

# Pan-Africanism and “African Personality”

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FOR many people in Europe, the term “Pan-Africanism”<sup>\*</sup> conjures up visions of other “pan” movements—Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism, and so on—which played a reactionary role in history. But Pan-Africanism cannot be considered in the same light. It arose as an expression of the struggle of oppressed peoples against racial discrimination and for more than sixty years has helped to inspire the leaders of Africa’s struggle for independence.

In its origins, the Pan-African movement embraced all of Negro descent and was not confined to Africa. In fact, its earliest proponents were from the West Indies or from the United States of America. The very term “Pan-African” was originally used by a Trinidad lawyer, William Sylvester, at the first Pan-African Conference held in London in 1900. And at this conference the American Negro scholar, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, who for generations has taught and inspired scores of Africa’s present leaders, played an important role. Efforts continued for more than a decade to build up support for the Pan-African movement, which acquired a new impetus from the experiences of the first world war, and the events which followed it. Hundreds of thousands of Africans took part in this war “to save democracy” and “to end all wars”. They fought on battlefields in Europe as well as in Africa, and in the course of these actions they began to acquire a deeper understanding of the nature of imperialism and of their own destiny as a people. There was considerable feeling in Africa that the first world war was not at all a war in which the interests of the African people were involved. Partly arising from this feeling, and partly from the difficult economic and social conditions which the war had given rise to, protest movements and revolts took place in a number of territories. There was rioting in Liberia, revolts in Dahomey, a widespread movement in Kenya, and an uprising in Nyasaland, led by John Chilembwe,

aimed, in part, against African participation in the war. Something of the feeling and viewpoint of the African people towards the war is captured by Chilembwe in his important document *The Voice of African Natives in the Present War*, written towards the end of 1914, shortly after a skirmish between “German” and “British” forces in East Africa in which five-sixths of the casualties on both sides were African. Chilembwe protested that:

“the poor Africans who have nothing to own in this present world, who in death leave only a long line of widows and orphans in utter want and dire distress, are invited to die for a cause which is not theirs.”

But the spirit of revolt shown in the Nyasaland Rising was no isolated affair. As Lewis Garnett Jordan, a leading American Baptist, explained eloquently:

“With 600,000 Africans fighting in the trenches with the allies and an equal number in arms in various parts of Africa under governments who have taken over the continent, it can never be hoped to again make the African a docile creature, to be dumb-driven like a brute, which his oppressors have been 100 years or more in the making.” (*Pebbles from an African Beach*: Philadelphia, 1918.)

## Pan-African Congress

Events were to prove him right. The experiences of the war and the impact of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia had a significant effect on the people of Africa. This was indicated, for instance, by the complaints of Gold Coast missionaries that African soldiers returning after 1918 showed “communist” tendencies. The early post-1918 years witnessed, too, the birth of the West African National Congress (1920), the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (1918–20), and the Communist Party of South Africa (1921), as well as the Kenya crisis of 1921.

The Pan-African Congress of 1919, called under the name “Pan-African” for the first time, was inspired by the same influences and forces which had given rise to the above events. Between 1919 and

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\* Only some aspects of the origins of the Pan-African movement are dealt with in this article. Others will be treated elsewhere in the book.

1945 five Pan-African Congresses were held—in Paris, London and Brussels, Lisbon, New York and Manchester. Not until 1958, after Ghana had become independent, was it to be possible to hold such a conference on African soil. Owing to the conditions under which these congresses were held, direct, living contact with the people and their struggles in Africa was not always possible. Partly in consequence of this delegates were to some extent American Negroes; sometimes West Indians; and the Africans were usually students or temporary exiles from their native lands. Yet it would be wrong to regard these conferences as completely unrepresentative. They were, in a general way, the voice and conscience of Africa; and, increasingly, from conference to conference, they became the thinking advance-guard of the African peoples' independence movements, many of their adopted policies, concepts and declarations anticipating, by a number of years, the programmes of African national organisations which developed after the second world war, and containing, too, most of the fundamental principles which have since been proclaimed by the All-African People's Conference. In addition, a number of delegates to the Pan-African Congresses later returned home to become leaders of the national movements which, in many cases, they initiated. Amongst such leaders who were partly reared by the Pan-African Congress movement were Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Azikiwe and Dr. Hastings Banda.

