

NOTES ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BLACK AFRICA (II)

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MEDIATING POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE FORMS (TYPES OF COLONIAL STATES) AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

WHILE it is true that the difference between the British and French administrative systems, or between the British and what has been called the "continental model," has been a favorite and often exaggerated theme for non-Marxist historians, it is no less true, as P. F. Gonidec notes, that colonization is a general form of domination, a multifaceted form whose various aspects work in harmony and are complementary. For a beginning analysis, it is nevertheless possible to "isolate" those factors that clarify the particular way it links up the system and its relative internal autonomy and influence, including its influence on or reaction to the economic base and social structure, for example.

I do not intend to offer a detailed treatment of every "colonial state" model — that isn't required — but some observations on their relative influence in the class structure of the colony are in order.

If, politically, colonization is the confiscation of power by the colonial state, as Gonidec has noted, then its only choice with respect to the more or less strong and stable native political institutions, is to destroy them or neutralize them in order to monopolize power in one way or another.

It can be said, with the consequential risks, that French colonialism tended to destroy those traditional institutions, while British colonialism tended to neutralize them, but, since it is a historic fact that France used neutralization in such cases as Morocco and Tunisia and among the Mosi of the present Upper Volta and the Merina of Madagascar and that Great Britain used "destruction" in the directly subordinate areas of the Crown Colonies, it seems preferable to say that both powers (and other lesser ones) alternated or combined different attitudes with the aim — and general result — of establishing the supremacy of colonial power, the only real power in a colonial situation.

The approach depended basically on the colonial power in question; the specific historic circumstances of development in the indigenous political chieftainship; and its social foundation, material strength and relations with the mass of the colonized population.

The ancient tribal or protofeudal governors were generally stripped of all autonomy of decision and action and incorporated in the colonial machinery as subordinates. Since it was from among them — with their nobility by lineage, war and position — that the first bourgeois figures managed to emerge within the primitive bourgeois trend among certain sectors in certain regions, it is important to note (without overlooking the role of the slave trade and especially that of "legitimate" trade) the **feudal state framework of conditioning** in which bourgeois elements began to emerge in colonial Africa — meaning their conditioning by the ideological rather than the economic factors of precolonial African society that were present at the birth of the African colonial bourgeoisie. The state's need to neutralize the indigenous chiefs by giving them a subordinate

role in the colonial machine forced them — or, in fact, made it possible for them — to promote the capitalist economic order, from within the lower bodies of the colonial administrative apparatus.

A complement of this was the role the colonial state was able to play in the socioeconomic promotion of other sectors of traditional society outside or under the delegated power of the tribal or protofeudal chiefs. It seems logical that, faced with the reality of a prebourgeois chieftainship of considerable strength, the colonial state should decide to work with it and extraeconomically restrict the radius of action of other competing sectors — in addition to the purely economic restriction by the foreign monopolies that exploited the colonial territory. It is precisely here that the imperialist power's tendency or model of administration had a certain importance in terms of whether or not it favored, in a general sense, any function the traditional chieftainship might carry out; in whether or not it showed a tendentious bias toward promoting those (not always "aristocratic") groups that were susceptible to being assimilated by the colonial European culture and, potentially, rivaling the power of the chiefs.

In addition to the preceding social structure, the colonial bourgeois process was conditioned not only by the nature of the indigenous chieftainship but also by the policy the metropolis took toward it — once it became clear that this chieftainship and its greater or lesser strength would play a role in the colonialist tactic at the time of conquest.

Within this policy, the traditional cultural-educational policy of the European power provided the framework within which the assimilationist tendencies or positions supposedly characteristic of French colonialism and the supposedly contrasting British line of autonomy or decentralization took on meaning and reality. It seems evident that the economic and social actions of the middle classes and especially of the petite bourgeoisie of an area under domination reflected the incidence of centralization or of autonomy on the part of a colonial administration.

The social complexity of black Africa

1. Even today, any independent or still colonial part of black Africa, and even northern Africa, might constitute what a number of Soviet researchers began, around 1974, to call a **multistructure**, to describe the historic result of the sequence and coexistence of different economic systems and forms of production ranging from generically tributary Asiatic forms, through the more or less accentuated existence of slave and feudal characteristics, to simple mercantile (including precolonial) production and the market economy. This last, generally an agricultural or mining monoproduction and monoexporting system, **predominates** in these multistructures as a form of dependency on the world capitalist system and is apparent, above all, in the unequal trade whereby raw materials are exchanged for products that come almost solely from the metropolis. This predominance in no way excludes a more or less active state participation in the economy, one which may be socialist oriented, in the best sense

of the word, and may even have begun, in practice, to separate itself from the imperialist system. Nor does this predominance exclude the village community and its pure or adapted economy in the most widely dispersed regions of the few nerve centers of a modern economy or in its urban spider webs, as the case may be.

One key factor in understanding the members of this multistruature is a knowledge of **when and how the capitalist mode of production came about in that colony**. The time (as we all know, but it's worth repeating) is none other than the period of colonial conquest in the transition toward the monopoly, or imperialist, phase of capitalism. In other words, capitalism did not come about as a result or product of the development of internal contradictions within those precolonial social formations — although a few of them had experienced the beginnings of simple mercantile production — but rather was a consequence of a European economy's expansionist needs and of the "extra-economic" factor of violent military conquest, from which it got its direct political control, of course.

