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# Ethiopian Marxist Review

published quarterly by the **C.P.R.P.**

- On the Modes of Production in Ethiopia
- Some Aspects of the Debate on the Proletarian Party
- The Struggle for Democracy in Africa
- Socialist Dissent in the East
- African Unity and National Self-Determination
- From the Classics: Marx/Engels
- Reviews of Books on Post-1974 Ethiopia

**No1**

**august 1980**

The Ethiopian Marxist Review is published by the **Study, Publications and Information Center (SPIC)** of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party.

The positions and views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the EPRP.  
Annual Subscription Rate: US \$ 18.000 or equivalent.

For African students: US \$ 12.00.

Price per copy:

U.S.A. \$ 6 - FRG-DM 12

France - FF 25

Italy - 3.000 lire

Britain - £ 1.50

Holland - 15

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## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	1
ARTICLES	
Negatu Alemu: On the Modes of Production in Ethiopia	7
Tsigereda Aklilu: Some Aspects of the Debate on the Proletarian Party	43
Gitwen F.: The Struggle for Democracy in Africa	82
COMMENTS	
B. Zelalem: Socialist Political Opposition in the East	95
Itafu Ali: African Unity and National Self-Determination	101
FROM THE CLASSICS	
Marx & Engels: Excerpt from « The German Ideology »	104
BOOK REVIEWS	
Mulugeta Osman: Review of books on post-1974 Ethiopia	109
Gemechu Tena: On B. Zegeye's article on « Leftist Juntas »	118

## Editorial

Theory becomes a force when it grips the masses, said Marx. The relevance and the problematic of theory appears in its link with practice. Integration of the revolutionary theory, i.e. scientific socialism, with the struggle of the masses is projected not only in an organizational form but also in the realm of a program, of tactics and strategy, and in the field of concrete practice. It is within this context that it is possible to discern the qualitative difference which exists between a run-of-the-mill jacquerie and a basically revolutionary movement, which, while realizing that the struggle cannot proceed according to an immutable blue-print, nonetheless, knows its objectives and the overall ways of realizing these aims. Outside of the concrete struggle of the masses, theory risks becoming puerile, and since it remains untested by practice its veracity cannot be ascertained. The dialectical relationship between theory and practice gives the former the function of guiding the latter—a revolutionary struggle has to be guided by a scientific theory.

In Ethiopia, the severance of the dialectical relationship between theory and practice has been demonstrated by the weakness of the focus on theory and its weak integration with the struggle of the masses. As a consequence the decades-long peasant uprisings remained localized both geographically and politically, their challenge to the system was not posed in a coherent and conscious manner. Thus, if the Ethiopian Left did call these struggles (in many cases against an aspect of feudalism and not against feudalism as a system e.x. rebellions in Bale and Gojjam) « revolutionary uprisings », their attack was not at all directed against the basis of the system. The ideological premises and references of the rebels were not radically different from that of the ruling class, their organizational level was weak, they had no program of action. It is not accidental that even in Eritrea where the level of social development could be considered relatively higher than other areas in the Empire state, the nationalist organization aged an armed struggle for some eleven years before it defined its objectives via a political program.

The issue is definitely linked to the level of class struggle and social

development. The fact that Ethiopia was ruled by a particularly retrograde band of feudalists and comprador elements cannot be underemphasised. The intense exploitation and oppression led to spontaneous and unsuccessful explosions on the part of the peasant masses. And though the first worker strikes occurred in the late '40s, the workers' movement, violently repressed by the imperial government, did not (could not) develop beyond the level of trade union consciousness. The intellectuals who, according to Lenin, are the ones to introduce socialist consciousness into the workers' movement, were, not only infinitesimal but were themselves political virgins as far as socialist thought was concerned. It was only in the mid-'60s that Ethiopian intellectuals started, in greater numbers, to grapple with socialist thought and to foreword an analysis which, if not fully scientific, at least manifested their discarding of the «constitutional-monarchist» and «populist» illusions they had adhered to in the late fifties and early '60s.

«Marxism in Ethiopia» is by itself a wide subject worthy of a detailed treatment, but, for the purpose of introducing the EMR, it suffices to point out that the historical and concrete situation in the country, the process of the country's integration into the world capitalist system, put an indelible stamp on it. The carriers of socialist consciousness into the ranks of the workers were themselves burdened by the influence of the historical past and the feudal present. Ethiopia had no political culture in the bourgeois or revolutionary sense of the term, political parties were totally unknown (the EPRP, formed in 1972, became the first party ever in the country), traditions of a democratic political process (elections, debates, dissent, etc) were practically non-existent. The traditions of the militarist feudal ruling class scorned at notions of democracy, rejected tolerance, demanded absolute conformity, castigated even the slightest tendency to entertain different views or opinions. Force had precedence over persuasions, speedy action, preferably violent, was favoured as the method for the settlement of differences. Feudal Ethiopia had virtually no philosophers and scorned at the pursuit of science and theory.

The Marxist formation of the Ethiopian intellectual has to be viewed in light of the weight of such traditions and the overall low level of socio-economic and politico-cultural development which prevailed. In addition, the contradictions within the country were so acute and the oppression of the masses so glaringly striking, the formation of the Ethiopian Marxist intellectual has been pushed to exhibit a certain «practical» bent. This was also affected by the prevailing international tendency of the 1968 period within the international Left — a rebelliousness against established dogma of the traditional parties coupled by a high degree of infantilism and adoption of simplicist recipe-like solutions to complex problems of the revolution. Ethiopian intellectuals, in their majority, came to Marxism not via the Marx of *CAPITAL* or the Lenin of «*Empiro-criticism...*» but via the latter's *What is to be Done?* and

*Two Tactics*. Mao's writings on guerrilla warfare assumed more relevance than the classical writings on Marxist philosophy, the problems of transition to socialism, etc... The search for practical and immediate answers to politico-organizational problems led to a one-sided theoretical development, and this state of affairs lies at the root of the infantilism and dogmatism that is still being manifested by a section of the Ethiopian «Left». The absence of a balanced theoretical development and the lack of a tradition of ideological debates and struggles within a united framework has lent to political controversies the consequence of sterile polemics and inevitable splits.

The 1974 February Revolution not only brought the proletariat to the forefront of the revolutionary struggle, but it also demonstrated in a vivid way the limitations of the slogans and programs of the Left until then. The incapacity of the Left to come out of the trap of formalism, of clichés and slogans was made clear by the revolutionary struggle which surpassed the expectations of the revolutionary intellectuals themselves. The facility with which the ruling junta appropriated the slogans of the Left also showed the limitations of the slogans themselves. The complex features of post-1974 Ethiopia and the incapacity of old clichés and formulas to give a coherent analysis of the situations and the contradictions in the society led to a disarray in the Left. A section of the Left revealed itself as a collaborator of the bourgeoisie in power and with this lost all claims to being part of the revolutionary Left. Some others were frustrated by the absence of simple solutions to the complex local and international situation. And since habits, traditions and dogmas never die an easy death, quite a few are still stuck with their old conceptions trying doggedly to turn and twist the changed situation to fit their antiquated mold.

The EPRP, on its part, has attempted, whatever may be the verdict on the results, to grasp the key of the process and the crux of the changed situation and to deal with this in a scientific and programmatic manner. To the question of the link between theory and practice, although tradition could only push it to show a bent towards the latter, it has tried to respond by giving theory its rightful place. The insistence on the study of Marxist theory in a living manner and the setting-up of study groups and the publication of internal and public theoretical papers are steps undertaken by the Party in this direction. The birth of the EMR, delayed by circumstances for quite a few years, owes its rationale to this preoccupation.

The Ethiopian Marxist Review was planned to be published some five years ago; and political as well as technical problems are responsible for the delay. However, the aims and purpose of the EMR remain unchanged. By publishing it, the EPRP aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. To inform the international Marxist and Revolutionary forces

about the basic political questions of the Ethiopian Revolution and as to how the Ethiopian Left approaches and analyses these questions.

The EMR will be a theoretical platform for Ethiopian Marxists, whatever their group affiliations, to deepen and develop the theoretical discussion about problems of the revolution. In this way, the EMR will give voice to those who have been denied one by the number of scribes who have been writing superficial and grotesque theses about the Ethiopian Revolution.

2. To serve as a platform for Marxists from Africa and other continents, for the discussion of theoretical questions which are relevant to the working class and popular struggles at the international level.

The struggle of the Ethiopian proletariat is an intrinsic part of the international working class struggle and the victory of socialism cannot be viewed or envisaged apart from such a victory at the international level. As Marx and Engels put it in the MANIFESTO, the struggle of the proletariat is national only in form.

The EMR can succeed in realizing its objectives only with the support, the all-round support, of Marxists from all places. And it seems fitting to us to conclude by calling for such an active support from communists, for, the EMR, though published by the EPRP, belongs to all of them, to all of you.

## ARTICLES

### On the Modes of Production in Ethiopia

*Negatu Alemu*

The identification of the dominant mode of production within the Ethiopian social-formation, in which various forms or modes of production exist, has been hampered by an incorrect formulation of the question and by a schematic bent on the part of the country's Left. A strict adherence to the classical unilinear schema which attributes to social development a rigid chronological, *de rigueur*, stage of development — primitive communal, slavery, feudal, capitalist etc. — manifested, albeit implicitly it can be argued, in the characterization of the pre-1974 Ethiopia as feudal and the post-1974 one as capitalist, has militated against the correct analysis and understanding of the contradictions within the social formation, the unevenly developing relationship between the various modes, and above all, the specific features of the articulation of these modes in the Ethiopian context. Within the almost-canonized characterization of Ethiopia as « semi-feudal », by the various tendencies within the Left, the crucial problems of analysing the society remained untouched.

