

Africa's Future— Capitalism or Socialism?

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(This is the text of the lecture given by Idris Cox at the African Seminar organised by Marxism Today, on October 1st, 1966. Texts of other lectures will appear in future issues.)

EARLIER speakers in this Seminar have given an outline of the forces of the African Revolution. The discussion revealed different political assessments of class structures in Africa, and to what extent there has been a growth of class society. This vast continent is so varied that what is true of one part of Africa is unlikely to apply to other parts. It is always dangerous to look at Africa as one indivisible whole, for the extent to which class society has developed, and the nature of class relations, differs from one African country to another.

From one standpoint it could be possible today to speak of two Africas—the independent states north of Rhodesia, and the remaining British, French, Spanish and Portuguese colonies. But even this leaves out of account new changes and sharp political contrasts. Basutoland (now Lesotho) and Bechuanaland (Botswana) only recently became independent. This is the constitutional and formal aspect, but in reality they are still under outside domination, and prisoners of the apartheid rulers of South Africa.

South Africa and Rhodesia are both “independent”, the former having won independence by constitutional means, and the latter by illegal means. But what is common to both is that the Africans (who are the vast majority) are still under a special kind of colonial rule, enforced by all kinds of repressive measures. In many respects their conditions are worse than those formerly experienced under direct imperialist rule in those African countries which have since won political independence—for white minority rule is an expression of the alliance of foreign imperialism with the racialist rulers in southern Africa.

My only purpose in making these preliminary remarks is to underline the need to avoid lumping all African countries together, as if they were faced with exactly similar problems. True, in one respect, all the 38 independent African states (leaving out South Africa and Rhodesia) have to face the challenge: “What next after Independence?”. Depending on the relation of class forces in each of them, and the political outlook of the African

leadership in these states, the challenge will be answered in different ways.

Independence and After

The struggle to win independence was a political expression of the common desire of all classes—workers, peasantry, intellectuals, and rising African capitalists. This gave rise to an alliance in practice of different class forces—even though not always expressed in an organised form. It was the united expression of all those whose interests (in different degrees) were being undermined by imperialism.

After winning independence, it seems clear that there develops a change in these class relations. Among influential sections of the African capitalists there is the conception that the main aim of African liberation has been achieved, but for the majority of the workers, peasantry and a great number of intellectuals, it is only the first stage and from which the next stage is to win complete national liberation. This also involves the transformation of the old colonial economy, a sharper struggle against neo-colonialism and intensified imperialist exploitation, and the all-round raising of living standards.

To achieve this involves an even stronger and sharper fight against imperialism, but in conditions in which there are more severe tests for the alliance of class forces. Having won the leading positions in government, many African leaders become satisfied with the “status quo”. African capitalist elements resist any further change and tend towards closer co-operation with imperialism.

On the other hand, the masses who have fought for independence are anxious to advance to the next stage of making basic economic changes, raising living standards and exercising a greater political role in carrying through these changes. It is at this point that rival political views are expressed more sharply, and differences become more profound on the precise path of future development.

Marxist Parties

Before independence Marxist literature was forbidden in all the former British colonies in Africa. Because of the different kind of French colonial

apparatus (with African leaders elected to the French National Assembly), it was more difficult to impose this ban in the former French colonies. Moreover, the close connections between the French Communist Party and the African liberation movements (especially between the trade unions) gave an impetus to the growth of Marxist ideas.

The Communist Parties in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Sudan, were deeply involved in the liberation struggle. The Communist Party was always banned in Egypt, and after independence in the other four countries, as also was the African Independence Party (PAI) of Senegal, which proclaims Marxist principles. The Communist Party of South Africa was formed in 1921 and declared illegal after 1948. The most recently formed African parties based on Marxist principles are the Socialist Workers and Farmers' Party (SWAFP) of Nigeria, and the Communist Party of Basutoland (now Lesotho).

Despite all bans, Marxist ideas were spreading in Africa during and after the second world war. The mighty blows of the Soviet armed forces against fascism made a strong political impact on a world scale. Thousands of Africans also fought against fascism, and their experiences had a marked effect on their political ideas when they returned to Africa. It is not surprising that the African ex-servicemen in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and elsewhere were among the foremost in later years in the struggle for independence.

All these factors, taken together, serve to emphasise that socialist ideas in Africa did not simply fall out of the sky. Nor were they entirely a product of African historical development, though this also made a strong impact. They were an expression of the great stimulus given to socialism and socialist ideas arising from the defeat of fascism and the growth of the socialist world.