It was a matter not of precapitalist social formations that progressed toward capitalism but rather of a precapitalist situation on which a specific type of capitalism — colonialism — was imposed — superimposed, juxtaposed or affixed — by force. It was a type of capitalism — or it used the capitalist elements it was possible and necessary to transfer and/or give birth to there — that was **complementary** to and **dependent** on the economic leaders of the system, on genuine capitalism.

It was not a capitalism derived from the conflict between the development of the productive forces and the form of the social relations of production — which would presumably have led to its appearance in some form. Historically and qualitatively, it was a different type of situation, one brought about by imperialist expansion quantitatively and qualitatively regulated by the modern history of world imperialism, and especially by its specific needs and methods of accumulation at certain crisis points following World War I and the October Revolution.

One aggravating factor in black Africa was the precedent of the slave trade, which had already linked certain areas — particularly the coastal regions of West, Southwest and East Africa — to European mercantilism. Without resorting to the exaggerations made by certain African and non-African progressive historians, it can be said that this factor undoubtedly contributed economically, socially, politically and ideologically to a first stage of underdevelopment and even regression in the areas it touched.

This difference between classical capitalism and peripheral, or dependent, capitalism — which only the theoreticians of dependency were discussing a decade ago and from which some have now retreated — is **vital**. This cannot be stated too often, because there's always some new element that particularly strengthens the political realism of the African revolutionary movement. In this regard, I would like to sum up certain ideas expressed by Kiva Maidanik,¹ of the Soviet Union.

¹ R. Avakov, K. Maidanik, T. Bokataeva: "Possibilities and Limits of Capitalism in the Third World," *Social Sciences Magazine*, No. 4, pp. 164-177. Moscow, 1975.

a) In contrast to classical European capitalism, underdeveloped capitalism emerges and evolves at the same time as the national independent states.

b) In contrast to classical capitalism, underdeveloped capitalism stems from the development of other societies and their extension, which is why the foreign factors, such as closer ties with the world economy than with the domestic or national economy, always predominate. The organic bond of classical capitalism does not exist among the different sectors of production in this independent, capitalist state; it is not a single economic body.

c) In contrast to classical capitalism, underdeveloped capitalism, introduced from abroad, has considerably lost its capacity for self-propulsion, which accounts for the prominent role of the state in the private sector — which is also different from the role the state played at the start of classical capitalism. When it tries to protect itself artificially from free competition, the underdeveloped state develops precocious, artificial and unproductive monopolistic sectors, turning classical capitalist history upside down. Of course, this state activity occurs only where classical capitalism, in its modern transnational version, has not established its control and subordinated everything that is national. Maidanik points out that

Although the Western European and United States monopolies got a hold on the economies of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America by the turn of this century it is only within the last few years that they have been considered an organic element in the social structure of those countries. This is linked to the process of the interiorization [introduction] of these monopolies... [as] rivals and partners of the state system in the process of forming the new, stable system of structures in the Third World.

The social characteristics of a multistructure are, naturally, very complex. Classes, sectors and old and new groups, formed within the framework of a traditional economic society or in a modern economy, exist side by side.

The appearance of new classes does not presume the disappearance of the old anywhere, much less in black Africa, with its dependent capitalism. Some of the old classes transform themselves into new ones through adjustments rather than total absorption. This means that class hybridization appears along with juxtaposition — and, of course, many cases of non-definition.

Traditional society and its traditionally tribal and sometimes proto-feudal organization, with infinite networks and links among individuals, did not disappear economically, socially or ideologically. Politically defeated, it survived under domination in all spheres of life. Although, at least in this century, social groups with class characteristics in the capitalist sense have appeared, the general picture seems to be more fre-

quently characterized by the existence of old groups or sectors whose contradictions — generally controllable and actionable — decisively influence the new classes and sectors today.

What we have, then, is a very unique class social structure — although, to probe all its unique facets, we have had to await decolonization. It is not a classless society, and consequently a society without class struggle — as some (both ingenuous and malintentioned) have tried to make it seem. It is not just one more class society, with the usual class struggle — as is dogmatically stated at times. These are societies whose classes, strata, groups and sectors take on specific forms and interrelationships that correspond to the specific history of the African continent, especially its peoples' relations with European capitalism.

At the Moscow Symposium (April, 1974) on the Formation and Struggle of the Working Class in Asian and African Countries, A. Gudimenko,² of the USSR, warned sociologists from the socialist countries against transferring the features and symptoms characteristic of the classes that emerged in a different sociohistorical environment (generally European) to the classes formed in the Asian and African countries. K. Ernst, of the German Democratic Republic, stressed the influence of such factors as the character of the world historical scene; the Third World countries' dependency within the world capitalist economic system; their initial level of social relations, which was "very different from the European precapitalist or feudal structures"; and the existence of traditional relations, deformed by colonialism and now in various phases of decay.

The delegates to the Moscow Symposium set themselves a number of questions on which Soviet, German, Hungarian, Polish and Bulgarian Africanists have been working intensively in the last few years, including the determination of the concepts of tradition and traditionalism; the classification and typology of traditional communities; the mechanism for these communities' participation in the class formation process; a picture of the political forces in mixed economy societies; and theoretical and practical conclusions for the workers' movement.