The problem was not, and still is not, one of pigeon-holing the concrete within a predetermined mould. The labels such as « feudal » and « capitalist », critically important although at the level of revolutionary practice, can have meaning only if they stem from a scientific analysis of the stage of the division of labour in the society, the economic forms in which unpaid surplus labour is extracted from the direct producers, and the degree of articulation of each mode within the social formation. As Marx explained, « the different forms of the division of labour became so many bases of social organization, and this division of labour proceeds according to fixed rules which themselves arise from the conditions of production »<sup>1</sup>. In other words, one does not arrive at the exploitative or oppressive conditions which exist by inferring this from the nature of the State (« the Ethiopian military junta is reactionary and thus its economic policies are reactionary ») but by analysing primarily the production relations themselves. The state is but:

« an organization of the exploiting class at each period for the

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, « *The Poverty of Philosophy* », International Publishers New York, 1971, page 135.

maintenance of its external conditions of production; that is, therefore, for the forcible holding down of the exploited class in the conditions of oppression (slavery, villeinage or serfdom, wage labour) determined by the existing mode of production»<sup>2</sup>.

And the mode of production is made up of the forces of production and thereby its social productivity — which reveals the 'innermost secret' structure combining to determine the socio-economic formation), the form taken at a particular stage of social development. In the words of Marx:

« It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers — a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the developments of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity — which reveals the 'innermost secret', the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state »<sup>3</sup>.

In analysing this basic relationship and the overall development of society, Marx and Engels did not establish a rigid schema, despite the fact that the classical unilinear schema of the stages of social development, which was given the sanctity of an immutable law by the CPSU in the 1930s, traces its origin to « The German Ideology » and « The Communist Manifesto ». Their conception of history did not attribute to it a function irrespective of man - « History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, it wages no battles. It is man, real living man that does all that, that possesses and fights; history is not a person apart, using man as a means for its own particular aims; history is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his aims »<sup>4</sup>.

History being the activity of man, social development cannot be unilinear. Furthermore, « the summing-up of the most general results (and) the abstractions which arise from the observation of the historical development of men have no value whatsoever if viewed apart from history », i.e. apart from the activity of man pursuing his aims. In fact the same Marx who foreworded the concept of « an Asiatic mode of production » (declared non-existent by official dogma in the USSR of the 1930s) and who wrote of « a patriarchal system, a caste system, a feudal and corporative system », (in *The poverty of philosophy*)<sup>5</sup>, took the pain to warn that even in the same economic basis — « the same from the standpoint of its main conditions » — there can be « infinite variations and graduations in appearance » — due to a wide variety of factors (natural environment, historical influences, etc) — which can be ascertained only by an analysis of the empirically given circumstances<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels: « *Anti-Duhring: Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science* », Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 321.

<sup>3</sup> K. Marx « *Capital* », Vol. III, Lawrence & Wishart. London, 1974, pp. 791-2.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx: & F. Engels: « *The Holy Family* », FLPH, Moscow, 1956, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> K. Marx, « *The Poverty of Philosophy* », *ibid*, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> K. Marx, « *Capital* », vol. III, *ibid*, p. 792.

Hence, the argument that Ethiopia must *either* be feudal or capitalist (the semi-feudal argument takes this also as its premise) is, if not undialectical, at least a wrong way of putting the question. The same can be said about the analysis which wants to plaster the concept of the asiatic mode on African societies<sup>7</sup> or to define pre-capitalist societies as essentially capitalist ones on the grounds of an existence of a worldwide capitalist system (the periphery-metropole school). In all cases, even in the cases where the unilinear schema has been « rejected », the tendency is to fit the formation within a particular « mode » without clearly tackling the « empirically given circumstances », the different forms of the division labour and the corresponding social organizational forms; in short, without investigating the « specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers ». Hence, even in the analysis which claim to start from the economic basis one finds the visible proof of inference from the political to the economic. That a general definition of feudalism that takes as its starting model England or France has been grafted on the Ethiopian reality is another side of the picture.

In the literature of the Ethiopian Left, at least the majority, one finds not only the « political approach » (the class in power is not the proletariat, therefore... etc) but also remarks the absence of an analysis of what has been called « feudalism » in Ethiopia. Leaving aside the flimsy and untenable attempt by some writers like Markakis<sup>8</sup> (« polity », « traditional social structure ») and Ståhl<sup>9</sup> « a tributary mode production » — thus denying that rent and tribute are NOT identical and that even under the feudal mode tributary forms of surplus appropriation exist), specific features of the articulation of the feudal mode in Ethiopia as compared to the classic one (in peasant — landowner or vassal — baron relations, in the relations between political power and ownership of land, etc.) have not been sufficiently dealt with. This has also led to a rather mechanical equation of the appearance of commercial farms or money rent with the development of capitalism and the disintegration of feudalism. The presently widespread view that the land nationalisation measure in Ethiopia will bring about capital accumulation and industrial development (thus making capitalism or socialism dominant — the choice depends on the political colour of the writer, i.e. whether he supports the regime's socialist pretensions or sees in the regime's measures a dri-

<sup>7</sup> See the articles by Maurice Godelier, Jean Chesneaux and Jean Suret-Canale in « *Sur le "mode de production asiatique"* », (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes, Editions Sociales Paris, 1969).

For a general presentation of the controversy over the question of the asiatic mode of production, see Gianni Sofri, « *The asiatic mode of production* » (in Italian, Einaudi Edition, Torino, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> John Markakis: « *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* », Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Ståhl: « *Ethiopia: Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development* », Uppsala, Political Science Association, 1974.

ve towards capitalism) is also another manifestation of this mechanical approach deducing the concrete from the general theoretical abstractions.

That the category of feudalism is applicable to the study of the Ethiopian formation is indisputable. But in dealing with what can be called Ethiopian feudalism, we make no automatic reference to the existence of serfdom (which, contrary to the assertion of many within the Ethiopian Left, is not a peculiarly medieval-feudal form)<sup>10</sup>, nor do we equate it with the classical definition and the mechanisms of reproduction it exhibited in feudal England or France. The feudal or, in many cases, generally pre-capitalist basis of the formation can be arrived from an examination of the relationship between the owners of the conditions of production and the direct producers. Within the general condition of what can be broadly termed feudalism, the articulation of this mode varied from North to South and even from province to province. The land holding system in the North basically lay on what was known as *rist*, generally land that is owned by an extended family, hereditary but non-saleable, and in fief-like imperial grants known as *Gult*, while in the south, many areas of which were occupied by Menilik in a clear military feudal conquest<sup>11</sup>, the method of land appropriation (forceful occupation of the lands of different nationalities) and the epoch it occurred in (the late 19th. century) put an indelible stamp on the features of the relationship between the owners and the direct producers. Two-thirds of the land was taken by the state (to be distributed as *gult* or to remain as state or *mengistland*) while the remaining one-third, *siso*, was divided between the local peasants and their traditional leaders, the division favouring the latter in most cases<sup>12</sup>. The peasant in the south did not have any of the protections associated with *rist* (however feeble they may be), they lost all rights on the land, and as was clearly ascertained in the mid-50s, they became virtual tenants. The relation between the landlords and the peasantry was not mitigated by kinship ties, traditional and customary laws mediating the basic exploitative relations as was the case in the North, where every *Gult* owner was also a *rist* owner (*ristegna*), i.e. a member of an extended kinship system, here the social barrier did not necessarily base itself on economic, nationality and cultural differences (in Tigray and other areas in the north, the lowest ranks of the aristocracy and the clergy were

<sup>10</sup> See Engels' letter to Marx on Dec. 22, 1882, in Marx/Engels: Correspondence, 1846-1895, pp. 411-412.

<sup>11</sup> The Hungarian historian Endre Sik, in his three-volume book, «*The History of Black Africa*» forewords the untenable theses that Menilik's expansion to the South was spurred by the Abyssinian «emergent commercial bourgeoisie». This incapacity of Sik to grasp what was basically a feudal conquest is presently manifested and extended by certain nationalist groups in southern Ethiopia who write, profusely and unscientifically, about «Ethiopian colonialism».

See also Engels' «*The Peasant War in Germany*», Progress Publishers, Moscow 1974, p. 180.

<sup>12</sup> Since 1966, the main form of private tenure of land has more or less become the *gebbar* tenure instead of *siso gult* and *rist gult*. In the South, where the

not economically in any way better off than the peasant masses among whom they lived). The effect of the different situation in the two regions vis a vis peasant-landlord relations and the peasant-land relations (though not social, the latter is undeniably important) had its effect on the intensity of the class struggle and the acceleration of the weakening of the dominant mode itself<sup>13</sup>.

However, in all the cases, the two fundamental classes confronting one another were the landowners and the peasants, and whether the peasant had «possession» of the means of production and the «labour conditions necessary for the production of his own means of subsistence»

*gebbar* system dominated, the extent of absentee ownership (many of those who hold *gebbar* tenure being absentee owners) was as follows:

*Extent of absentee ownership in private tenure areas*

Province	Absentee owners as percentage of total owner %	Percentage of total owned area held by absentee owners % Measured land	Unmeasured land
Arussi	28	27	—
Bale	15	12	—
Gemu Goffa	10	42	8
Harargue	23	48	—
Illubabor	42	42	—
Keffa	18	34	16
Shoa	35	45	22
Sidamo	25	42	5
Wollega	29	28	—
Wollo	26	13	27

Source: Ethiopia, Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, *Report on Land Tenure Survey of Arussi, Bali, Gemu Gofa, Hararghe, Illubabor, Kefa, Shewa, Sidamo, Wellega and Welo* (Addis Abeba: Department of Land Tenure, 1967-1970).