The winning of political independence opened out a new stage in Africa and presented a new challenge, either to succumb to the external (and internal) pressure to expand the economy on capitalist principles, or to advance on the path towards socialism. Is it possible to by-pass (or to restrict and shorten) capitalist development in the new African states and advance instead at a more rapid pace to socialism? These are not academic questions for Africa today, for upon the answers will depend whether the new African states can eliminate what remains of imperialist domination and advance to socialism, or whether imperialism will even strengthen its grip and rob the new states of all the hardy-won fruits of independence.

This brings me to my two main themes :

- (i) the existing socialist concepts in Africa; and

- (ii) how far are Marxist ideas applicable to African conditions.

Socialist Concepts

It is not strange that these bear the imprint of the stage of historical development reached in Africa, but are also influenced on the one hand by the character of the struggle against imperialism, and by two opposite pressures—the advance in the socialist world and the political domination of imperialism and its ideology in Africa. Though it is clear that foreign monopoly firms are rapidly expanding their operations in Africa (together with a considerable indigenous growth of capitalism) it is significant that most African leaders dare not openly advocate the path of capitalist development.

This is a tribute to the mass opposition to imperialism, and the deep suspicion among ordinary Africans of the capitalist system, in contrast to the strong political impact of the socialist world. But in my view it does not follow that the conception in Africa of what socialism means is on a higher level than elsewhere in the world. Among Africans who oppose capitalist development are many who seek salvation in the return to what they conceive to be the classless system of the past, despite its primitive conditions.

At the same time, African conditions, and the vastly different relation of class forces, make a strong impact on socialist concepts in Africa. In my recent book *Socialist Ideas in Africa*,¹ I have tried to make a modest contribution to the growing dialogue between Marxists and non-Marxists (within and outside Africa) on the political character of these concepts and their relevance to the situation in Africa today.

In tropical Africa communal land ownership and tribal society are fairly common, with a virtual absence either of feudalism or a developed capitalist society. The main concept of socialism in Africa at present is one of a special type of "African Socialism", different from that of the socialist world, and also from the kind of socialist systems likely to arise in Europe. The main argument against Marxism is that it applies only to capitalist countries and is not applicable to Africa, where it is claimed capitalism has not developed and where the class struggle does not exist.

It seems to me that one of the main reasons for this standpoint is the confusion between the basic economic and political *content* of socialism (which must inevitably be universal in character) and the particular *form* of socialism in different countries and the methods applied to achieve this aim.

¹ Lawrence and Wishart, 1966.

Basic Principles

Socialism will most likely take on different forms in Africa (and even from one African country to another), and Africans will chart their own path to achieve it. To advocate socialism (African or otherwise) means nothing unless the concept provides for definite and universal basic principles. Among these principles, in my view, *four* main features need to be underlined. I would define them as follows:

- (a) Common ownership of the land and all means of production.
- (b) Production for use, and not for profit.
- (c) Large-scale modern industry and agriculture, based on planned production.
- (d) Political power in the hands of the people, based on democracy in all spheres of life, with the workers and peasantry as the decisive force.

These basic principles apply to Africa as to any other part of the world. They cannot be confined geographically to particular countries, or even to continents—any more than it is possible to conceive of a science of African chemistry, Nigerian physics, or Kenyan mathematics.

Like all other sciences, socialism is a science which applies to the whole world. What passes for “African Socialism” or “Arab Socialism” is in reality a diversion from the path towards scientific socialism. This does not mean that all its advocates are consciously adopting this disguise to conceal the real path to socialism. Most Africans look upon it as something unique for their continent, and an expression of their own identity in opposition to imperialism and capitalism.

However, among its leading advocates are political leaders who have not the slightest intention of building socialism in their countries. They use the formula to maintain and strengthen their influence among the African peoples who are seeking a new way of life. For many of these political leaders it is simply a cover for a policy in practice which means co-operation with imperialism and their belief in capitalist principles.

“African Socialism”

There is time only to deal with two or three specific examples. Until 1962, and under the influence of the late George Padmore, Dr. Nkrumah was most eloquent in advocating “African Socialism”. But when President Senghor of Senegal organised an international seminar at Dakar in December 1962, to peddle his pet theme of “Negritude” and to expound this concept of “African Socialism”, this was a warning signal to Dr. Nkrumah.