From his research on the relationship between caste and class, A. Kutsenkov, of the USSR, reported that, whereas the individual is a member of the working class because of his socioeconomic situation, he is, at the same time, a member of a caste, which continues to determine his direction and goals; the sociopsychological and theoretical-ideological class limits are confusing and vague; the existence of castes within the class framework gives it a sort of cellular structure; and the class consists of numerous groups, even though it tends to absorb and gradually "lead" the castes as society develops.

Until this absorption takes place, the new classes — the bourgeoisie and proletariat — will continue to be numerically and qualitatively weak.

² Quoted by A. Starikov, "The Working Class in the Developing Countries," *Social Sciences Magazine*, No. 1, Moscow, 1975.



As a result, it is not their social consciousness but rather other forms that generally prevail; tribal or tribalist; ethnonationalist (the general state of development now makes this possible); racial (as an antiwhite, anti-Arab or anti-Hindu racist response); and, above all, highly varied and often syncretic forms of religious consciousness. All are tremendously influential in the major and minor struggles for local political power, which usually acts as an objective mediator of foreign domination. If it often seems that there is no economic struggle by black African trade unions or political class struggle, this is due to the numerous mediations and camouflages in the African political scene.

The rural world is still apparently isolated from these struggles, in a very slow transition toward the establishment of clearly capitalist relations. The agrarian petite semibourgeoisie and the semiproletarian migratory worker live side by side in the semiurban society of black Africa, but the circumstantial result is contradictory: far from being urbanized, these sectors block the maturation of capitalist relations in the few cities inherited from the colonial period.

A. Starikov notes that

The low correlation between urban growth and industrialization . . . means that small, market-type production and the marginalized sectors increase. The city's rural social aspect is manifested in the immutable or modified way in which traditional type communities and institutions were transferred into it, so that its inhabitants are oriented simultaneously toward city and countryside.³

³ A. Starikov, *op. cit.*

At the same time, several obstacles slow the African peasant's transformation into a capitalist farmer; it isn't a single-track, spontaneous or "natural" process. The existence of zones that specialize in the "commercial crops" of colonial export production was not necessarily favored by the preceding development of the traditional economy; capitalism did not emerge in Africa from the village commune but was rather superimposed on it — **perhaps in spite of it** — adapting it to capitalist needs without destroying it. This accounts for the slow and tortured process of transition from a natural to a mercantile economy, which is often forced rather than stimulated to develop through increased productivity and the social division of labor.

In conclusion, capitalist agriculture in black Africa evolved in an extremely contradictory manner. Although there are pockets of small but truly capitalist production, the phenomenon of adapting "traditional" structures to the conditions of the dependent market economy is more frequently apparent. Indeed, to a certain extent these backward structures are reactivated around supposedly modernizing processes such as agrarian reform or the much-touted "green revolution"; this goes along with certain types of tenant farming and the role of traders and leaders. The socializing efforts in certain countries are not immune to this, either. Moreover, it is essential to remember that this situation is not a simple "reminiscence" of the tribal or tribal-feudal situation but a result of its "petrified" insertion in the system of world economic relations of which these alleged reminiscences form a part.

The productivity of African agriculture is lower than that of both Latin America and Asia, yet between 80 and 90 percent of the people of black Africa make their living by farming.

For those who know the effects colonization has had on black Africa's industrial development, it isn't enough to say that African industry is retarded. Where industrialization exists, it has generally taken place since independence; the exceptions to this are insignificant within the continental panorama. Even the process of replacing imports is very far behind in Africa, compared to Asia and Latin America. Economist Samir Amin notes that this process took place at some speed in Latin America in the '30s and '40s and in Asia around the '50s. In Africa, however — especially south of the Sahara — this process didn't begin until the '60s, when independence was attained. South Africa's economic importance alone reveals the underdevelopment of the other countries: 1976 statistics show that South Africa had 40 percent of all African industrial production and 30 percent of the continent's total Gross National Product.

These figures explain the small size of the local bourgeois sectors, both in the countryside — the Kulak type that Amin and other economists discuss — and in the city. While it is possible to differentiate between nationalist and comprador attitudes among the bourgeois sectors, it is more realistic to refer to a **petite bourgeoisie** that is present in a wide variety of neocolonial economic sectors. The big bourgeoisie of the African economy is, naturally, a foreign bourgeoisie that lives outside Africa, ex-

cept perhaps for the Anglo-Boer white-nationalist bourgeoisie, gendarme of subimperialism in southern Africa. The middle-level bourgeoisie is almost exclusively that which began as the petite bourgeoisie and heir to the colonial state; moved to the status of pro-bourgeois bureaucracy in the '60s at the time of independence; and can now be classified, in almost all cases, as a bureaucratic bourgeoisie.

A. Starikov, of the USSR, notes that the pro-bourgeois bureaucracy does not own the means of production and that its benefits are obtained not from direct exploitation of wage earners but from enormously high salaries, governmental corruption, etc. The bureaucratic bourgeoisie, he adds, is that sector which becomes capitalist by taking advantage of state posts and the opportunities they offer.