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed treatment of the various kinds of land tenure in Ethiopia, see the following:

— John M. Cohen & Dov Weintraub: «*Land and Peasant in Imperial Ethiopia: The Social Background to a Revolution*», Van Gorcum & Co., Netherlands, 1975.

— Berhanou Abebe, «*Évolution de la Propriété Foncière au Choa (Ethiopia) - Du Règne de Ménélik à la Constitution de 1931*», (Paris, 1971).

— Allan Hoben, «*Land Tenure Among the Amhara of Ethiopia: The Dynamics of cognatic Descent*», (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1973).

— G. W. Ingda-Work, «*Ethiopia's Traditional System of Land Tenure and Taxation*», (Ethiopia Observer, V, 4, pp. 302-339).

— Ethiopia Ministry of Land Tenure and Administration, «*Report on Land Tenure Survey of Arussi, Begemdir, Bale, Keffa, Shoa, Sidamo, Tigre, Illubabor, Gemu Gofa, Eritrea, Wollo*», (Addis Abeba).

— Richard Pankhurst, «*State and Land in Ethiopian History*», (Addis Abeba, 1966).

— E. Westphael, «*Agricultural Systems in Ethiopia*», (Wageningen, 1975).

or had « no right to the land », the direct relationship between the landlord and the peasant, a relationship which was the base of the property relationship, was one based on exploitation. The appropriation of the unpaid surplus labour by the landlord took different forms, but, despite the relatively increased spread of money-rent (which had appeared even during the time of Emperor Menilik), the surplus appropriation maintained a basically precapitalist form. Labour rent, though abolished by law, in the early '40s, continued well up to the 1960s. This, which is ground rent in its simplest form and which shows the low level of the development of the feudal mode, took the form of not only labouring on the landlord's land without pay but also meant working on the government's land (*budad*), the produce from which was sent to the granary of the palace. Thus, it is a specific feature of the Ethiopian situation that the state, even though it did not, like in the Asian mode, stand directly over the producers « simultaneously both as a landlord and sovereign », did, nonetheless, pump out surplus value from the peasants, as in the case of labour rent, rent and surplus value are identical<sup>14</sup>. The peasant's conditions of bondage, the absence of personal freedom and his being tied to the soil as its accessory, are requisites of this condition which amply existed in Ethiopia. As Marx explained, in such conditions as where the peasant could be said to be in « possession » of his means of production and the necessary material labour conditions required for the productions of his means of subsistence, the appropriation of the surplus of nominal owners could be realized only by « extra-economic » means<sup>15</sup>. In Ethiopia, this took the form of stationing soldiers in the houses of peasants, assigning a government agent (*mislene*) to make sure that the labour rent obligation is fulfilled and taking other punitive measures.

An overview of pre-1974 Ethiopia shows, however, that the dominating form of surplus appropriation from the peasant took the form of rent in kind. The preponderance of this form did not, however, put an end to the earlier forms of ground rent — labour rent, corevee labour — paid to the landlord or the state. The transformation to rent in kind, even if it meant that surplus production depended on the field of production actually owned by the producer and not on the land of the landlord, did not imply, at the level of the mode of production, a basic change. « From the economic standpoint of the nature of ground rent, there is no change »<sup>16</sup>. In Ethiopia, rent in kind did not include products of the rural home industry (as was the case in Europe of the Middle Ages) but was based on and payable in the form of the products of the land. In its pure form, rent in kind, as compared with labour rent, gives the producer more action to gain time for surplus-labour whose product shall belong to himself, as well as the product of his labour which satisfies

<sup>14</sup> K. Marx, « *Capital* » vol. III, op. cit., p. 790.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 791.

<sup>16</sup> K. Marx, « *Capital* », vol. III, ibid, p. 794.

his indispensable needs<sup>17</sup>. But in the actual context, where the usage of oxen and increased yield practically led to the increment of rent, the peasant was not motivated to exhaust his surplus labour. The economy remained a subsistence one, a natural economy, i.e. « the conditions of the economy being wholly or to the greater part reproduced by the economy itself, directly replaced and reproduced out of its gross product »<sup>18</sup>. The peasant, by paying one tenth of his produce (*asrat*) to the landlord, actually paid the land tax to the government as the amount paid by the landlord to the government as tax in lieu of tithe was considerably less (or in many cases nil, as the landlords paid no tax) than the *asrat*. In 1967, though a government legislation more or less abolished tax in lieu of tithe, the payment of *asrat* continued as the landlords tied to the central state forced the powerless peasants to pay. Increased production on the part of the peasant also meant possible termination of his tenancy by the action of the landlord who may be prompted to seek favourable rent terms with other tenants. Hence, the differentiation in the economic position of the peasants arose less from the existence of rent in kind as from the *gult* system, from the high rate of absentee landlordism and the introduction of mechanized farming, and the parcellation of land that was proliferating.

In dealing with the question of the mode of production, many Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian writers, have put an emphasis on two points in order to show « the disintegration of feudalism and the rise of capitalism », even though this rise was not equated with the development of an « independent » capitalism by the dependent Ethiopian bourgeoisie. The two points are: the spread of money rent and the introduction of commercial farms/mechanized agriculture into the countryside. These factors, added to the existence of a small, foreign controlled, industrial sector are said to give Ethiopia its semi-capitalist feature. The characterization of Ethiopia of the 1960-1970s as a transitional formation takes more or less the early 1950s as a watershed, as it is in this period that the state issued legislations inviting foreign capital on extremely advantageous grounds (no taxes for the first five years, repatriation of profit, etc)<sup>19</sup>.

The kernel of the conditions leading to what is called a transitional formation is not to be found simply within the dynamics of the development of the dominant feudal mode<sup>20</sup>. The transformation of rent in kind to

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 795.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The *Statement of Policy for the Encouragement of Foreign Capital Investment in Ethiopia*, whose generous terms were reiterated in the mid-'60s, also allowed the complete withdrawal of invested capital as well as customs-free importation of machinery.

<sup>20</sup> In using the term « dissolution » or « transition » we do not imply a mechanical evolution of capitalism from feudalism. Capitalism can exist together with pre-capitalist forms. At the same time, as the alliance between feudalism and imperialism in Ethiopia showed, the process of capitalist development manifests its contradictory nature by the dissolution and restoration of the previous mode. In

money rent was not only sporadic but also not as widespread as it is believed to be. (see Table 1 and 2). In fact the 1973 draft of the tenancy Bill had no provision making money rent standard while it, on the contrary, allowed sharecropping and gave the landlord the right to take 50% of the crop produced by the tenant. Money-rent, wherever it appeared, was no more than a changed form of rent in kind. It was combined with and adulterated by the prevailing practice of rent in kind and labour rent. In the absence of a development in social productivity and with the tenure system militating against increased productivity initiatives on the part of the peasantry, money rent could not develop either to the transformation of the land into the peasants' freehold or to capitalist form of rent i.e. rent paid by capitalist farmers.

Despite the formal abolition of *rist-gult* and *gult* privileges, the landlord continued to collect taxes and other dues from the peasantry, who, in addition, had to pay to the state education and health taxes. Marx said:

« the transformation of rent in kind to money rent... presupposes a considerable development of commerce, of urban industry and of commodity production in general, and thereby of money circulation. It furthermore assumes a market price for products, and that they be sold at prices roughly approximating their values »<sup>21</sup>.

Though commerce and urban industry were present, their stage of development in Ethiopia was very low. Money rent was thus hardly the norm and it did not represent any excess over profit. In 1967, for example, the total agricultural GDP was Eth. \$ 1,621 million and of this Eth. \$ 1,249 million was non-monetary. In 1969, per capita income in the urban sector was estimated to be Eth. \$ 680 per annum, of which 649 was monetary income, while in the rural areas, at the same time, per-capita income per annum was estimated at Eth. \$ 109, of which only 35 was monetary income<sup>22</sup>. While the tax burden on the peasant was admittedly onerous, government revenue from direct taxation in agriculture remained negligible in relations to the agricultural contribution to the GDP (some 60%). /see Table 3/

Therefore, while the increase in the circulation of money and the progressive dominance of money-rent could be speculated or projected (and this despite the 1973 draft tenancy Bill), the reality of pre-1974 Ethiopia, admittedly different from that of the 1940-1950 one, did not

other words, capitalism undermines feudalism while at the sametime also conserving it. The process is contradictory.

For further comments on this, see:

Charles Bettelheim, « *Theoretical Comments* », Appendix I, in Arghiri Emmanuel, « *Unequal Exchange* », (London, pp. 297-298).

Nicos Poulantzas, « *Internationalization of capitalist relations and the nation-state* », in *Economy and Society*, Vol. III, No. 2, May 1974.

<sup>21</sup> K. Marx, « *Capital* », vol. III, *ibid*, p. 797.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, by Nega Ayele & John Markakis (Spokesman publications, R.A.P.E., London, 1978), p. 55.

Table 1 - Distribution of tenancies in private tenure areas according to mode of payment of rent

Province	Mode of payment			
	In Crop	In Cash	In Crop and Cash	Labor/and/or Service
Arussi	92	7	1	—
Begemder	66	30	3	1
Gemu Coffa	15	70	5	10
Gojjam	70	24	2	4
Hararge	47	42	11	—
Illubabor	25	66	9	—
Keffa	31	64	5	—
Shoa	82	15	3	—
Sidamo	12	84	4	—
Tigre	90	5	5	—
Wollega	37	48	12	3
Wollo	84	9	6	3

Source: Ethiopia, Central Statistical Office, *National Survey Sample of Arussi, Begemdir, Gemu Gofa, Gojam, Hararge, Illubabor, Kefa, Shewa, Sidamo, Tigre, Wellega and Welo* (Addis Ababa: Central Statistical Office, 1963-1967).