It is well known that President Senghor is wedded to co-operation with French imperialism, is always full of praise for de Gaulle, and strongly resists any

basic changes in Senegal. So this seminar was the signal for Dr. Nkrumah to abandon the formula of “African Socialism”, and to start without delay to wield an ideological campaign against it, and to advocate scientific socialism.

This was the main theme of the Ghanaian weekly paper *Spark*, which was launched soon after, in which scientific socialism was interpreted as the application of Marxist ideas to African conditions. It is not surprising that *Spark* was the first paper to be suppressed after the military coup which took place in February 1966.

The second example of African Socialism is that of President Kenyatta and Tom Mboya in Kenya. Nearly two years ago the Kenya Government came out with an official programme for “African Socialism”. It will be remembered that Oginga Odinga, who was then Vice-President of Kenya, at that time expressed the view that this was a popular concept and would do no harm, since it could be interpreted in different ways. As we know, Odinga has since broken away from KANU and is leading the opposition Kenya People’s Union against this policy, and for the principles of scientific socialism. This is not surprising, for the Mboya concept of “African Socialism” is expressed in practice in huge compensation payments for land bought from white settlers, in exorbitant sums being paid by Africans buying over European land, and in close co-operation with foreign imperialism. As for its internal policy, it advocates workers becoming directors, managers and shareholders of foreign monopoly firms, but for the African majority the result is low living standards and mass unemployment, together with the ruthless suppression of political opponents.

No wonder that even the extremely moderate British weekly Fabian journal *Venture* (September 1965) expressed the view that this policy could never lead to socialism, African or otherwise, and that the “Kenya Government had opted for the capitalist direction of economic development”.

Former advocates of “Arab Socialism” have also recently changed their views. This concept has now been abandoned in Egypt, and President Nasser and other Egyptian political leaders are laying stress on the concept of scientific socialism, and insist that workers and peasants must occupy the leading positions in the country. Moreover, though the separate existence of a Communist Party is still illegal, all Communists have now been released from prison and detention camps and are involved in responsible political work.

Class Relations

Now to the second theme: “How far are Marxist ideas applicable to African conditions?” Many African leaders argue that the writings of Marx and

Engels do not apply to Africa because their experience was confined to European countries which had a developed capitalist economy, and in which the class struggle was being waged between the industrial proletariat and the capitalist class.

They maintain that the class struggle does not exist in Africa, where class formation is in its infancy or does not even exist. They maintain that everyone has common interests, and that the one-party system is the only suitable form of political organisation.

While accepting the view that class formations in Africa are still at an early stage, I strongly contest the view that classes do not exist in Africa today. One chapter in my book gives a factual survey of capitalist growth in many African countries, alongside class differentiation in agriculture, a moderate expansion of industry, and the growth of a working class. During the past year these trends have increased more rapidly.

True, the main economic enterprises are still in the hands of the big foreign monopoly firms. But not only is there a rising capitalist element being integrated with these firms as directors and managers, but also a considerable growth of an African capitalist class in trade and commerce, transport and contracting, and a big increase in the number of small African capitalist firms.

Generally speaking however, most tropical African countries (with the exception of southern Africa) are in the pre-capitalist stage of development. For them it is not a matter of the transition from capitalism to socialism (as in Britain and the rest of Europe), but whether they have to go through the full process of capitalist development (which took nearly three centuries in Britain) before achieving socialism. We have to consider whether there is a prospect in Africa of a non-capitalist development towards socialism, or at least, of restricting the period and scope of capitalist development in the advance towards socialism.

It is true that the building of socialism is easier when a developed capitalist economy is taken over. It was Lenin who emphasised that it would be difficult in Britain to capture power from the capitalist class, but once this was achieved it would be comparatively easier to build socialism. On the other hand, it was comparatively easier for the workers and peasants to win power in Tsarist Russia, but extremely difficult to build socialism.

Writing the *Communist Manifesto* 120 years ago, it is obvious that Marx and Engels had in mind mainly the class struggle in Europe. This historic document ended with the call "Workers of all Lands, Unite". Lenin in his time realised that in most countries outside Europe it was the peasantry which constituted the vast majority. With the growth

of imperialism and national liberation struggles it was now possible to develop the national revolution into a socialist revolution, and the new call was "Oppressed Peoples of all Lands, Unite". So no-one can argue that Lenin thought only in terms of workers against capitalists. No revolutionary leader ever laid stronger emphasis on the alliance of the working class and peasantry, or worked out so clearly the stages of transition from the democratic to the socialist revolution.