Capitalist in what fields? In urban land speculation, business enterprise, agricultural investment, secondary industry, the infrastructure (housing, roads, domestic transportation), etc. — that is, wherever the entrepreneurs, (comprador) intermediaries and native planters operate, both in the small economic space left by the foreign monopolies and in those sectors of the economy indirectly controlled by those monopolies. As they move from public administration — the state — into these fields, the members of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie inevitably mix with other bourgeois sectors, and many researchers (including Romano Ledda,⁴ of Italy) consider them to be a single class. Moreover, it is also inevitable that the sectors of the local bourgeoisie as a whole should associate with the generally dominant foreign private sector — the monopolies — that pretend to serve the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the nation with certain carefully considered capital investments. In short, the bureaucratic bourgeoisie plays a key role in the general situation of dependency.

Small-scale production cannot guarantee reproduction in the countryside, but the generalized poverty in the cities of black Africa prolongs its life in two ways: by creating a market for its insufficient but cheap products and by providing a large urban population that finds it easier to subsist on the basis of small-scale production and small business. Visitors to any city in black Africa cannot help but note a veritable beehive of small, poor artisans and traders.

Small-scale enterprise continues as long as the proprietor earns enough to maintain himself and requires neither a large investment nor highly skilled workers. Big enterprise in the same city comes with foreign capital and, to a lesser degree, state action, functioning as something totally alien to and apart from small-scale African enterprise, as Kiva Maidanik explains. Technically and organically, the two are separated by an abyss. The objective and significant fact is that, because of the different levels and more or less isolated ways in which big- and small-scale enterprise develop, there is no violent competition between them. Rather, this competition takes place among the small enterprises — that are ruined, one

⁴ Romano Ledda, "Social Classes and Political Struggle," *International Socialist Journal*, No. 22, Year 4, August, 1967.

after another, by the introduction of any machine, however backward in terms of advanced technology.

Small-scale production and trade can grow without developing in the shadow of big enterprise. Neither in the city nor in the countryside is their transformation into big enterprise on the classic capitalist model objectively guaranteed, in any way automatic or simply a question of time. Foreign capital tolerates them, while the underdeveloped state is unable to solve their various problems of obtaining capital, a domestic market, an infrastructure, machinery, skilled workers, raw materials, electricity, etc.

2. We agree with A. Starikov that the working class is not a homogeneous mass but rather a conglomerate complex of strata and groups that differ in class maturity, consciousness and preparation for undertaking one or another form of struggle.

A. Gudimenko, of the USSR, lists three levels in the process of forming a proletariat: a) the laying of socioeconomic bases, b) clarification of the social and sociopsychological conditions for class awareness and c) the maturity of politico-ideological conditions.

V. Vasiliev, of the USSR, comes out against an unjustified extension of the limits of the working class — as V. L. Allen⁵ (whose acute analysis I will criticize later) does outside the framework of Marxist methodology — and proposes, instead, the concept of a “critical mass of the class” which takes off from the dialectic balance between quantity and quality.

Right from the beginning of colonization, an African work force was needed in four basic fields:

a) In South Africa, the Rhodesias and Kenya, the white colons needed agricultural workers. Conquest and land expropriation provided a mass of landless workers who were ready to do the hardest type of manual labor in return for the right to set themselves up on a small piece of foreign land — i.e. the land taken over by the Europeans. Perhaps, as Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen⁶ point out, there weren't enough workers at first, because workers were brought in from India to work the sugarcane plantations of Natal; in 1905, 27 percent of the work force in the South African gold mines was composed of Chinese; and even Afro-Caribbean workers were “imported” to build the railroads.

b) An African work force was also needed in the mining of iron, copper, manganese, diamonds, gold, etc.

c) The public works program also required a work force to build roads and railroads, improve the ports, etc.

d) Finally, the colonial administration used Africans to help maintain colonial order — soldiers, police, office workers, health inspectors, messengers and even gardeners for the European manors.

⁵ V. L. Allen, “The Meaning of the Working Class in Africa,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, February 1972.

⁶ Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen, “Towards an African Working Class: A Survey of the Issues,” Conference of the University of Dar es Salaam, 1974.

The taxes for housing and training were every bit as "effective" as the theft of the best lands as a means of making the African sell his labor. The two methods were combined in almost all the colonial territories in order to create a paid work force at a very early stage; within this framework, class and trade union action also took place right from the beginning of foreign domination — though in an incipient form, of course, and always banned and accompanied by brutal repression.

After a hundred years of dependent capitalism, the working class in the tertiary public and private sector is now far greater than in the industrial sector, which accounts for only 2 or 3 percent of the African population. As Romano Ledda has pointed out, there is almost no big industry to concentrate the workers, so they are dispersed in hundreds of small and middle-sized industries. In the last ten years, some workers have been concentrated for the construction of dams and road networks, but this has generally involved temporary workers, as was true in the mines at the end of the last century. Moreover, skilled workers constitute a numerically insignificant part of the work force, a situation that increases the risk of unemployment within the working class as a whole.

