africa-Asia-Latin America Revolution (AAA Revolution)* edited by Jacques Vergès, which I initially printed. The Albanian party naturally did not have the same means as Beijing and the support it was able to grant could only have been very marginal" ^{ix}

Richard Gibson, responsible for the English-language edition was the Black American journalist, formerly secretary of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in the United States. (The one that had Oswald Harvey as a member in New Orleans)

In 1957, Gibson work for CBS Radio News. With a colleague, he covered the Cuban revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power. In 1960, Gibson, who then sympathized with leftist movements, co-founded the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), which defended Castro's government from negative coverage in the North American press.



Richard Gibson working as a journalist for CBS Radio News.
RICHARD T. GIBSON PAPERS/GEORGE WASHINGTON UN

When he left CBS, Gibson took over running the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and it grew rapidly on college campuses. He resisted subpoenas from Senate investigators seeking to discredit the group and urged civil rights leaders to support the Cuban cause. Gibson appeared before the US Senate Internal security Sub-committee on April 25 and May 16 1961 and consistently refused to answer all questions and allegations about communist affiliations which was that he was carrying on “activities against the United States through a Chinese Communist network which reaches to various parts of the world.”

Not all was has it seemed. Suspicions of Gibson have been around a long time. Denials came whenever the accusations were raised, successfully suing Gordon Winter, a self-confessed South African security agent and having his book, *Inside Boss* withdrawn for insinuations that Gibson was a CIA agent provocateur and traitor to the causes he championed. ^x

Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan found some evidence in 1994 and asked Gibson about it. He denied all. “While Gibson has staunchly denied any disloyalty, recently released C.I.A. documents include a letter in which – more than a decade later – the Agency formally asked a commercial company “to assist C.I.A. by placing on retainer Mr. Richard T. Gibson.” “How would that have come out? ...,” said Gibson, when we told him about the document, “I’m amazed. It sounds a little bit like disinformation to me.” He suggested that the letter might be about a different man with the same name and middle initial.”^{xi}

In reality since July 1962, the FBI used him as an informant supplying information on the ‘Fair Play for Cuba Committee’ and, as detailed in a

Newsweek report published in 2018, Gibson continued the story, going international in his reach.^{xii}

In July 1962, Gibson in a piqué of dissatisfaction quit the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and approached the CIA: he could be of assistance. The CIA made contact. Gibson had moved on to Switzerland to become the English-language editor of a new magazine called *La Révolution Africaine*. In a January 1963 memo, CIA Deputy Director Richard Helms informed the FBI that Gibson had told an agency source about the ideological direction of the magazine—further left—and how it planned to relocate 15 staff members from Paris to Algiers.

In the summer of 1964, Gibson had a falling-out with the publisher of *La Révolution*, who accused him of attempting to “*try and penetrate the ranks of the revolutionary international movement.*” As such, *Revolution* informed its readers, Gibson “may no longer be counted among the contributors of this review”^{xiii}

Whenever the charge was repeated years later, Gibson shrugged it off. “If I’m CIA, where’s my pension?” he told James Campbell of *The Guardian* newspaper in 2006.^{xiv}

Indeed, he worked for the CIA .His mission: to report on “his extensive contacts among leftist, radical, and communist movements in Europe and Africa.” *Newsweek* commented, Gibson seems to have been a prolific spy. One CIA memo asserts that in 1977 his file contained more than 400 documents.



The return of Jacques Vergès to Algeria in 1965, following the fall of President Ben Bella, ended the publication of the magazine. In the late 1960s Vergès began

to represent Palestinian militants but from 1970 to 1978 he disappeared: Vergès subsequent notoriety raises questions about (not his constant anti-Americanism but) supposed “leftist” anti-establishment credentials as he acted as defence lawyer, notably in a string of high profile cases (which were lost) that included the Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie. He died in August 2013.^{xv}

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