But to come back to Marx and Engels. They lived in a capitalist society, and from their analysis of this society charted the way forward to socialism. Over a century ago little was known in Europe of the various stages of historical development in Africa, but Marx and Engels were both fully conscious of pre-capitalist stages of development in Asia, Europe and elsewhere, and had in fact made a serious study of pre-capitalist societies.

Pre-Capitalist Society

One has only to read Engels' famous classic *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, to be convinced of the foregoing, or to study Marx's work *Pre-Capitalist Formations*. Many African leaders seem to suffer from the illusion that because many parts of Africa are in the pre-capitalist stage today that this did not exist anywhere else in the world. But the fact remains that the basic aspects of African tribal society have existed earlier in most parts of the world.

Late in the 19th century village communities based on communal land ownership still existed in Tsarist Russia. Many Russian political leaders idealised this communal system, and did not realise that it was rapidly breaking down with the growth of a rich peasantry within the framework of feudalism. On the other hand, Marx and Engels conceived the possibility of preserving this communal form of society and raising it to a higher level, but *only as a result of socialist revolution in Europe*.

As we know, this did not happen, and it was not until over 20 years later in the 1917 revolution before Russia was able to restore communal ownership, but on a much higher level. Today we have a situation in which socialism has triumphed over one-third of the world, and another one-third consists of new states which have achieved political independence. So the prospect of by-passing capitalism, or at least of restricting the period and scope of its development, is far more favourable than it was in the late 19th century.

This does not mean that African countries can jump directly from their present stage of development into a socialist society. I agree with Ken Post that Africans are not in a position to choose between

capitalism and socialism (just as items in a shopping list), for Africa is still largely within the capitalist sector, but they can choose between a further advance on the capitalist road or effort to chart out a path to socialism. It is more likely that there will be several stages of transition towards socialism, and this is not only a matter of economic growth, but of big changes in the relation of class forces in Africa.

The African masses were the main force in the struggle for independence (which I would qualify as constitutional independence and not as political independence in the full sense of the word), but they were led by African bourgeois elements, together with the petty bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. Today these forces occupy most of the key positions in the new states, but because of their class position are now hesitant in leading the way forward to the next stage of economic independence and complete liberation.

To advance the transition towards socialism it seems clear that the growing African working class and the peasantry must advance to leading positions in the new African states. And the struggle to achieve this must be directed not only against imperialism and neo-colonialism (as in the fight for independence), but also against the bourgeois elements in key positions in the new states who tend to become allies of imperialism. Whether this means armed struggle the Africans themselves will decide. In my view, armed struggle is inevitable in many parts of Africa—though victory in one part may pave the way in another.

Marxist Ideas

This also means an ideological battle against the illusion of some special kind of "African Socialism", and to raise instead the political level to an understanding of the principles of scientific socialism. To achieve this it does not seem to me to be an essential condition that Marxist parties must exist in Africa on exactly the same model as in the rest of the world—at least, not in the early stages. I have no illusion that European Marxists possess some kind of magic solution for African problems. In Africa, the number of Marxists is growing rapidly, and Marxist ideas are spreading. The advance to socialism in Africa will come from African revolutionaries, and not from Europe; just as the advance to socialism in Britain will come from British Marxists and revolutions, and not from the Soviet Union or China.

However, Marxism is a world theory, and the living experience of the struggle to achieve and to build socialism in any part of the world can enrich the revolutionary movement elsewhere in the world. Not only can Marxism assist in the advance of the African Revolution—African experience can also enrich Marxism on a world scale.

The transition to socialism in Africa does not depend only on internal changes within Africa itself. This is certainly vital, especially the advance of African unity in the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism. But it equally depends on close economic and political co-operation with the existing socialist world, both in respect of assisting their economic development and in maintaining world peace and resisting the imperialist cold war. It depends equally upon solidarity action in Britain and other capitalist countries with every aspect of the struggle in Africa.

Africa has made history in recent years and makes an increasing impact on world affairs. The African people will choose their own path, and decide their *own* future, but we are also concerned because we live in the same world. As distinct from Britain and other capitalist countries they have the choice of embarking on the road to capitalism or choosing the road to socialism. By choosing the road to socialism, it will assist the struggle for socialism throughout the world.

(In the time available for questions and discussion a wide range of important issues were raised, chief of which were: (i) socialist economic aid; (ii) whether there was a choice of capitalism or socialism in Africa; (iii) the danger of Marxist ideas in Africa being presented as a copy of European Marxism; and (iv) whether it was correct to accept the banning and dissolution of Communist Parties in Africa.