To gain an understanding of the main ideas developed and put forward by the Pan-African Congress movement it is necessary to examine their decisions and resolutions. The First Pan-African Congress, held in Paris in 1919, and attended by fifty-seven delegates adopted a resolution which, amongst other things, demanded the right of Africans to participate in government, commencing with local and tribal government, and being gradually extended "to the higher offices of state; to the end that, in time, Africa is ruled by consent of the Africans". Thus, at an early date, the principle of full political rights for Africans was adopted, though at this stage it was seen as an eventual achievement rather than as an immediate demand; and, moreover, the conception of national independence and of political power in the hands of the African people were not yet clearly formulated.

The Second Congress was held in 1921, in London and Brussels, and there were 113 delegates present, including forty-one from Africa. The Congress adopted a *Declaration to the World* which called for the "establishment of political institutions among suppressed peoples", and demanded "local self-government for backward groups" leading to "complete self-government". The Third Congress, held

in Lisbon and London in 1923, also went no further than the two previous ones in regard to the question of government, limiting its demand to that of a voice for Africans in their governments. At the same time there was emphasis that the development of Africa should take place for the Africans and not merely for the profit of Europeans. The Fourth Congress, which was held in New York in 1927, did not really carry the movement very much further forward.

### The Fifth Congress

It was not until 1945, when the Fifth Congress was held, that one could see a really decisive change. The experience of the war, the defeat of fascism and the rise of new socialist states, resulted in a fundamental change in the balance of forces in the world which found expression, too, in the internal developments within the different countries. Everywhere the people were on the march; trade unions were formed and grew, women and young people set up organisations, greater use was made of democratic rights, the struggle for national independence in Asia and Africa mounted to new heights and won new victories. Historically speaking, the world had "moved Left", had heeled over away from imperialism and reaction and in the direction of national independence, democracy and socialism.

The same tide of change swept over Africa, and found significant expression at the Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in October 1945. The previous Pan-African Congresses, despite the efforts of their organisers, had been mainly gatherings of intellectuals. This is no criticism of the delegates nor of the organisers of the conference who, to the best of their ability, upheld the cause of the African people's struggle throughout all these years. Moreover, the restricted character of the representation at these congresses was almost inevitable under the conditions prevailing before 1945. But by the end of the second world war the world had been so transformed and the movements in Africa had made such progress that it was the mass organisations, the national parties and the trade unions in particular, that were the dominant influence at the Fifth Pan-African Congress.

The resolutions adopted by the Congress reflected the change no less than did the basis of representation. Demanding independence for the African people, its Declaration to the Colonial Peoples states, in unequivocal terms:

"We affirm the right of all colonial peoples to control their own destiny. All colonies must be free from foreign imperialist control, whether political or economic.

"The peoples of the colonies must have the right to elect their own governments, without restrictions

from foreign powers. We say to the peoples of the colonies that they must fight for these ends by all means at their disposal.

"The object of the imperialist powers is to exploit. By granting the right of colonial peoples to govern themselves that object is defeated. Therefore, the struggle for political power by colonial and subject peoples is the first step towards, and the necessary prerequisite to complete social, economic and political emancipation. . . . Colonial workers must be in the front of the battle against imperialism. . . . Today there is only one road to effective action—the organisation of the masses. . . . Colonial and subject peoples of the world, Unite!"

One cannot help but notice the difference not only in tone but also in the character and preciseness of the demands of the 1945 Congress in comparison with those of the earlier congresses. The 1945 Congress was clearly an anti-colonial Congress, international in spirit, and influenced by socialist thought no less than the experience of anti-imperialist struggle.