Note: Bale and Eritrea were not included in the National Sample Survey.

Table 2 - Distribution of tenancies according to mode of rent payment and share of crop in six plow culture sample areas

Area	Rent as share of produce						Unknown %
	Cash rent %	Fixed rent in kind %	1/4 %	1/3 %	2/5 %	1/2 %	
Chore (Shoa)	4	—	—	88	—	8	—
Ada (Shoa)	5	5	—	65	1	24	—
Tabor (Sidamo)	92	—	—	—	—	8	—
Worago (Sidamo)	60	9	2	21	—	4	4
Nolekaba (Wollega)	21	41	4	2	—	3	7
Seka (Keffa)	35	11	—	—	—	21	23

Source: Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, *Reports on Land Tenure Survey of Kefa, Shewa, Sidamo and Wellega* (Addis Abeba: Department of Land Tenure, 1967-1970).

Table 3 - Direct taxes<sup>1</sup> on agriculture, 1964/65 - 1970/71  
 Table 1 - Direct taxes<sup>1</sup> on agriculture, 1964/65 - 1970/71  
 (In million Eth)

	1964 1965	1965 1966	1966 1967	1967 1968	1968 1969	1969 1970	1970 1971
Land Tax <sup>2</sup>	5.6	5.9	6.3	5.7	5.8	6.2	5.8
Tith <sup>3</sup>	10.3	10.5	10.6	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.6
Education Tax <sup>4</sup>	4.9	5.0	4.9	4.3	5.0	5.3	5.2
Health Tax <sup>4</sup>	5.4	5.5	5.5	5.0	5.6	6.2	6.2
Cattle Tax	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.5
Agricultural Income Tax <sup>5</sup>	—	—	—	6.9	11.8	15.3	13.6
Sub-Total: Direct Taxes	26.5	27.2	27.5	23.8	30.4	35.2	32.9
Export Duties <sup>6</sup>	28.0	20.1	21.6	21.1	19.0	34.0	31.0
Transaction Tax on Exports	5.4	4.5	5.2	4.7	4.5	5.4	5.4
Sub-Total: Export Taxes	33.4	24.6	26.8	25.8	23.5	39.4	36.4
Total Direct Agricultural Taxes	59.9	51.8	54.3	49.6	53.9	74.6	69.3
Total Direct Tax Revenues <sup>7</sup>	59.1	63.2	77.1	76.6	97.7	102.3	116.4
Total Tax Revenues <sup>8</sup>	265.4	290.0	313.5	314.8	337.2	376.2	410.6
Value Added in Agriculture <sup>9</sup>	1,769.2	1,927.8	1,946.2	—	—	—	—
Gross Domestic Product <sup>9</sup>	3,188.5	3,489.5	3,597.0	3,717.5	3,958.5	—	—
Direct Agricultural Taxes as Percent of Direct Tax Revenues	44.8	43.0	35.6	31.0	31.1	34.4	28.2
Direct Agricultural Taxes as Percent of Total Tax Revenues	22.5	17.8	17.3	15.7	15.9	19.8	16.8
Direct Agricultural Taxes as Percent of Value Added in Agriculture	3.3	2.6	2.7	—	—	—	—
Direct Agricultural Taxes as Percent of Gross Domestic Product	1.9	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.4	—	—

<sup>1</sup> Export taxes are considered direct taxes for purposes of this table.

<sup>2</sup> Land tax includes the land tax arrears and fines.

<sup>3</sup> Tith was abolished in principle and substituted by agricultural income tax in 1967/63.

<sup>4</sup> This is only an estimate of the agricultural sector's contribution to this tax.

<sup>5</sup> This tax was levied for the first time in 1967/68.

<sup>6</sup> This includes largely the export duties on coffee (including surcharge), hides and skins and other export duties.

<sup>7</sup> This consists of primarily the income tax and land taxes.

<sup>8</sup> This excludes the revenues from state property and other non-tax revenues.

<sup>9</sup> The fiscal year estimates here represent simply the average of two calendar year estimates. The Ethiopian fiscal year runs between July 8 to July 7.

Source: *Final Accounts of the Budgets (Annual) of the Imperial Ethiopian Government*, Ministry of Finance.

show the prevalence of money-rent. The relationship between the landlord and the peasant did not turn into full « money-relationship fixed contractually by the rules of positive law ». The small size and fragmentation of holdings (95 per cent of the holdings estimated at three hectares or less) and the increased rent on land impeded the peasantry from assuming complete ownership of the land « by buying off his rent obligations ». The capitalist tenant farmer did not emerge from this situation. While the transformation of rent in kind to money rent is deemed to be inevitably accompanied by the formation of a class of property-less day-labourers<sup>23</sup>, in the concrete context of Ethiopia this did not happen in a significant manner. The cause could be traced to the fact that money-rent did not predominate, but it is also true that reasons linked to the peasant attitudes towards land and mobility (itself an attitude conditioned by the dominant ideology) are equally important. Evicted tenants in the south settled on nearby lands and did not emigrate in greater numbers to the cities or plantations. In fact, the daily labourers and migrant workers to the Setit-Humera mechanized farms (in Gondar) came mainly from Tigray, Wollo and Gondar, i.e. from areas where the *rist* type of holding dominated and where rent in kind was prevalent<sup>24</sup>. Thus, the overall picture shows the peasant tied to the soil in one way or another, under a relation of personal dependence vis a vis the landlord (where purely military state of subordination existed this relation was strong)<sup>25</sup>, basically producing for subsistence « as an isolated labourer with his family ». Therefore, the relatively low price of agricultural products in pre-1974 Ethiopia was « a result of the peasant producers poverty and by no means of their labour productivity ».

The introduction of capital into agriculture was sporadic and took certain particular features in Ethiopia. To begin with, the commercial or mechanized farms were in their majority controlled by foreign capital and the government, even though the government took little initiative on its part towards agricultural development (from 1963-1973 agriculture was allotted only 4.2 per cent of the combined ordinary and capital expenditure of the state). While there were a few private commercial farms, and these, in the majority of cases, on government land, the main feature of the introduction of capitalism into agriculture was via agro-industrial enterprises set-up by the state and foreign capital.

The main area of plantation agriculture was the Awash Valley. In 1954, the government evicted Oromo pastoralist peasants and handed over their fertile land, for a nominal rent, to the Dutch firm HVA (Handels Verenigings Amsterdam) which started sugar cane plantation. High tariff on imported sugar and a monopoly on the internal market, together

<sup>23</sup> Marx, « *Capital* », vol. III, *ibid*, pp. 798-799.

<sup>24</sup> This itself indicates the illusory nature of the so-called « communal » nature of the holdings in the North.

<sup>25</sup> See Marx, « *Grundrisse-Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* », Penguin Books, England, 1977, pp. 163-165.

with tax exemptions enabled the HVA to reap and export huge profits. The labour force on the plantation was brutally suppressed and exploited, and the regime, ever ready to please foreign capital, had even stationed a police contingent (company strength) on the plantation area. In 1962, the government set-up the Awash Valley Authority to attract more foreign capital in the commercial agriculture endeavour in the Valley. Thus, the land abandoned by the Afar pastoralists (as a result of eviction or migration) was taken over for cotton plantation by the Tendaho Plantation Share Company, a subsidiary of the British Mitchell Cotts Group. By 1973, some 65,000 hectares were under cultivation.

The expansion of commercial agriculture in the Awash Valley led to the impoverishment of the local population. The Afar people, in their majority nomads and pastoralists, were evicted from their land, denied grazing area and forced to concentrate on a reduced area. Aside from the Afars, the Kereyu and Ittu Oromo groups were also evicted from their villages. That there was increased productivity in the Valley is indisputable — the total value of production passed Eth. \$ 90 million in 1969-1970. However, certain important points need to be raised in order to understand the significance of the whole venture.

Primarily the beneficiaries of the whole project were mainly foreign companies. HVA controlled 22% of the cultivated hectares while Tendaho owned some 17%. The big units, controlled by foreigners, accounted for 86 per cent of the total value of production from commercial agriculture in the Valley<sup>26</sup>. This implies that the spread of commercial agriculture in the Valley, despite the benefits derived from it by the comprador and bureaucratic middle men in the state machinery, was neither the work of nor did it lead to the emergence of Ethiopian capitalist farmers.

Secondly, the entry of the Afar Sultan of Awsa, Ali Mirah, and other Afar chiefs into the field of plantation agriculture needs a comment. Sultan Ali Mirah controlled some 29 per cent of the farm land and, together with other chiefs and relatives, he started plantation of cotton like the foreign firms. The Afar pastoralists, evicted from their grazing land, were forced to work with meagre or no pay, and impoverished peasants from the highlands also came to work as sharecroppers. Increase in the price of cotton in the early 1970s led to the amassing of huge profits by the Sultan and the chiefs. The money thus obtained was not invested in further agricultural or industrial ventures but was mainly hoarded or used for conspicuous and luxurious expenditures in the cities. This is by no means to suggest that the introduction of plantation agriculture in what was essentially a feudal area led to no class differentiations. While it is true that the whole project in the Valley benefitted primarily foreign capital and led to the outflow of capital from the country, it also led to

<sup>26</sup> For a good exposé of the effects of commercial agriculture on the pastoralists and nomads of the area, see Lars Bondestam's «*People and Capitalism in North-Eastern Lowlands of Ethiopia*», (*The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 12, 3, 1974.) Figures above are given by Bondestam.

intensified class differentiations in the Afar society and the whole area, despite the fact that Sultan Ali Mirah's entry into the field of capitalist farming hardly qualifies as the classical genesis of the capitalist farmer. In the class differentiation, we observe the large-scale farmers made up of the Sultan, other chiefs and their relatives. The small-scale farmers, though relatively well-off by Ethiopian standards due to the high price of cotton, had to hand over the bigger amount of their surplus to the Sultan in the form of taxes, school fees, etc. In the lower rung, there were the seasonal workers, property-less and paid starvation wages, who picked the cotton for a few months and then returned to their meagre subsistence-agriculture or to the towns to swell the army of the unemployed. The seasonal workers had no union and were treated « worse than cattle ».