Idris Cox replied to the questions and discussion along the following lines.)

Socialist Aid

Socialist economic aid to the independent African states is extremely important, not simply in relation to the volume and value of socialist aid available, but its different character from the numerous imperialist "aid schemes". First, it is provided on more generous terms—about 2 per cent as against 5 per cent to 6 per cent for British and United States loans—and for a longer term. Second, socialist aid is advanced only for the state and co-operative sector of production, and not to the private sector which is concerned only with production for profit. Thirdly, it is directed more especially to creating industrial enterprises in the public sector.

The question has been asked as to whether it is not possible to expand socialist economic aid on a scale that would enable the African states to transform their backward economies and rule out entirely the resort to investments from imperialist countries or economic "aid schemes". It seems to me there are two aspects to this problem. First, it is obvious that the economic resources of the socialist world (despite its rapid economic growth) are not sufficient to solve the economic problems of the African continent. Secondly, even if this were

possible, if African economic development towards socialism becomes so dependent on outside aid, it would rule out the enormous value gained from the African political experience of struggle to build up their own economic system.

On the first point, on many occasions I have been struck with the facile belief that the socialist countries have unlimited economic resources to place at the disposal of the newly independent states. In practice, this is applied to the Soviet Union, for even China has limited resources for this purpose. Moreover, there is the tendency to forget that in the first decade after the Second World War the Soviet Union extended vast economic aid to China and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, and in the past decade more particularly to Cuba. None of us are in a position to assess fully the enormous sacrifices which the Soviet people have made, not only to build their own socialist system and its defence during the Second World War, but also to assist the rest of the socialist world.

What is amazing after all these sacrifices, is that they are still willing to make even bigger sacrifices to assist non-socialist countries to transform their economies and so raise their living standards. This in itself reveals a high level of political consciousness and sense of international solidarity. If increased economic aid were possible (and some African states are not even willing to accept it) I am sure there would be no hesitation in increasing it.

However, in my view, socialist economic aid cannot possibly become a substitute for the necessary creative economic development in Africa itself, but is mainly a useful supplement to the economic growth which must develop out of African conditions and its present stage of development.

Is there a Choice?

As to whether the African states have a choice of capitalism or socialism, it depends almost entirely on the kind of political leadership which exists. I agree with Ken Post that Africa as a whole is still within the world capitalist sector, but this is only true at different levels in different parts of Africa. In South Africa, Rhodesia, Congo, and to some extent in the Ivory Coast, there is a fairly high level of capitalist development. But in Egypt capitalist development has been retarded, and replaced by striking socialist measures, while in Guinea and Mali there has been extremely little capitalist development.

It is not really a matter of preventing any degree of capitalist development, but rather of deliberately restricting its scope and consciously taking steps to ensure that the growth of the state and co-operative sector of production is far more rapid than the private sector, and ultimately to reduce the private sector to a bare minimum.

From this standpoint the remarks of Michael Harmel were extremely important in relation to the political struggle between the Russian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. As is well known, the Menshevik standpoint was that the growth of capitalism was a pre-condition of the struggle for socialism. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks insisted that the Russian capitalists were no longer a progressive force and could not lead the democratic revolution, and that only an alliance of the workers and peasantry could end the Tsarist regime and lead the way to socialism without the pre-condition of capitalist development.

In other words, in the changed world conditions under imperialism, and the relation of class forces in Tsarist Russia, the alliance of the workers and peasantry would lead the national democratic revolution and transform it into the socialist revolution. That was nearly 50 years ago, and the great advance of socialism in the Soviet Union is the living proof that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were correct.

“European” Marxism

On the third point, whether Marxist ideas in Africa have to be a copy of European Marxism, I have already stressed that the science of Marxism is universal, but that its application will depend on the specific conditions existing in different parts of the world, and on the balance of class forces. Certainly in Europe it is not a matter of by-passing capitalism, since this system has been developed in different parts of Europe for nearly three centuries.

In Europe, it is a struggle to end capitalism and imperialism, to win political power from the hands of the big monopoly firms, and to build socialism. In short, it is the transition from capitalism to socialism. But in Africa it is a matter of cutting short or eliminating the long and painful process of capitalist development (which can only become a bigger obstacle to achieving socialism), and by-passing the full capitalist stage.