Within the next few years the scene of interest shifted from Pan-African Congresses in Europe to the actual organisation of the struggle in Africa, a struggle in which a number of the leading figures were those who had been prominent at the 1945 Congress.

### **Pan-African Principles**

The birth of Ghana in March 1957 gave a new impetus to the Pan-African movement, and provided new opportunities for its growth. Independent Ghana became, as it were, the new base from which the ideas of Pan-Africanism could spread, and it was, therefore, natural that the first Conference of Independent African States was held at Accra, April 15th to 22nd, 1958, and the first All-African Peoples' Conference, also at Accra, in December 1958. Eight independent African States—Ghana, Liberia, Ethiopia, Libya, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Republic—attended the first conference of African States, whose deliberations were clearly inspired by the ideas of the Pan-African movement.

It would, perhaps, be useful, if, at this point, we considered the ideology of Pan-Africanism.

Pan-Africanism is based on four main principles. First, that the people of the entire African continent have a common destiny and therefore need to unite their efforts to the utmost in order to solve their problems. Secondly, that Africa must be ruled by Africans and that all forms of foreign domination and influence, all forms and manifestations of colonialism, must be swept away. Thirdly, that to achieve unity and to destroy colonialism, the African people must re-establish their own history, revive the memory of their own national heroes and

struggles for freedom, rekindle their own languages and culture, reassert their own dignity and recognise that they have their own distinct contribution to make to the progress of human society; these ideas go to make up the conception of the "African personality". Fourthly, that, following the ending of direct colonial rule, African society must be radically reorganised—economically, socially and politically. In short, Pan-Africanism is African independence, African unity, "African personality" and radical social change—and all four conceptions are closely linked.

These principles of Pan-Africanism, which have developed over the years in the course of the struggles of the African peoples, through the thinking of their leaders, the deliberations of the Pan-African congresses, and the activities of the African people's organisation, were summed up in the stirring words which dominated the platform at the First All-African Peoples' Conference in December 1958:

**Peoples of Africa unite**

**We have nothing to lose but our chains**

**We have a continent to regain**

**We have freedom and human dignity to attain**

These conceptions were equally voiced by the different speakers at the First Conference of Independent African States. Kwame Nkrumah, in particular, who has been a most consistent and energetic champion of Pan-Africanism, made special reference to the question of African unity and to the need for the African people to express their own African personality.

"Although this was the first time that most of the representatives of the Independent African States had met each other, we soon discovered that on all matters of vital importance to our respective countries, we all had a common community of interests which has been strikingly reflected in our resolutions and decisions. . . . We are most agreeably surprised by the singular 'one-ness' which unfolded itself as speaker after speaker made his contribution to our discussions. . . . We are one, an entity symbolised by our united African Personality. . . . The community of aim and purpose expressed by our African Personality will allow us in the future to play a *positive role* and speak with a concerted voice in the cause of Peace, and for the liberation of dependent Africa and in defence of our national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity."

### **History Suppressed**

No one at all familiar with the history of Africa can fail to appreciate and sympathise with the African people's desire to stand on their own feet, to slough off every vestige of colonialism in outlook, culture and behaviour. For over four centuries they knew slavery, the lash and the sword, the robbery of their

land and resources, the break-up of their families, the carving-up of their territory and the arbitrary and ruthless tearing-up of ethnic groups. African languages were ignored by the colonial authorities and the language of the conquerors—English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Italian—were made “official”. These were the languages taught in schools, spoken in court, used in edicts. As with languages, so with culture. The African people’s own culture, still often admittedly in process of formation yet already rich in tradition and with its own distinctive contributions to make to the common culture of the world, was set aside, scorned and even denied. African history suffered the same fate at the hands of colonialism. The European rulers claimed that Africa “had no history”, no past and no achievements. In the schools—themselves catering for but a handful—the African children were taught European history; they learnt about English kings and queens or French emperors, but nothing about their own destinies. Cecil Rhodes, Stanley, Marshal Lyautey—these were the “heroes” which African people were asked to respect. Even the names of territories and towns and lakes—Rhodesia, Stanleyville, Leopoldville, Salisbury, Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg, Novo Lisboa, Lake Victoria—honoured European rulers and adventurers and in other ways recalled European associations, as if there were no African place names available. And in the towns, statues of imperialist conquerors stood as if to taunt the African people with an ever-present reminder of their subject status.