Foreign capital was also engaged in agricultural projects in Eritrea. However, the other important feature in the commercialization of agriculture took the form of the so-called « Minimum Package Programme » started in 1971 by the Ministry of Agriculture with the aid of Sweden and Denmark. The objective of the project, mainly launched in the southern provinces, was to promote small-scale farming for the market and « to help the poor farmers ». The schemes envisaged mechanization, price stabilisation as well as credit and marketing facilities. The facilities were limited to those who farm on twenty hectares or less and this was said to favour the poorer farmers and tenants. However, practical application of the projects in Arussi (CADU), in Tullo Bollo, Shashemene and other areas showed that the project benefited mainly landlords and heightened the impoverishment of the poor farmers. Mechanization led to increased number of evicted peasants. The terms of credit facilities favoured the landlords rather than small farmers. A down payment of 25 per cent for fertilizers and 50 per cent for seeds was required and the interest rate for credits, to be paid in cash over 14 months, was 12 per cent. In addition, a borrower had to supply two guarantors and, if he is a tenant, must have a written lease and permission from the landlord. Thus, the facilities and credits of the project were monopolised by big farmers. The option of seeking quick increase in agricultural products for export and supply of food stuffs (Third Five Year Plan) dictated a bent towards large-scale mechanized farming to the detriment of the conditions of the poor farmer. And though it is true that the traditional landlordism and tenancy was eroded in the south, the rise in land prices and rent gave the landlord the option of selling or renting his land at high prices or even taking up commercial farming himself. The mass eviction of peasants was accompanied by the increased concentration of land in ever fewer hands<sup>27</sup>.

The introduction of capitalism in agriculture, though mainly concentrated in southern Ethiopia, nevertheless accelerated the disintegration of

<sup>27</sup> For a critical examination of the Minimum Package Projects, see Michael Stahl, «*Contradictions in Agricultural Development*», op. cit.

the feudal mode. Agricultural capitalism, distorted by the feudal mode, was still in its infant stage but its impact was spreading. More and more entrepreneurs from the cities were leasing land from the government or from landlords and engaging in commercial agriculture with the focus on cash crops. The spreading eviction of tenants was undermining the traditional tenancy norm and accelerating, even if indirectly, the dissolution of the *rist* system in the North, notwithstanding that capitalism had actually an insignificant presence in the Northern regions (Eritrea excepted). And since the « appearance of capital as an independent and leading force in agriculture does not take place all at once and generally », this feature of capitalism in agriculture in Ethiopia does not detract from the fact that capitalism had made more than an inroad into Ethiopian agriculture. Agriculture did not entirely come under the control of the capitalist mode of production and thus the development of capitalism manifested an imperfect feature, a limited form of which did not allow capitalism full development and the freedom « to unfold all its peculiarities », as Marx put it.

Hence, in pre-1974 Ethiopia there were various modes of production — the feudal mode, petty-commodity production as well as the capitalist mode of production. The articulation of the feudal mode in the social formation had produced a political effect which was well on the way in undermining the dominant role played by the mode itself. The absolutist state, still feudal, nonetheless, highlighted decaying feudalism. The centralization of the state, the emergence of fractions of the bourgeoisie tied to imperialism and the political and military alliance with imperialism itself, accentuated the dissolution of the feudal mode. If the dominant role of a mode of production in a social formation is to be ascertained from the dominance of the reproduction of the relations of production specific to it in all fields (political, economic, ideological), then it is clear that the feudal mode of production was not dominant in pre-1974 Ethiopia. At the same time, the capitalist mode, for all its rise and spread, was not also dominant. In other words, Ethiopia had a transitional social formation in which the relations of production specific to both feudalism and capitalism were being reproduced. However, since the transitional stage is characterised by the rise to dominance of one mode over the other, the development of the situation in the specific case of Ethiopia manifested the decay of feudalism and the « rise » of capitalism. That, left to its course, the rising mode, with all its imperfections and dependence feature, would have assumed the dominant role is clear. The disintegration of the feudal mode and the emergence of transitional tendencies surpass the internal dynamics of the dominant mode. The class struggle in the whole formation, the stage of historical development and the contradictions outside of the field of agricultural production must be analysed. In the ties of the absolutist state with imperialism which led among other things to the spread of capitalism in agriculture, the emergence of the comprador bourgeoisie, etc., in the formation of the absolutist state which saw the necessary emergence of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, in the need on the part of the

state for more revenue which was, among other things, necessary for maintaining its military strength and authoritarian rule, in an international situation which required the entry of Ethiopia into the fold of « modern nations »..., in these and other similar circumstances outside of the direct field of agricultural production are traced the main reasons which led to the dissolution of the feudal mode of production, notwithstanding the dynamics of the mode itself.

Hence, the 1974 February Revolution emerges as the explosion of the contradictions of the transitional social-formation. The manifestation of this contradiction between the two modes was not the bourgeois revolution for the simple reason that a bourgeoisie capable of leading such a revolution and consummating the dissolution of feudalism was not present. Furthermore, the explosion of the fundamental contradictions overflowed the strictly anti-feudal framework: the proletariat and the masses struggled for a resolution of the conflict not in favour of capitalism but for a revolutionary transformation that will deal the final blow to the feudal mode and arrest and destroy the capitalist mode. Unlike the classical bourgeois revolutions which forwarded capitalism as the focal point of the bourgeois-led popular struggle against feudalism, the February Revolution embodied a struggle for socialism, a rejection of both feudalism and capitalism. In the strategic slogan of the Left, the New Democratic Revolution, one can discern clearly, despite the critics directed against this conception of the development of the revolution in countries like Ethiopia, a rejection of both the feudal mode and the capitalist path. The landed aristocracy had lost its monopoly or hegemony over the state power and the bourgeoisie was both weak and linked to the landlords and imperialism and thus unable to stage a serious bid for exclusive power. Thus, the February Revolution found the proletariat and the broad masses pitted against the landlords and all fractions of the bourgeoisie. Attempts by the bourgeoisie to recuperate the situation by promising reforms failed as the experiences of both Endalkatchew Makonen's and Michael Imru's governments showed. The bourgeoisie was incapable of affirming its hegemony. The masses, on the other hand, lacked the organizational means with the necessary political and military strength to assure the transfer of power to the people. The bourgeois system objectively found its saviours in the rightwing petty bourgeoisie within the military who, by forcefully usurping power on September 1975, moved to save the threatened system. Thus, the February Revolution, even if it dealt a « death-blow » to the feudalists and the comprador and bureaucratic bourgeoisie, did not succeed in destroying bourgeois class domination. By appropriating state power, the military junta came to the rescue of capitalism as a system. Though the bourgeois fractions were burnt by the Revolution, the new rulers, by assuming exclusive political power and economic control, moved towards the formation of the new bourgeoisie. The past five years (1975-1980) have witnessed the drive by this bourgeoisie to expand its political and economic power in order to impose capitalism as a do-

minant mode of production. That this drive manifests particular features (socialist demagogy, a general propaganda attack against capitalism, absence of a significant development of the bourgeoisie, etc) is traceable to the effects of the February and post-February popular revolutionary struggle, to the poverty of the country and the dislocation of the weak economy, the short time-gap. etc..., and in no way implies a non-capitalist path or a radical system. The taking of power by the junta and its subsequent policies in all fields, despite their erratic nature and the demagogy, are basically and objectively capitalist, serving capitalism as a system.

### *On the Modes of Production in Post-1974 Ethiopia*

The treatment of the above is presently suffering distortion due to the persistence of some to cling to the unilinear schema (« if Ethiopia is not feudal then it must be capitalist », etc) and the attempts by the apologists of the junta to announce unashamedly that Ethiopia has become socialist. In all cases, the main point of the arguments revolve around an evaluation of the nationalisation measures undertaken by the junta, especially the land nationalisation (officially referred to as a « Proclamation To Provide For the Public Ownership of Rural Lands »). Hence, in our general analysis of the prevailing modes of production in Ethiopia and the degree of their articulation (question of dominance and dissolution), we shall focus on the nationalisation measures, especially as this refers to rural lands.

The question of land nationalisation can be approached from two angles: first-from the general treatment of the measure by Marxist theory and second from the angle of its particular features and prospects within the concrete context. The action of the state within the agrarian structure is in the final analysis determined by the class struggle in general and the system of complex opposition within the ruling class itself. The ouster of the feudal landlord class by the Revolution of the people excluded the settlement of the issue in the « Prussian Way » with feudalists conserving their big estates and converting them to capitalist ones. The « peasant way » resulting in land distribution and the spread of petty production based on private property, though within the ambit of the « land to the tiller » slogan, could not also be realized due to the interest of the class which had appropriated power, its needs to assume full economic control via nationalizations, and due to the development of the revolutionary struggle which had surpassed mere anti-feudal limits and had linked the question of land to the cardinal issue of power and liberty. Both the « Prussian way » and the « peasant way » fall within the framework of capitalism, framework which the February Revolution was challenging. During the February Revolution, the rupture at the level of the state followed the mass upheaval. The situation thus differed from Peru of 1969,

generally taken as a model of land reform from above. During February in Ethiopia, the poor peasants ere forcefully occupying land, chasing away the landlords and asserting their right to till the land « for themselves ». In the confrontation between the two forces — the junta that had come to power and the peasants, — the overall revolutionary movement in the urban areas played a crucial role attempting to block the resolution of the issue within the framework of capitalism. The proclamation on rural lands issued by the junta in March 1975 affirmed as law what had become actualised on the field (the takeover of land by the peasants) while at the sametime laying the ground for the capitalist exploitation of agriculture through the nationalisation measure.