Especially in semirural areas, the African working class maintains strong links with tribal groups or village communities, basically for economic reasons: family maintenance, food supplies, the need for part-time agricultural work or reliance on such work as something to fall back on in hard times. The relationship between the working class and the poor peasantry in black Africa is one of the most difficult and exciting topics of discussion and, in my opinion, **the most important with respect to the anti-imperialist and socialist revolution in Africa.**

In this regard, I consider "The Significance of the Working Class in Africa," by V.I. Allen — published some six years ago in the *London Journal of Modern African Studies*⁷ — to be a useful in-depth study that can be critically summed up as follows:

a) The already mentioned **labor shortage** in the production centers to which the colonialist gave priority resulted in an **extensive recruitment network**. This, together with the extraeconomic compulsion of taxes applied everywhere (not just in the production centers), produced a model of labor migration and migratory workers to and from the main centers of production.

b) The owners derived certain advantages from this system: this type of worker was easier to control than the local work force — and, we might note, could be used to compete with it, from a **tribal and class** point of view. Moreover, it was easier to lower the migratory worker's wages. A two-way movement of labor developed and still exists, except in the notable and verifiable sociopolitical case of the copper mining areas of Katanga (Shaba) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). The extreme of this situation is the turning of such countries as Botswana, Mozambique and Malawi into veritable "labor reserves." (It would be useful to make a comple-

⁷ V. L. Allen, *op. cit.*

mentary study on intertribal solidarity, based on the Lunda-Luba complex, in view of class exploitation by associated monopolists, as a rather sedentary work force in copper and diamonds from a broad area of Central Africa, including parts of northeastern Angola, central and southeastern Zaire and northwestern Zambia.)

c) The workers move back and forth seasonally or for periods of up to five years without breaking their ties with their tribal home; indeed, they preserve these ties as security against the risks of wage labor.

d) As a result, most wage earners have continued to be small farmers, as well. **Thus, the relations between African workers and peasants are perhaps closer than in other parts of the underdeveloped world — and not only for tribal reasons but also because of the unique class structure that colonial capitalism has had to create.** Allen goes on to say that individual wage earners have very little control over wage scales and are often fired when the boss decides to replace them with machines. The small farmers also lack control over the price of their products, which are often pushed out of the market by the discovery of alternate supply sources or synthetics. All these factors bring them still closer together.

e) Within the context of capitalist pressures, both wage earners and small farmers experience ups and downs in their standard of living, employment and the intensity of the work. Their situations naturally influence each other: a drop in the workers' standard of living or a rise in unemployment may lead to a return to farm production, while a drop in the standard of living among the peasantry tends to increase the numbers of migratory wage earners.

Because both of these social factors are open to the arbitrariness of capitalism (though in different ways) and are, therefore, in opposition to the capitalist ruling class, one can conclude that, whether or not these similarities turn both wage earners and small farmers into "a single economic class," as Allen contends, at least **they make the worker-peasant alliance almost inevitable.**

As the author points out, similar replies to capitalist (usually foreign) domination are to be expected from both. The peasants or small farmers can develop a class identity that is not antagonistic to that of the wage earners, but — contrary to Allen's conclusion, which may simply reflect his overenthusiasm for the possibilities of common or collective action — they are not the same.

The author does acknowledge that "Recognition of a common class identity [that of the exploited] implies a process of politization that advances in response to the intensity of the contradictions in a given situation," and he adds that proof of this already exists in the national liberation struggles. While this is true, we should guard against exaggerated optimism and ask ourselves the following genuine, real, objective questions:

Is the worker-peasant collective action or alliance easy to achieve at the level of semiproletarianization?

Is the worker-peasant collective action or alliance easy to achieve at the level of semidetribalization?

While it is true that the migratory nature is simply an influential factor, while the sale of labor is the **determining** one, that influence varies with the different superstructural conditions of wage earners and peasants — although it would be wrong to exaggerate the breach that exists.

Basing himself on observations made by the British author Jack Woddis,⁸ Allen winds up in a more realistic position. Woddis considers the migratory worker to be a migratory peasant as well and, hence, concludes that the African worker-peasant, with his knowledge of both worlds, is capable of bringing to the countryside the spirit and political consciousness that has arisen among the peoples. Now it is Allen who warns of the danger of superficiality but, nevertheless, takes a position based on populism: "This statement exaggerates the politicizing potentialities of urban life and **underestimates those of peasant life,**" and he suggests that the peasants can respond through emulation.

In the end, Woddis — with Allen concurring — comes out for what I consider is **sociopolitically possible and essential: the favorable conditions for a worker-peasant alliance.** Amílcar Cabral pointed this out, saying, "We observe that our peasants are guided by a large majority of cadres who have ties with the urban wage earners."⁹

f) Although wage labor, farm production and trade are different economic categories, as Allen recognizes, he often finds it difficult to clearly place people in one category or another in tropical Africa because "Many — the same people — may fall into more than one category." This is a key factor, the result of the low level of specialization, in a situation that barely reaches the subsistence level.