Everything conceivable was done by the imperialists to stamp out from the minds of the African people the memory of their own characteristics or attainments, to instil in them the belief that they were “inferior” people, without a past, without culture, without language and with nothing to their credit. In this way, hoped the imperialists, the African people would assume doubts in their own capacities, would grow more humble, more easily accept their heavy yoke and do nothing to change things. Above all else, the colonial authorities strove to prevent the African people getting to know of their own past struggles against oppression, against slavery, against foreign conquest, against the effects of imperialist rule, against the whole colonial system. The names of African heroes were “taboo”, or dismissed as “agitators”, and even as “madmen”. When African leaders tried to set up their own schools to teach their children the real history of their countries and to explain to them what were their rights—as Chilembwe tried to do in Nyasaland and Kenyatta in Kenya—then the full wrath of the government came down, and the schools were suppressed.

Added to all this was the shameful practice of racial discrimination which ate into the heart of

society right across the continent. This foul pestilence laid its hands on everything. Because of their colour Africans were not allowed to use the same shops, the same restaurants, the same cinemas, swimming baths (sometimes even bathing beaches), park seats, buses, trains, post offices, lavatories and churches, even whole districts and sometimes towns, as the European. They were debarred from higher education and from certain hospitals. They were denied access to certain jobs and professions, kept in the most menial employ, and even where they obtained better jobs were paid a tithe of the European wage or salary. The greater the number of white settlers, the worse the discrimination. So much for the European civilising mission to “uplift” the “heathen”! It is a striking commentary on European rule that it is precisely where European settlement was less, such as Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, that educational advance amongst Africans was most rapid; and, conversely, where European settlement was heavy, as in the Congo, Angola, Mozambique, the Rhodesias, Kenya, that a mere handful of Africans were able to secure university training.

### African “Personality” Defined

Is it really any wonder if, in the face of all this, the African people at last cried out: “Enough! We are not inferior peoples, and nor are we going to let you keep us in a subordinate position any longer. And what is more, we are determined, from now on, to express our own personality, to have our own thoughts, develop our own ideas and policies, based on our own African soil, our own African circumstances, our own history, our own struggles, traditions, languages, culture and achievements.”

Ndabaningi Sithole, a leader of the national movement in Southern Rhodesia, has defined the term “African personality” in these words:

“This personality finds satisfaction in African politics, economics, education, art, culture and a host of other things. This means that African politics can never be the same thing as European or American politics. European or American systems can never be those of Africa. . . . The idea of *African personality* can be gleaned in the movement of Pan-Africanism—the strong desire on the part of the African people to be and to remain themselves in opposition to being converted into black Englishmen, Frenchmen and Portuguese—and in that of African nationalism—the Africans’ strong desire to control their own destiny rather than to have it controlled by outsiders.” (*The Voice of Africa*, August 1961.)

Or, as put by Kwame Nkrumah: “The African must assert his own personality and develop according to his own ways of life, his own customs, traditions and culture.”

In illustration of this concept of the African

personality Sithole shows how it expresses itself politically, economically, in culture and education, and in military questions.

Politically, he says, it expresses itself in its "strong rejection of white domination in Africa, in its determination to destroy that domination, root, stem and branch." Therefore, it aims at complete independence, at "total emancipation from foreign rule" and at being "master of its own destiny in Africa". The African personality, he writes, "died with political dependence, but rose from the dead with political independence. . . . The army of Europeans who spoke for Africans has been pushed aside. Africa now speaks for herself. She does not have to act as a carbon copy for European ideas, thoughts, actions. She does not have to perform the role of rubber-stamping European schemes and plans".