For, land nationalisation is nothing but a capitalist measure, it means, in the words of Lenin, « maximum elimination of medieval monopolies and medieval relations in agriculture, maximum freedom in buying and selling land, and maximum facilities for agriculture to adapt itself to the market »<sup>28</sup>. Land nationalisation makes it possible to abolish absolute rent, leaving only differential rent<sup>29</sup>, and this is, if anything, capitalist. Lenin put it more succinctly in 1912:

« ...capitalist landownership *cannot* be abolished, by its very nature, through any transfer of land, not even through the transfer of all the land to the state (i.e. through what the science of political economy calls land « nationalisations »)...

... And what if landlordism were to exist without landlords, i.e., if the land were owned, not by landlords, but the state? That, from the point of view of capitalist, would be a *still more* perfect agrarian system, with still greater freedom of adaptation of land tenure to the market, with still greater ease in the mobilisation of the land as an object of economy, with still greater freedom, breadth, clarity and definiteness in the class struggle characteristic of every form of capitalist ownership »<sup>30</sup>.

And adds:

« Land nationalisation is quite feasible economically under capitalism, and its *real* significance would consist in any case-that is no matter how it was effected, by whom and on what conditions, whether stably and for a long time or unstably and for a short time — in the maximum elimination of all that is medieval in Russian landownership and Russia's agrarian system; it would consist in the *freest* adaptation of the *new* system of land tenure and land ownership to the new conditions of the world market »<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> V. I. Lenin, « *The Land Question and the Fight For Freedom* » (a collection), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Lenin, « *Stolypin and Narodnik Agrarian Programmes* », collected works, vol. 18, Progress Publishers, 1973, pp. 145-146.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 147.

Concerning the abolition of private property in land, Lenin states the following: « (the) abolition of private property in land is the maximum of what can be

Therefore, the evaluation of the act of nationalisation necessarily calls for the abandonment of the per se glorification of the measure as « socialist and revolutionary » and for the adoption of an objective analysis which situates the measure within the class struggle in the social formation and the nature of the ruling class. The level of historical development must also be taken into account in order to avoid the mechanical equation of the nationalisation of land with the prevalence of the Asiatic mode of production (the state as a landlord and sovereign = asiatic mode, is a travesty of Marxist analysis when applied to present day Ethiopia). An analysis of the junta's land nationalisation<sup>32</sup> measure requires not only that the question be approached from the point of view of general theory but also in light of the particular situation in which the measure was proclaimed, and the pattern of application envisaged by the junta in this respect. Since the junta's measure can reciprocally be inferred from its basic class interest, it is important to underline some important factors so as to avoid the pitfall of simplistic and mechanical arguments. The members of the military junta, though objectively representing diverse class interests which were to confront one another in violent conflicts, were not, in their majority, *consciously* responding to a *coherently thought-out* strategy/tactic dictated by class interests. The February Revolution had made it a generally accepted truth — « feudalism must be destroyed for the country to develop », « land to the tiller », etc. — and the NCOs and soldiers who made up the majority of the Derg had little sympathy to or ties with the landlords. Hence, the military rulers had to proclaim « somekind of land reform ». But the exigency for this did not mainly arise from their anti-feudal fervour but from the February Revolution, from the mass struggle itself.

In other words, unless the junta gave an answer to this top-priority question, its survival was in doubt. This aspect gives the proclamation its « compromise » feature and the regime didn't refrain from telling the peasants that now « it has proclaimed the land reform law, it should be given support and understanding ». That the regime opted for the nationalisation measure instead of adopting other « milder » forms can be explained by a number of considerations which interacted to cause its adoption. To begin with, those charged with the drafting of « a land reform law » were mainly military and civilian intellectuals geared more towards a « radical solution » that will « with one sweep » put an end to the myriad of land tenure systems prevailing in the country. That they were not deeply aware of the intricate problems of the peasantry and general agricultural development is also quite well-known. And furthermore, there was a pre-

done in bourgeois society for the removal of all obstacles to the free investment of capital in land and the free flow of capital from one branch of production to another. »

In *Capitalism and Agriculture*, (International publishers, NY, 1946, p. 69).

<sup>32</sup> We use the term nationalisation to denote the transfer of landownership to the state.

vailing tendency which equated nationalisation measures with socialism, and direct, and inevitably mechanical, reference was made to the Bolshevik law on land (1917) without really understanding the why of the measure and the subsequent problems faced by the Bolsheviks vis a vis the peasants and agricultural development. Objectively, the drive to strengthen the state economically and politically, could be realised, at least it was so believed, by the act of sweeping nationalisations. Thus, a combination of subjective and objective factors, especially the masses' declared desire to put an end to « reformist » approaches and solutions to the problem, resulted in the adoption of the nationalisation measure which many have since graciously labeled « radical and revolutionary ».

The way in which the reform was proclaimed and the planned method of application of the measure show, however, that the junta had in mind more the control and exploitation of the peasant masses rather than their liberation. The proclamation was drafted by military and civilian bureaucrats, and, peasants, who are the direct and main protagonists of the whole question, did not participate in any way in the actual drafting of the law that was to shape their future. Thus, the proclamation was a clear administrative act from above, a hastily-contrived measure by a power desperately seeking to regiment under its control the mass revolutionary movement, and to stabilise itself by decreasing the revolutionary ebb of the mass struggle. The application of this proclamation was also handed to the regime's bureaucratic apparatus (the Ministries of land reform and Interior, the police, etc...) and the dynamic role played by the students who had been sent to the rural areas (*Zemetcha*) was neither planned nor welcomed by the junta. Therefore, the process of the drafting of the law and the planned modality of its application exhibited more than an intellectual contempt or paternalism vis a vis the peasantry (« ignorant », « unconscious », « easy tools of feudal lords », etc) — it showed the regime's non revolutionary premises and its primary preoccupation of defusing or at least controlling the class struggle that had started to rage fiercely in the rural areas. With the land proclamation, there came the cry for law and order, the practice of defining peasant initiative as anarchy and counter-revolution. In other words, the institutionalization of the class struggle, its deflection and weakening.

The regime's proclamation, by the mere act itself, is also said to reflect its desire to have a vast social base by winning over the peasantry. There is even a section of the Ethiopian Left which adhered to the theses that the land proclamation manifests the junta's desire and effort to win over the peasantry to its side. However, a closer look at the concrete situation reveals that the proclamation did not at all emanate from such a premise even if such a purpose could be objectively inferred from it, *a posteriori* that is. The junta did not come to power leading a mass movement or having a strong class base. It was basically weak and its weakness was being aggravated by the revolutionary struggle of the masses and the threat posed by the ousted ruling class fractions. This

being the case, the Ethiopian junta, very much like the regimes which come to power via a coup d'état, was basically preoccupied with the question of consolidating its power. To realize this it could resort to two options:

1. take concrete measures which will heighten the mass revolutionary movement and class struggle and lead to the total overthrow of the old ruling class fractions.

But this option assumes that the junta leads the revolutionary movement, that the junta considers it as its interest to uphold the class struggle's continuation. At least, it assumes that the junta can control the struggle within limits set by it. The concrete situation was, however, different. The February Revolution was not a bourgeois revolution limited to mere anti-feudal and bourgeois capitalist objectives. What was at issue was the total and revolutionary transformation of the society, the appropriation of political power by the masses themselves. The demand for the formation of a provisional people's government (PPG), a slogan supported by the masses and upheld by the EPRP long before the junta took power, stood in direct contradiction to the junta's rule. Furthermore, the masses considered the takeover of power by the junta as illegal and as an usurpation, and the most advanced sections (the EPRP, CELU, student unions, etc) did not hesitate to point this out publicly and to demand for an immediate end to the military rule<sup>33</sup>. It was thus clear why the junta considered the threat from below or from the mass revolutionary struggle as more serious than the one coming from the ousted feudalists and comprador bourgeoisie. The continuation of the revolutionary struggle would have clearly meant the end of the junta's rule itself, and since those who had usurped power had no desire to commit « class suicide », the first option was unavailable for the junta.

2. to strike both at the mass revolutionary movement and the ruling class fractions ousted by the February Revolution.

This was the course adopted by the junta, and it is precisely this which characterizes the various measures of the regime. In the concrete field of the land question, the junta had to strike at the feudalists while at the same time putting a brake on the class struggle in the rural areas and « out-revolutionizing » the Left, mainly the EPRP, which was using the agrarian question as one of the main question for anti-junta agit-prop

<sup>33</sup> « Resolution of the Annual Congress of CELU », sept. 1974, in Amharic. *The University Students Union of Addis Abeba* also made a general assembly and passed a resolution calling for the formation of a Provisional Peoples Government in the place of the junta, the guaranteeing of democratic rights, etc... (USUAA sept. 1974 Resolution-mimeographed, in Amharic).