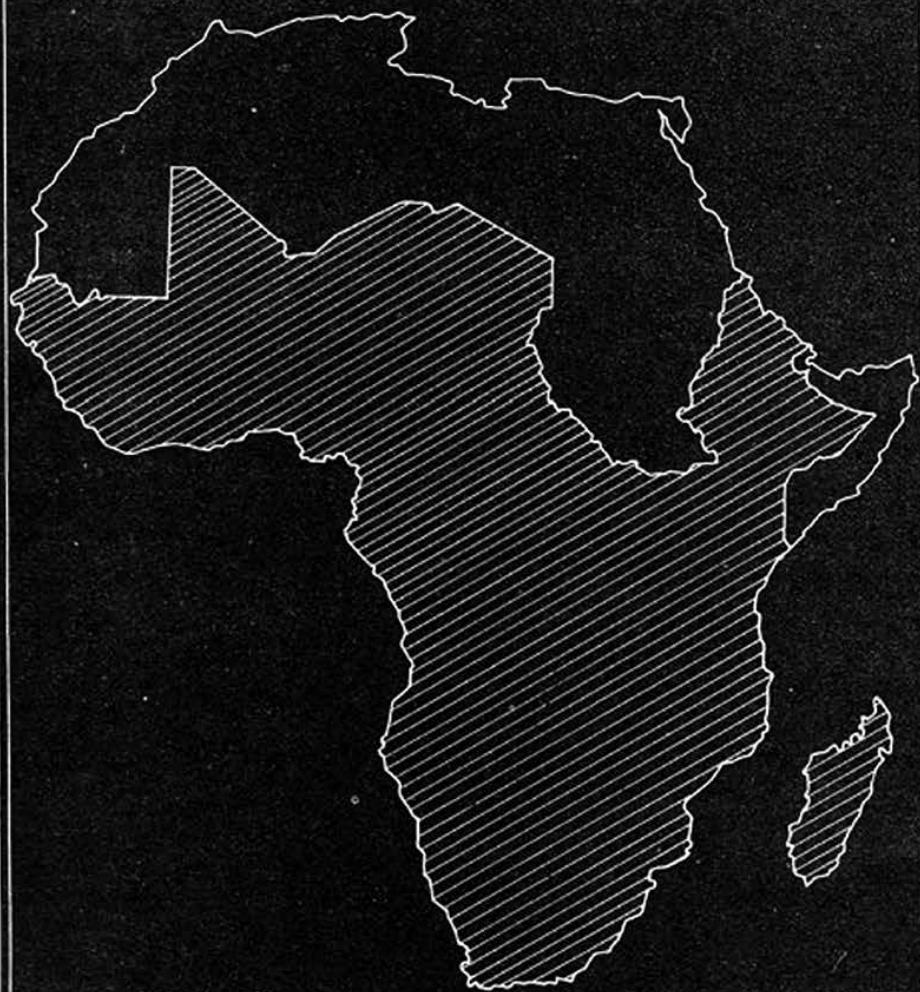
This lack of economic specificity is what traditional US and other empirical studies of Africanism would have us accept as "social mobility" when it isn't at all a question of "You, too, [and anybody else] can have a Buick" in black African society but rather concerns the fact that extreme poverty can only offer defective social sectors and groups within a common status of subordination. It is extreme poverty that also makes it difficult to set the limits between the lumpen proletariat and the working class, limits that appear clear only in terms of the former's nonparticipation in the organized action of exploited groups or in subsistence production on a family basis.

g) At the end of his work, Allen insists that, because of their objectively equal economic positions, all the sectors heretofore mentioned

⁸ Jack Woddis, *Africa: The Roots of Revolt*, London, 1960.

⁹ Quoted by Romano Ledda.

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are members of the African working class, thus abusing what V. Vasiliev, of the USSR, prefers to call the "critical mass of the class." In any case, Allen finds a good formulation for what we have already analyzed broadly and deeply, especially in Maidanik — namely, the fact that this very unique situation arises more from the "satellite relations" between what are fundamentally subsistence societies and the industrially developed countries "than from one specific form of relations at the place or point of production."

In my judgment, this point leads to the "rediscovery" of a basic truth of undeniable social and political significance: these people and sectors are exploited by the system — and, therefore by the system's big bourgeoisie, which is foreign. It should be remembered that the African working class appeared before the African bourgeoisie, chronologically speaking; that, before the African bourgeoisie existed, there was already another European bourgeoisie, which, for economic necessities, required a proletariat in Africa — one that could only be African — and had no need of an African bourgeoisie (at least from the end of the 19th century up to World War II). **The African bourgeoisie arose after the African proletariat — and like it, under the European bourgeoisie.**

This is all very well known, yet sometimes we forget that, precisely because of these origins, **the African proletariat has had a European bourgeoisie in the sense of the original class contradiction, as well as the basic one, almost up to the present.** This fact would seem to be equivalent to the national problem or contradiction, yet I would venture to suggest that it be viewed, for a moment, from the angle of the internal class struggle rather than from that of the struggle for national independence. In this way, I think the problem can be seen differently.

Therefore, the proletariat's attitude toward the local bourgeoisie is not so much a fatal consequence of its low level of consciousness as it is of the lack of an **open** confrontation with that African bourgeoisie until two decades ago — and even then the African bourgeoisie acted not as the historic replacement of the other but rather as its mediator and subordinate.

Up until 20 years ago, history generally presented separate, **isolated** confrontations between the foreign bourgeoisie, the local bourgeoisie and "aspirants" to the latter, on the one hand, and the foreign bourgeoisie and the proletarian, semiproletarian and lumpen proletarian masses, on the other. History shows isolation rather than contradiction — isolation that erupted on the basis of tribal solidarity in many cases. It is worth noting this — not in order to defend national destiny at all costs and against all historic tests, as the local bourgeoisie tries to do, but rather to find the real basis for the extremely contradictory relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of black Africa.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that, aside from its parasitical and sell-out nature in ethical political terms, the local bourgeoisie includes different levels of maneuverability in relation to the foreign monopolies — which don't follow a single line, either.

Returning to the level of possible alliances for the revolution, or at least the most significant and promising ones, and trying to unravel this problem, I would like to conclude with a proposal that refers directly to what I have described as a semiproletarian situation — which is, of course, the counterpart of a semibourgeois situation. In each specific situation, it is imperative to know the degree of **integration and stability** of the people who fall within a specific socioeconomic sector or group, their particular position in the “urban proletariat and the rural peasantry” and — to move into the final section of this article — the form of social consciousness that predominates in the urban class and rural tribal areas.