On the economic level, stresses Sithole, the African is mindful of his past status under which the European powers regarded Africa "as a source of human and raw materials. The human beings of Africa were viewed in the light of economic exploitation. . . . Second, Africa was regarded as dumping ground for the finished goods of Europe". In consequence of this policy of imperialism, the African was "dehumanised, depersonalised, devalued", and his human dignity insulted and besmirched by his being treated simply "as an economic tool", his initiative and genius crippled and frustrated. Now all this is changing. The African is no longer the passive consumer or performer of European economic plans. "He has ceased to be a means to European ends. He now exists in his own right. He is an end in himself in his economic sphere." This is expressed in Africa's strong opposition to joining the European Common Market and in its desire to form a Common African Market.

Culturally, African songs, dances, dress, customs and traditions, which suffered such a set-back under the colonial system "have suddenly sprung to life as a result of political independence". African music, painting, sculpture, dancing, even opera, a new form for Africa, is suddenly flourishing. African research is rediscovering Africa's past and her heroes brought out into the sun of the people's acclamation. "The entire continent," says Sithole, "seems to be throbbing and pulsating with things African. . . . They seem to be shouting with one big voice: 'Give me back my Africa, and the things that are African!' "

In education there is the same development. The entire consciousness of the African students, as Sithole points out, "was thoroughly immersed with white heroes and black villains". The colonialist strove to destroy the African personality in every classroom. There was even a distinction made with the teachers. European teachers were called "Mr.

so-and-so", whereas African teachers went by the name of "Teacher so-and-so". But now African education is undergoing a complete overhaul. "The African-personality-killing schools' books are being rewritten or discarded altogether." African schools no longer teach white supremacy, but the equality of all men.

From a military standpoint, too, African people feel that their personality was crushed under colonialism, and that in this sphere, no less than in others, fundamental changes must be made. During the first and second world wars, as we have already noted, the imperialists appealed to the Africans to provide soldiers for the defence of "freedom and democracy". But when the fighting and the dying was over, the African people found that in the very land of their birth they were denied the things for which they had allegedly been fighting. Once again they found themselves "cheated, cajoled, duped by the imperialists". Once again they had been "used" by imperialism, this time as military weapons; once again they discovered that the imperialists used them simply as instruments to serve colonialist ends, but never considered them as people. From now on, however, the African is determined that he and his land will no longer be used for foreign military purposes. Africa will be no foreign military base, will sign no military pacts linking it with interests other than its own and will not fight for any cause not in Africa's interests. Today, in fact, "African soldiers . . . train to defend African freedom not European freedom".

### Not Chauvinism

Similarly in the field of law, all African customary law was cast aside, and European legal systems, based on capitalist conceptions of private property, introduced. Africa is now evolving its own legal systems, based on tradition and on the requirements of the newly developing African states. European bourgeois parliamentary systems, too, are being rejected. Even in the trade union sphere, the attempt by the imperialists to set up tame trade unions which would actually help to maintain the colonial system, has broken down; and the formation of the All-African Trade Union Federation is an expression of the determination of African workers to have their own, independent trade unions, severed from all connections with imperialism and neo-colonialism, or the I.C.F.T.U.

Thus in every sphere of human endeavour Africa is now staunchly expressing its own personality and defending its own interests. In short, despite the struggles which still lie ahead to end direct colonial rule in many parts of Africa and to defeat the new threats of neo-colonialism, Africa today, in the

words of Ndabaningi Sithole, is "the captain of her soul, and master of her own destiny".