On October 10, 1974, the *University Teachers' Association* addressed an open letter to the ruling junta calling for the formation of a provisional popular government, the declaration of land reform and the guaranteeing of democratic rights, etc...

action. The land nationalisation proclamation was taken as the best means of striking at all these targets. The regime did not actively seek a broader social base, it did not try to win over peasantry by assuming the leadership position of their struggle against the feudalists. The regime's drive towards stabilisation relied essentially on force, not on assuming hegemony over a raging class struggle but in checking and crushing the struggle itself, not on winning over the peasantry to intensify the struggle against the feudalists but on striking both at the feudalists and the peasantry at the same time and, especially, on defusing the struggle of the masses. That the regime had to compromise and to proclaim certain laws manifested more its weakness and capacity to manoeuvre rather than its conscious desire to broaden its base. In other words, the junta did not seek (and still doesn't) popular *consensus* but wanted the submission of the masses, forced or otherwise, to its rule. Demagogic adoption of nationalist and socialist slogans and the unending barrage of « radical laws » have their rationale in this and do not in any way indicate the regime's positive response to the demands and needs of the masses. Put differently, and to use the junta's demagogic phrase, the regime listened to the heartbeat of the masses not to respond to it in a revolutionary way but to outflank and crush it.

An outgrowth of the incapacity of some to realize the driving motive, be it subjective or objective, of the junta is the so-called characterization of the regime as « bonapartist »<sup>34</sup>. The practice of taking Marx's caricature of Napoleon III in order to pull out theory of « Bonapartism » is in many instances the repeated practice of Trotskyite groups, and it has been used freely to explain both Stalin and Hitler, Iraq and Ethiopia, etc... Aside from the fact that Marx himself in his 1871 drafts and texts criticised such an inference, the application of the term to the post-1974 Ethiopia is impossible on many grounds. Most important of all these points is the relation between the junta and the peasantry. The junta not only lacked peasant support but did not represent the interest of the peasantry as opposed to that of the proletariat and the urban masses. The peasantry itself, for all its uprising, played a role different from that of its counterpart in France during Bonaparte's time. Furthermore, the ties between the urban proletarian-led movement and the peasant struggle was being strengthened (especially during the student *Zemetcha* to the rural areas) *in opposition* to the junta's rule. The junta, to paraphrase Marx, represented neither the future nor the past of the peasant, it was as opposed to the revolutionary peasant as to the conservative one which wants to maintain its small holding in « stupefied seclusion ». In other words, the interests of right wing petty-bourgeoisie and that of the vast majority of poor

<sup>34</sup> Nega Ayele & John Markakis, op. cit., p. 190.

Also see, Addis Hiwot, « *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* », Merlin Press, London, 1975.

The Trotskyite papers, in general, attach this characterization to the ruling Ethiopian junta.

peasants did not coincide. In short, to pin the « Bonapartist » label to the Ethiopian reality is an historical methodology which is inimical to Marxism.

The junta's proclamation on land, in March 1975, did not, to quote the Soviet *New Times*, « give land to the illiterate and ignorant peasants who are not aware of their class interests ». Leaving aside for the moment the Soviet evaluation of the Ethiopian peasant, what happened was in no way a reform from above. In other words, the peasants were not given land, they had already started to take it by their own force together with students who had come from the cities. In many areas in Southern Ethiopia, the confrontation between the peasants and students on the one hand and the landlords and the police on the other was a violent one. The landless peasants not only grabbed their land and chased away the landlords but were also beginning to set-up self-administration structures with the help of the *Zematch* students. The junta's proclamation confirmed a process that had already begun while at the same time laying ground for the bureaucratic and centralised control of the peasant action. Concerning the North's so-called communal holding, the proclamation recognised the existing right of the *ristegnas* over their land, confirmed their possessory right and prohibited any further claim on such land. The junta's primary drive to shortcircuit a revolutionary process that threatened to overflow the confines of agrarian reform, is best illustrated by its official warning to peasants who were forcefully grabbing land and evicting landlords. On 24-9-74, the Addis Abeba Radio broadcast, in Amharic, the following warning from the ruling junta:

« We have discovered that some tenants, not having studied and understood the provisional decision and having been instigated by some mischief-makers, have interpreted the words "have a guarantee to live and benefit" as meaning that they owned the land and had the right to benefit from it forever, and accordingly have been denying some landlords the right to their land.

We warn everybody that they must realize that such action would disturb the security of the country and these people must bear the responsibility for disturbing security... the landlord must not evict the tenant indiscriminately, and the tenant must not consider the land on which he has settled as his own and must continue to give profits to the landlords in accordance with their agreement, and must not evict the owner of the land or take possession of the land. We therefore warn against such actions ».

The warning, which went unheeded, exhibited the junta's main preoccupation, it manifested the petty-bourgeois drive to control and marshall the peasants actions, in a gradual and orderly process set by its own class interests. The official junta declaration of December 20/1974 put it also clearly: « ... the government is the trustee of this important national resource (land). And it is the responsibility of the government

to determine land tenure policy in an appropriate manner, *in a manner that promotes productivity* »<sup>35</sup>. The preoccupation with productivity and the marshalling of the peasants' action within government prescribed limits is also at the base of the land nationalisation proclamation of March 1975.

Hence, the land proclamation has to be viewed from the above perspectives-as a capitalist measure to assure productivity, as a confirmation of a *fait accompli* (taking of land by peasants) and as a means to curb the peasant revolutionary struggle and put it under the centralised control of the ruling class. The proclamation was joyously received by the people as a whole and rightly considered not as « a gift from above » but as the fruit of their own struggle. The law juridically affirmed the death of feudalism. The feudalists, who were deprived of their political power by the February Revolution, were relieved from their economic power by the proclamation nationalising rural land and by the subsequent nationalisation of urban land and housing. A reading of the proclamation on land, however, gives an insight into the junta's basic premises leaving aside the usual demagogic references to « equality, freedom and fraternity ». In the preamble to the Proclamation, while the need « for altering existing agrarian relations » is recognized, the emphasis is given to « release the productive forces », « increase productivity », « to provide the participation of the peasantry in the national market ». While, an agrarian revolution within a socialist perspective puts the necessary emphasis on liberating the peasantry from the land itself, the junta's proclamation affirms the peasant bondage to the land by stating that « a person's right, honour, status and standard of living (in countries like Ethiopia) is determined by its relation to the land ». In other words, this primary reference point of feudalism and feudal ideology (the reference to land to determine a person's status and role in society) is upheld.

The proclamation affirmed the overthrow of feudalism, at least on the legal and economic level, and by declaring all land « collective property of the people » confirmed the State as the biggest and sole landowner in the country, as the state is « the trustee of all land » and the « expression of the collective ». The landlords put out of the scene, the state, thus, confronts the peasants in a direct manner as the owner of all land and as a ruling political power. The Proclamation also limits the amount of land allotted to any peasant family (a ceiling of ten hectares), gives the peasants possessory rights and allots land to former landowners « willing to personally cultivate the land ». The redistribution of land envisaged in other areas did not include the North where the *ristegnas'* possessory rights were recognised, and further claims prohibited. The whole process of agrarian reform was tied within a bureaucratic machinery (the Ministry of Land Reform, the Ministry of Interior, the peasant associations which,

<sup>35</sup> « Declaration of the Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia », Dec. 20/1974, Addis Abeba, p. 10 (English translation from the Amharic is Official, emphasis added).

since 1975, have been purged and turned into virtual government agencies in the rural areas, etc)<sup>36</sup>.

Five years after the Proclamation the actual situation in the rural areas permits us to reach certain basic conclusions. That the proclamation has had practically little effect in the North as compared to the South is a fact, but the application of the proclamation in the South itself indicates the inevitable limits and perspective of the whole measure. The predominant feature of present-day rural Ethiopia is the existence of small-scale production by a parcellaire peasantry. Despite the junta's drive towards its own version of « cooperatives and collectivization » (a drive fiercely resisted by the peasants), the prevailing situation shows millions of peasants possessing and farming small parcels of land (the ten hectare limit is by itself well beyond the capacity of the ordinary peasant who lacks the facilities and necessary security for increased production). Feudalism as a *dominant* mode has virtually disappeared and if certain remnants of the mode do exist they manifest the imperfect and limited development of capitalism rather than the prevalence of feudalism as a mode. The spread of mechanized agricultural farms in the form of state farms, though limited at the moment, indicates a developing trend leading to the eviction of peasants from fertile lands, the impoverishment of the small farmers by the competition of the state farms, etc...

Surplus from agriculture is considered by the junta as the basis for accumulation of capital and industrialization. Leaving aside the controversy over the link between agriculture and industry in a program of development, such a strategy requires the integration of the peasant into the market and the increase in productivity of agriculture. An empirical view of the situation indicates that these conditions have not been realized. The cause for this can be traced to the political and economic policies of the junta itself (repression against merchants, overall repression against workers and the urban population, repression against peasants, existence of war situations as a consequence in various areas, a generally violent drive to impose control over the people) which have led to the further disruption of the ties between town and country, the non-integration of the peasant into the market (in some areas, the practice of the junta to abduct peasants into its militia force has resulted in the peasants' refusal to bring their grain to the market places, favourite site of the junta's kidnapping activities) and to the overall weakening of the market. But the fundamental reason is to be traced to the proliferation of small-scale production itself and the farming on small parcels. The fact that the peasant has mere usufructory right over the land and cannot sell it does

<sup>36</sup> It is revealing of the junta's policy and class nature that it refused to arm the peasants so that they may resist the landlords violent actions in opposition to the proclamation on land. A junta member (quoted by Nega/Markakis, op. cit., p. 136). stated: « toady they get guns, tomorrow they refuse to pay taxes »! The junta later started to arm the peasant associations selectively, after purging them and making sure that they were filled by elements « loyal to the state ».