There is nothing static about Marxism. It is being enriched with new experiences every day. Its basic principles in Africa will be similar to those in Europe and the rest of the world, but the experience of its application in Africa will be of great value to Marxists everywhere. Far from being a mere extension of “European” Marxism, it will serve to deepen and enrich the knowledge and experience of the whole world Communist movement.

The Communist Parties in Africa are embedded in the national liberation struggle, and converts to Marxism are growing rapidly. They have no need to rely on Marxists outside Africa to solve their problems—though they appreciate the value of close contact and the interchange of Marxist ideas. They represent a new creative political force which will not only find solutions to the problems of the African

Revolution, but will also serve to enrich Marxism on a world scale.

Ban on Communist Parties

It has been argued that it was wrong for Communists in Algeria and Egypt to accept the enforced dissolution of their Parties. This is a difficult and complicated problem, and it is not easy for British Marxists to pronounce judgment. All the more so, because this is something outside our own experience.

At the same time, we need to be clear that Marxists everywhere (including Algeria and Egypt) have always argued the need for a united revolutionary Party in every country, based on Marxist principles. Of the 81 Communist and Workers' Parties in 1960, no less than 20 were illegal. They have waged a heroic struggle in the most difficult conditions and will continue to do so, as did the illegal Communist Parties in Algeria and Egypt.

When the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria and the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) in Egypt presented the Communist Parties with the alternative of remaining illegal, or becoming individual members with full political rights of either the FLN or ASU they were faced with an extremely difficult choice. Both the FLN and the ASU have set the aim of achieving socialism. They each insist upon the principle of a one-party system. Communists are by no means tied to this principle, but advocate instead a united national democratic front embracing all revolutionary forces agreed on a common programme. Unfortunately, this was not acceptable by the ruling parties in Algeria and Egypt.

What were the Communists to do in this situation? They had the choice of carrying on the illegal struggle as an independent revolutionary Party, or becoming individual members within the existing one-party system. If this party had been reactionary and pro-imperialist, the answer would have been quite clear. The Communists would refuse to join and would insist upon their independent Party and their illegal struggle. However, both the FLN and ASU also have the aim of socialism, and Communists are allowed as individuals to express their Marxist standpoint within these parties, and even to occupy key positions—as many of them do at the present time. What they had to consider was whether they could best advance the aims of the socialist revolution by working within a recognised one-party system which set socialism as its aim, or by being still isolated in prisons and detention camps.

For over 40 years since its foundation in 1924, the Communist Party was illegal, with many hundreds

of its members in prison year after year. As a result of the political changes initiated by President Nasser and the ASU after the 1962 National Charter, and the new aim of achieving scientific socialism, all Communist prisoners were released in 1964.

Faced with this changed situation and the choice between political isolation or becoming active within the ASU, an enlarged meeting of the Central Committee of the Egyptian Communist Party in April 1965, decided on the second alternative. At the same time, while accepting its responsibility to join with all revolutionary forces aiming to build socialism in Egypt, it made clear that it did not accept entirely the ideological standpoint of the ASU. In its Manifesto, following this enlarged meeting, the Central Committee pointed out that:

“Divergencies regarding the methods to adopt in order to solve political, economic and social problems may exist and will exist. But despite these factors, one truth emerges: what unites the socialists is by far greater and more important than what divides them.”

The Egyptian Communists were convinced that big advances were being made towards achieving socialism in Egypt, and that this proved that there was more than one road to socialism. But its achievement did not depend entirely on the ASU in its present form, nor in the separate existence of the Communist Party. The main condition was the unity of all revolutionary forces into a vanguard party combining both of them:

“This is why the Egyptian Communist Party considers that the Egyptian road to socialism demands the gathering together and unification of all the revolutionary forces wanting to achieve socialism, into a single vanguard revolutionary party. This party will not be the Communist Party, and . . . the question of a revolutionary vanguard party which does not conform to the classical framework of the Communist Party is posed in a number of countries”.

One may agree or disagree with this perspective, but what is clearly obvious is that the Egyptian Communists have not tied themselves to rigid formulas (much less to the methods of “European” Marxists) and are striving to apply Marxism in a creative way in light of the actual situation in Egypt and the relation of class forces.

It may well be that the advance towards socialism in many African countries will not involve the formation of Communist Parties on the European model, for the relation of class forces is very different from Europe. Africa's revolutionary vanguard (both Marxist and non-Marxist together) will map out their own path to socialism. Marxists in Britain cannot choose this path for them. Their responsibility is to organise all forms of solidarity to assist them to advance along the path they have chosen.