Imperialism and its agents try to turn this just and historically inevitable desire of the African people to speak—in Nkrumah's words—"through the voices of Africa's own sons", into a source of confusion and disruption, and as a means of stirring up racial strife. Thus, those who, for centuries preached and practised the most vile forms of racialism, of white supremacy, now turn round and declare that expressing the African personality means creating a form of African chauvinism. All the voices of the African organisations and leading political figures give the lie to this argument. Nkrumah has emphasised:

"Our emphasis upon Africa bespeaks neither chauvinism nor isolationism. . . . We welcome men of good will everywhere to join us, irrespective of their race, religion, or nationality. When I speak of Africa for Africans, this should be interpreted in the light of my emphatic declaration that I do not believe in racialism and colonialism. The concept 'Africa for the Africans' does not mean that other races are excluded from it. It only means that Africans, who naturally are in the majority in Africa, shall and must govern themselves in their own countries. The fight is for the future of humanity. . . ." (*Voice of Africa*, October 1961.)

Similarly the heroic Patrice Lumumba once emphasised:

"Our movement does not rebel against the white people. We have only one enemy—colonialism—and not the European people."

Kenneth Kaunda, too, the leader of the United National Independence Party of Northern Rhodesia, has explained that the cry of "Africa for the Africans" was "no more than the legitimate cry for majority rule. . . . Time and again we have said what we still say now, that those Europeans who are willing to work in peace and harmony under a democratically elected African government are more than welcome here". Ruben Um Nyobe, great son of the Kamerunian people who was murdered by French troops in 1958, voiced the true internationalism of the African liberation movement when he wrote:

"(we) do not confuse the British people with British imperialism which holds people under its sway, nor the French people with the French colonialists who pillage and oppress the people of our country. We must warn our brothers against the dangers involved in a policy of hate against the White Man. Racial hatred is incompatible with any idea of progress." (*The Immediate Unification of Kamerun*, 1951.)

How noble and generous are the voices of Nkrumah, Lumumba, Kaunda and Nyobe beside the strident, panic-stricken, hate-filled shrieks of the Tory backwoodsmen, the Welenskys and Verwoerds, the French, Belgian and Portuguese

colons, the American racialists of Little Rock and Washington.

What often causes confusion is that the slogan "Pan-Africanism" is sometimes used by those who distort its meaning to suit their own narrow purposes. Thus, in the Republic of South Africa, there is the so-called "Pan-Africanist Congress" or P.A.C., which has usurped the title "Pan-Africanist", though its policy runs counter to nearly all the positive historical demands and policies of the Pan-Africanist movement.

### Distortions of Pan-Africanism

Thus, outstanding leaders of the genuine Pan-African movement, such as Nkrumah, Lumumba, Kaunda, Nyobe, as we have just seen, have warned against the dangers involved in anti-white chauvinism. But the P.A.C. is based on chauvinism, and refuses to co-operate with the African National Congress (A.N.C.) on the grounds that this body works with progressive Coloured people, Indians and Europeans.

A further tenet of the Pan-African movement is the unity of the peoples against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The P.A.C. is not only against such unity in words, but in deeds it has constantly sabotaged the efforts of the people to struggle against the Verwoerd government, going so far as to issue leaflets calling on the workers to blackleg the general strike which the A.N.C. and others had organised in protest against the government's fascist measures.

Pan-Africanism is one of the inspirations behind the formation of the All-African Trades Union Federation. Taking part in this body is the South African Congress of Trade Unions, open to all workers irrespective of race, and co-operating closely with the A.N.C. and other sections of the national liberation movement in South Africa. But P.A.C. leaders have openly helped to set up FOFATUSA (the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa), a body linked with the I.C.F.T.U.

Pan-Africanism recognises the need for radical economic, social and political change in Africa; and the most advanced states are ready to co-operate with the Soviet Union and other socialist states to assist that purpose. The P.A.C., on the other hand, echoing all the slanderous propaganda of imperialism, is filled with the same violent anti-Soviet conceptions as those held by the most rabid colonialists.

The P.A.C. has little influence in South Africa, but abroad it has spread its poison and tried to disrupt the national movements in several other African territories. Thus, in Angola, its collaborators attack Agostinho Neto, Mario de Andrade, and Viriato Cruz, the leaders of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (M.P.L.A.), because

they are prepared to co-operate with progressive Portuguese and those of mixed Portuguese and African origin. In Zanzibar, its extreme racialism has split the movement for national independence and enabled British imperialism to maintain its power there. As for the Republic of South Africa, the articles of the P.A.C. leaders devote their main energies to boosting one another and attacking such outstanding fighters against white rule as Chief Albert Luthuli and Nelson Mandela.