3. Decolonized Africa is a multitude of small — and, in some cases, large — polyethnic states that should be considered as potential national states. The concepts of “independent state” and “national state” do not coincide, but this interesting process, the inverse of what took place in national states in Europe, should not surprise us if we give due weight to the difference between metropolitan and peripheral capitalism.

Another result of this is the continuation of tribal conflicts, or the degeneration of interethnic or intertribal relations, in almost all these states; the proliferation of border incidents between them; certain levels of cultural-linguistic alienation; and other problems.

Hungarian economist and Africanist Tamas Szentes has raised an essential question concerning social structure in the countries of black Africa, which I have mentioned a number of times here: **that of the interaction between the class structure and the different ethnic and tribal groups.** On the basis of that interaction, it is not surprising to find that what was a more or less collective exploitation through conquest of one ethnic group by another in sub-Saharan Africa was crossed with differentiating class factors under colonial capitalism and **developed into a relative coincidence between class and ethnic exploitation and, consequently, between the exploited class and the tribes conquered before colonialism.**

It has already been pointed out that various traditional communities had more or less clear lines of social differentiation before colonization and that sometimes these lines were reinforced by ethnic and religious distinctions. Leaders and officials of the precolonial states acquired social status from their membership in a particular ethnic group, from their position in a specific lineage or by virtue of their ritualistic attributes. This, incidentally, raises serious doubts about the “absolute” African communalism and “evident ontology” that allegedly serves to legitimize the model of “African socialism” proposed by almost all the triumphant nationalisms in the '50s and '60s.

It was not by chance that this type of nationalism enjoyed the academic approval of those historians, sociologists and ethnologists for whom Africa was and is “a collection of culturally different and mutually irreconcilable tribes constantly at war.” Just as, for certain dogmatic interpreters of reality, the only possible Africa was that of social classes, so, for them, nothing existed outside of the tribal. They naturally created a “cultural pluralism” which emphasized the endemic conflicts present

in a "plural society" in which different groups remain forever above or outside the inevitable crucible.

The class struggle is obviously different from the ethnic conflict but is linked to it. The class struggle can exist coextensive with, in addition to or in contradiction with the relations among different ethnic groups. Only a specific study of the relations of production in a given social situation can provide concrete answers to questions of order or socio-political intent.

Before going on to an analysis of certain specialized materials, we should point out that, although tribal explanations are often used deliberately to disguise class conflict, it is just as necessary to admit that a certain autonomy exists in the ethnic-tribal element.

A great deal of Marxist and other literature influenced by Marxist-Leninist concepts has appeared in recent years, dealing with this problem.

In Africa, class, ethnic and power relations are closely linked and can only be treated separately for purposes of analytical distinction. Class and ethnic relations have a mutual and separate effect on the position, distribution and maintenance of power in black Africa. It's high time to throw out the terminology and content of theories that study ethnic-tribal and class features in black Africa at "two completely different levels," which such theoreticians refer to as "horizontal" and "vertical" differentiation.

In a work published in 1972, British Africanist Robin Cohen¹⁰ points out the following variables in determining differences among ethnic groups within a certain colonial or neocolonial territory: the size of the population; its natural resources; the extent of the division of labor in each group of agricultural production, crafts industry or trade — **whether or not relations of domination-subordination result from precolonial conquest or the unequal division of labor**, in which one specific ethnic group holds a monopoly on a technical or commercial specialization — and **different forms of recruitment of the colonial population for certain occupations by the colonialist administration and monopolies**, often the result of stereotypes that assume that one ethnic group or another has a special ability for a certain kind of work.

Naturally, there are also lesser variables, such as the geographic coincidence of a group or groups with the areas that the Europeans penetrated and occupied (the coastal regions, for example).

The system of categories or positions of the ethnic or tribal groups in the political arena of a colony had repercussions and was partially the result of the distribution of political power.

The struggle among these groups would then have been a struggle by those on top to hold on to the best position and by those less favored to displace them. There are many African examples to show that possession of or ascent to political power — meaning participating in the colonial

¹⁰ Robin Cohen, "Class in Africa: Analytical Problems and Perspectives," *The Socialist Register*, London, 1972.

administration or the independent government — could override those precolonial factors that had determined a particular system of categories among the ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, as Cohen notes, the description of the interethnic conflict should not be oversimplified. The relation between the leader and his "clients" in the group was increasingly influenced by the class factor, which the people tended to interpret in order to stabilize, destabilize or break the client relations established on an ethnic-tribal basis. Thus, the awareness of ethnic-tribal identity within the same group has varied among the different components of that group.

Outside factors still carry great weight in this process, and here I am referring to the colonial power and decolonization, to the monopoly groups and other powers with some strategic or economic interest in the country in question. Such factors deliberately favored one ethnic group or another with the hope that it would act with total submission. One of Cohen's important conclusions is his emphasis on the specific role that imperialist political factors have played, along with economic relations, in the control of or access to domestic sources of power and on the fact that the structure inherited from the traditional or sanctified authority **defined the nature and social character of the ruling classes internally, or nationally.**

In short, it is a question of the importance of the political factor in class differentiation within a colonial and then (almost always) neocolonial society. This brings us closer to, though not exactly in line with, Cohen's statement concerning "the political nature characteristic of the process of social differentiation" in black Africa. Unlike classical capitalism, wealth or social standing does not usually arise from the attainment of power in the colony. Power and social standing are not isochronous. Wealth very often accrues or increases when power is attained.