The P.A.C. also attacks the African National Congress because it allows Communists to play a part in their organisation. But Dr. Du Bois, the father of Pan-Africanism, is himself a member of the Communist Party—and is fully entrusted by President Nkrumah with the historic task of directing the research for the publication of the *Encyclopedia Africana*. And no one can claim that Kwame Nkrumah is not faithful to the ideals of Pan-Africanism.

Imperialism is happy to use the P.A.C. as a weapon to disrupt the African movements. But there is little doubt that African people will increasingly see through this trick.

#### African "Exceptionalism"

Imperialism also seeks to turn the slogan of "African personality" to its own advantage by suggesting and encouraging ideas that would blur the sights of the African people, hide from them the class realities of the African scene and leave them without rudder or compass in the complex and difficult struggles which still lie ahead. They would like the African people to believe that the "African personality" embraces a Tshombe, a Mobutu, a Katulungu or Ahidjo alongside Lumumba, Luthuli, Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Keita, Kenyatta, Nyerere. They would like the African people to accept the proposition that between Kasavubu and Kenyatta, simply because both are Africans, there is more in common than there is between the three staunch anti-imperialists Kenyatta, Castro and Khrushchov. The imperialists also hope that the slogan of "African personality" will make the African people forget that although they have a common interest, as Africans, in getting rid of imperialism, there is a basic difference in long-term interests and in outlook between an African capitalist and an African worker, or between an African landlord and an African peasant.

Some people are so taken up with these false interpretations of the conception for which the Pan-African movement stands that they have constructed a whole edifice of "African exceptionalism". Thus they have extended the concept of African personality and twisted the meaning of African history and present structure to argue that Africa

has no classes, no capitalist class, no proletariat, no peasants, but just "people". The absence of classes, they argue, makes unnecessary working-class power (or the dictatorship of the proletariat) as a stage in the construction of socialism; and, moreover, because Africa has no classes, it alone, of all continents, can produce the purest form of democracy with a dictatorship neither of the bourgeoisie nor of the proletariat. Along with these conceptions is the attempt to foster a racial exclusiveness which will cut Africa off from the great national liberation movements of Asia and Latin America, and from the anti-imperialist countries which make up the socialist camp. Even the perfectly justified, and, in fact, correct aim of building socialism in Africa on the basis of the specific concrete conditions, class relations, and historical traditions of the African people, is distorted to support a "theory" that Africa will follow "neither the capitalist road nor the communist road", but will strike out and build a different form of society, a "third social system" distinguished from either of the two main systems in the world, capitalism and socialism.

Is it true that there are no classes in Africa? People who assert that there are not argue as if the contention that different classes exist in Africa is somehow an attempt to impose European ideas and a European pattern of society on Africa. But the existence of classes is not a European invention but a world-wide phenomenon. And when one says that there are different classes in Africa this simply means that Africa—despite its very real difference from other continents (and they, too, differ from one another)—goes through certain inevitable phases of historical development as do all human societies. It is true, of course, that in pre-colonial times, although Africa had passed, in the main, beyond the stage of primitive communal society and was mainly in a stage defined by Jean Suret-Canale as "elementary feudalism", class forces were not yet fully developed and class contradictions in consequence did not become acute.

The imposition by European powers of the slave trade, apart from robbing Africa, over a period of some 400 years, of at least 50 million people, mainly the most robust, healthy and young—that is, the most direct form of the productive forces—also held back the development of the productive forces in Africa by the very nature of the slave trade itself.

Once Europe had passed beyond the stage of competitive capitalism and entered the stage of monopoly and imperialism, Africa underwent a further and different form of conquest, expressed in the colonial system of the twentieth century. Once more African class development was distorted. Colonialism stifled the normal growth of African productive forces. European monopoly of the mines,

of trade, banking, transport and usually the best land, hindered the growth of an African capitalist class; and the exploitation of Africa as a source of cheap raw materials, accompanied by a policy of deliberate limitation of industrial production, meant a delay in the formation of a large body of permanent, semi-skilled and skilled labour, of factory workers, of a proletariat. Migrant labour, the creation of a force of peasant-workers fluctuating between their own land and wage employment, became a widespread phenomenon. The survival over large parts of Africa of commonly-owned land and the absence of private ownership has also influenced the pattern of class forces in Africa today.

Thus, in the period in which African territories are gaining their political independence, class forces are still in process of growth, and the divisions between them are not so clearly defined as in the advanced capitalist countries. It is this factor, the early stage of the formation of class forces in Africa today, the weakness of the capitalist class, the extreme mobility between workers and peasants, the somewhat limited scale, in some cases, of differentiation amongst the peasantry, and the relatively small size of the African intelligentsia, which has led some people to conclude that "there are no different classes in Africa".

### Class Forces in Africa

Of course it would not be difficult to demonstrate that some African people sell their labour power and work for wages, some people work the land (either on communal lands or on individual plots bought or rented), some people have larger farms and employ Africans as agricultural workers, some people own shops and carry on trade, and some are owners or part-owners of enterprises employing African workers. The very existence of African trade unions shows that African workers are only too aware of their common class interests, of their identity as workers. And the steps (warmly welcomed by the people), which Kwame Nkrumah has taken to curb the business activities of Ministers and leading party figures in Ghana clearly indicates not merely the existence of an African capitalist class in Ghana, but also an attempt on its part to grow and expand its strength, confronted on the other hand by the people's endeavour to halt such a development.

The relatively limited stage of class differentiation reached in Africa is, of course, a positive factor in that it can facilitate the taking of a non-capitalist path of development. It does not guarantee that such a road will be taken, but is by no means an unimportant consideration in this respect. And it helps to explain, too, why there has been a tendency in Africa, much more so than in Asia, not only for the

united people in each territory to come together to win the battle for independence but even to form one single mass party embracing the overwhelming majority of the people and expressing their aspirations and demands.

At the same time, failure to recognise that there are different classes in Africa would handicap the African organisations which are striving to reconstruct African society so as to overcome the last vestiges of colonialism. This is of special importance in the newly independent African states where, in some cases, representatives of the African national bourgeoisie are attempting to make use of their governmental positions or contacts to build up their own class economic strength and political power behind general demagogic slogans about the "national interests".

Recognition of class realities in modern Africa is equally important if there is to be any advance towards socialism. It is clearly to the advantage of those who wish to preserve capitalist forms in Africa—and this applies both to the imperialists as well as to local reactionary capitalist forces—if it is believed that there are no separate classes in Africa, no African capitalist class to exploit the people and no African working class which should exercise the leading role in the transition period. Many African organisations have in their programmes clauses asserting the aim of building a society without "the exploitation of man by man". Such an aim clearly demands the recognition of the existence of a capitalist class whose exploiting role must be ended.

It is, perhaps, not a mere coincidence that the idea of a "classless society" already existing in Africa is being put forward at a time when, in the West, capitalist propagandists and right-wing labour leaders are claiming that classes no longer have meaning in the advanced capitalist countries. Before the war the capitalists used to pretend "we are all workers now"; but today they argue "we are all capitalists". The big imperialist monopolies which rule the west and still dominate the economics and, to a large extent, the politics, of most of Africa, would like nothing better than that "this whole business of classes" could be buried and forgotten by the people. But it was recognition of class realities which made it possible for the workers and peasants of Russia, and later China and other countries in Eastern Europe and Asia, to win complete national liberation, establish the political power of the working people, and move on to the construction of socialism. It is the understanding of these same class realities in Africa, different in pattern though they may be, which will enable the African working people to move on from political independence to the formation of fully independent, democratic states and the transition to socialism.