This politization of class relations depends on the virtual absence of relations of ownership and the existence of an impoverished material base in black Africa, and also on the obvious strength of extraeconomic factors in a context of direct political domination or classical colonialism — a force or control determined, in the end, by the economic situation within the class structure of a dependent society. In such cases, real political power (the colonialist or neocolonialist metropolis) and formal political power (the colonial or independent state) receive all the support and influence of the existing political ideology. Let us remember, with Glezerman,¹¹ that, "In capitalism, political and legal ideology come to the fore." If they are used to protect the bourgeoisie's economic domination in the metropolis, their hypertrofied use in the colony or neocolony is even more justified.

Cohen consistently enumerates certain variables that influence the class structure and its internal relations in contexts of this nature: a) possession of legitimized means of violence and coercion; b) possession of inherited legitimacy — precolonial or traditional — and of sufficient

¹¹ Glezerman, *Problemas fundamentales del materialismo histórico* (Basic Problems of Historical Materialism), Cuban Book Institute, Havana, 1974.

political credibility to deal with foreign colonialist factors; c) the holding of "governing manipulative skills," such as education and experience; d) the possession of illegitimate means of violence, such as the ability to incite and/or manipulate mutinies and to destabilize or change the order of civilian society by means of strikes, etc.; and e) access to relations with groups that have a command of a, b, c and d. To this should be added family, religious, tribal, clan and similar relations.

In the formative process of the African working class, class identity is measured by recognition of its traditional (tribal) obligations, ethnic loyalty or loyalty to the political clan system, all of which delay class formation. The history of strikes and the formation of trade unions in colonial and neocolonial black Africa nevertheless demonstrates that this mass is capable of initiating class action under certain circumstances, going beyond its ethnic-tribal conditioning.

In summary, we would say, with Cohen, that

- a) ethnic and class hierarchy may coincide in certain situations;
- b) in others, ethnic identity predominates; this usually happens in the lowest sector of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, in the pro-bourgeois bureaucracy and — we might add — among the semiproletariat, as well;
- c) in still others, as is generally the case in the multiethnic sectors of the high-level bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the industrial working class, a class identity already prevails; and
- d) in most cases, the conflict between belonging to a class and belonging to an ethnic group is not solved and can follow any direction, depending on political and social circumstances. This situation is explained by national, ideological, institutional, economic and occupational limitations — the open expression of an ethnic consciousness, on the one hand, and the incomplete and uneven nature of development of class consciousness, on the other.

Once again, this shows the need for detailed information, to try to establish the particular "blend" in any situation.

As Cohen himself noted, this doesn't take into account the fact that all these observations refer, in particular, to the state as a terrain of struggle in which ethnic and class groups are differentiated from one another with respect to their positions of domination or subordination, the nature of the class structure within each ethnic group and the inter-ethnic hostility of each class.

In conclusion

Naturally, I'm not going to sum up all these notes in a forced effort to draw final conclusions. The whole point has been to use, to the greatest extent possible, recent knowledge and resources, such as the fresh and notable work of various Africanist institutions in the Soviet Union, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Poland and other developed socialist countries, to raise questions and refrain from schematic conclusions.

With the kind "mediation" of other authors, I have argued that class concepts and class consciousness appear actively in Africa only under certain circumstances and conditions — not because black Africa is a "classless continent" but because, although the extent of social differentiation was already present in one form or another in many traditional societies, it was inevitably modified in many complex forms by imperialist domination.

Although we recognize the incomplete and embryonic nature of class formation and development in Africa and the exceptional nature of an open class action, we should keep the existence of these actions and, above all, their political meaning well in mind. It is often possible to detect that the real nature of interethnic conflicts depends on socioeconomic differences or is intimately tied to material life.

Moving to another level, the question arises of what a revolutionary process really means in black Africa, what forms of accumulation and development would be used in developing socialism, what groups could really act as the motor force of this struggle and what types of political tools they should forge. Much has already been written in an effort to reveal and solve the many difficulties that have existed for so long.

Thus, for example, an industrial working class whose social conditions, weight in production and level of consciousness were insufficient to make it a revolutionary or vanguard party should have sought the decisive support of the peasantry and the petite bourgeoisie.

This is not the time for a theoretical discussion of whether the preceding statement is correct and viable or not. Even with the best of intentions, it would mean incurring the risk of further obscuring matters. Moreover, we are fortunate to be writing this in the summer of 1978, after the events in Angola and Ethiopia, and can venture the opinion that any class combination for establishing a vanguard will emerge from the specific circumstances, which it would be difficult to generalize. To repeat what is already a common note here: **these particular circumstances require a specific study, totally free of prejudice and pressure, except for that sole pressure that justifies all study and action: the pressing need to finally be free of colonial and/or neocolonial imperialism.**

The specific study of various realities — and, especially, the solution begun in a few important cases — leads us to the following hypothesis:

Whatever the particular class combination for national and social liberation may be, a revolutionary consciousness and a fighting political movement are essential. ■