not significantly affect the negative consequences of such type of production. Parcellaire landholding and prevalence of small-scale production presupposes not only the numerical preponderance of the rural population in the country but also the restricted concentration of capital in other lines of production and the fragmentation of capital as a whole. In other words, capitalism, even if it prevails, is but little developed<sup>37</sup>. As Marx goes on to explain: « proprietorship of land parcels by its very nature excludes the development of social productive forces of labour, social forms of labour, social concentration of capital, large-scale cattle-raising, and the progressive application of science »<sup>38</sup>. That the peasant has no ownership right does not detract from this, for, what is essential, as a prerequisite for the peasant's ownership of the product of his labour, is his possession of the land, which is « the principal instrument of production, the indispensable field of employment for his labour and capital ». Small-scale landholding and production necessarily results « in the greater portion of the agricultural production being consumed as direct means of subsistence by the producer peasants themselves ». The portion that reaches the urban market can be only the excess above the subsistence consumption. Thus, the peasant produces his own means of subsistence independently, as an isolated labourer with his family<sup>3</sup>. This further accentuates the peasant's isolation and his subjugation by backward feudoclerical ideas, aggravates his marginalization and his parochialism manifested in his identification primarily with his family and village. Small-scale agriculture is therefore an obstacle to increased production, to the attempts to develop the market, to realize capital accumulation and to urbanize the rural areas. The level of social development attained does not regulate the exploitation of the soil, it is rather the accidental and unequal circumstances of the individual producers which determines it. Conscious rationale exploitation of the soil is absent and the peasant is left in the mire of backwardness and misery. To sum it up with Marx's cogent comment:

« Small landed property presupposes that the overwhelming majority of the population is rural, and that, not social, but isolated labour predominate; and that, therefore, under such conditions wealth and development of reproduction, both of its material and spiritual prerequisites are out of the question, and thereby also the prerequisites for rational cultivation. ... Small landed property creates a class of barbarians standing halfway outside of society, a class combining all the crudeness of primitive forms of society with the anguish and misery of civilised countries... »<sup>39</sup>.

Though a comprehensive published study about the southern regions after 1975 is lacking and even if the junta's figures and interpretations leave much to be desired in the sphere of accuracy, it is still possible to

<sup>37</sup> K. Marx, « *Capital* », vol. II, op. cit., p. 804.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 807.

<sup>39</sup> K. Marx, op. cit., p. 813.

refer to specific studies of selected areas and to an overall empirical observation in order to show that the parcellation of land and the proliferation of small scale agriculture has brought about results similar to the one affirmed by Marx's scientific analysis. Preliminary studies made by the EPRP in some regions in the North also suggests the same conclusion—proliferation of parcellation, production mainly for consumption, weak urban — rural ties and weak link of the peasant with the market, etc... In a study published in Sweden and dealing with the land reform process in western Wollega, the Swedish author who visited the said area in 1975-76 presents an interesting empirical data which proves the above<sup>40</sup>.

Stahl observes:

« Two years after the proclamation of land reform, the peasants of Western Wollega are almost as poor as they were before. A main improvement is, though, that most peasant families now eat enough to fill their stomach once or twice a week. This is due to the abolition of feudal obligations. But in other respects the peasants' economic situation has hardly improved. The productive forces are as little developed as before the land reform »<sup>41</sup>.

Four years after Stahl wrote this, the situation has not changed in any significant manner. The predominance of small scale agriculture excludes any change. The following lengthy extract from Stahl's study shows clearly the truth of the contention that increased productivity and capital accumulation will have to remain chimerical so long as this type of production predominates in the field of agriculture<sup>42</sup>.

« The point of departure for the discussion is a real case. Ato Guddina is a poor peasant living in the countryside within the region of study. His family consists of his wife and — until recently — eight children, the youngest daughter died of a sudden fever which became fatal due to the child's general condition of malnutrition. The eldest son has left the home and another son is himself farming a plot given to him by his father. The rest of the children—including the small one—are helping with the household work.

During the imperial regime Guddina was a tenant. He rented land from a rich peasant to which he paid 12 Birr per year for land use. But Guddina

<sup>40</sup> Michael Stahl, « New Seeds in Old Soil: A Study of the land reform process in Western Wollega, Ethiopia, 1975-76 » (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, 1977) - Also see Johan Holmberg's « Grain Marketing and Land Reform in Ethiopia », (Uppsala, 1977).

<sup>41</sup> Stahl, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Marx shed light on this in this manner:

« For the peasant owning a parcel, the limit of exploitation is not set by the average profit of capital, in so far as he is a small capitalist; nor, on the other hand, by the necessity of rent, in so far as he is a landowner. The absolute limit for him as a small capitalist is no more than the wages he pays to himself, after deducting his actual costs. So long as the price of the product covers these wages, he will cultivate his land, and often at wages down to a physical minimum. » (*Capital*, vol. III, pp. 805-06).

could not use much of the land he rented, since he had no oxen. He could only afford to rent two oxen from a wealthier neighbour for less than a week annually. During these busy days he prepared the seedbed on a field close to his house, the total area ploughed was less than one acre. He planted teff on the field and grew some pulses, tubers and coffee around the house. But production was far too insufficient for the family's subsistence. In order to survive Guddina worked as a wood-cutter and sold firewood to townspeople in a nearby market center.

After the land reform proclamation Guddina got cultivation rights to the plots of land he had rented from the rich peasant and all obligations to this man were abolished. Instead he got obligations to the state. Guddina now pays 4 Birr for land use and 3 Birr as income tax. His total tax-burden is thus 7 Birr while he formerly paid 12 Birr to his landlord (out of which the landlord paid 3 Birr as land tax to the state). Guddina has now one ox. The peasant association to which he belongs confiscated the cattle of a rich landlord who was considered an exploiter. The criterion used when selecting those who were to receive oxen credits was family size in combination with income level. Because of his large family, Guddina was one of the first to obtain an ox.

Guddina then started to co-operate with a neighbour, a poor peasant who had also got one ox on credit from the association. They worked out a system according to which each of them could use two oxen on certain days a week during the ploughing season in 1976. For first time Guddina was able to cultivate an area which would yield a harvest which could release his family from constant semi-starvation. He ploughed and planted 4 fields as follows:

teff: ½ hectare

teff: 1 hectare

barley: ½ hectare (together with the neighbour)

teff: ¼ hectare (together with the neighbour)

In all Guddina planted 2 hectares.

Guddina obtained all means of production (except the land) on credit. He had no seed, but he got seeds from the association on credit. The association distributed parts of the harvest from the communal farm as seeds on credit to poor members. Guddina also had to buy fertiliser on credit from EPID (a government agency-N. A.). In 1976, the main constraint on Guddina's production was not land but oxen and seed. Guddina had still another hectare of land which he could not plough and plant due to lack of ploughing capacity and lack of seeds.

Consequently, Guddina is indebted. He owes the association 20 Birr for teff seeds and owes EPID 12 Birr for fertilizer. Altogether his debt amounts to 59 Birr to be paid before the planting season 1977 (the oxen-loan is to be paid to the association within three years, one-third of the amount each year).

Will the harvest Guddina reaps be enough for his family's subsistence and for the repayment of debts?

On the one hectare field planted with teff Guddina broadcasted 24 kg teff seed (the recommended amount is 30 kg). He used 25 kg fertilizer on the field (the recommended amount is 100 kg). Therefore he can expect to get a yield which lies slightly above the average yield for unfertilized teff fields in this area, which is 3,5 quintals per hectare. On the ½ hectare plot of teff he broadcasted only 5 kg seed and used no fertilizer, so he can expect to get only about ½ a quintal as harvest from that field. Altogether Guddina's family will obtain some 5 quintals of teff. If we deduct 60 kg which must be reserved for seed for the next year (assuming that Guddina will plant 2 hectares next year), 4,5 quintals will remain for the family's own consumption. If the family is to keep hunger at a distance they will have to consume, on average, 250 grammes per person and day. This makes a total of 7 quintals. Consequently, Guddina's family do not have sufficient food.

Here I have calculated with teff only, which is the main ingredient in the staple food. Guddina can compliment the teff diet with small amounts of tubers (yam and anchote) and vegetables (beans, cabbage) which grow around the house. Nevertheless the family will not subsist from its own production only. Therefore, Guddina will have to continue cutting wood for sale. However the wood-cutting stands in the way of the family's efforts to expand their food production; each day spent cutting wood during the rainy season (when food supplies are most scarce) means one day less for farming: (scarcity of food and peak periods for agricultural work coincide in time). The calculation, which is crude but realistic, shows that Guddina will barely be able to support his family during the coming year.

Then what about the debts? The coffee he grows around the house will fetch approximately 15 Birr when sold on the market. This sum covers the debt for the fertiliser he got from EPID. But there remains a debt totalling 47 Birr to the peasant association, and it seems unlikely that Guddina will be able to pay the sum.

We now have to leave Guddina in his difficult position and turn our attention to general aspects of the problem. *Guddina's situation is representative of a considerable portion of the peasantry.*

If Guddina and his fellows are to escape from the vicious circle of hunger and poverty, they will have to invest in basic means of production like seeds, oxen and implements. But in the present situation they are unable to pay for these inputs. If strict repayment in cash is demanded from the poor peasants for the initial investments, they will have to sell such a great proportion of their harvest that they are returned to a state of semi-starvation. Attempts to accumulate resources for the associations by expropriating them from the poor members cannot succeed. An association cannot prosper if the majority of its members are hungry. Work efficiency on communal projects will be reduced and so will motivation.

The conclusion is that the poor peasants at present do not produce any surplus which could be converted into cash and channeled into asso-

ciation funds to finance collective investments. The same conclusion also holds for a majority of middle peasants. Extraction of surplus from their production would have the effect of transforming them into poor peasants »<sup>43</sup>.

The peasant has no easy issue out of this dilemma. Improvements in agriculture, which on the one hand cause a fall in agricultural prices<sup>44</sup> and, on the other, require greater outlays and more extensive material conditions of production, are not only beyond his capacity but mean the downfall of the small scale agriculture itself<sup>45</sup>. At the same time, the spread of state farms on a big scale, with the resultant eviction of peasants and competition with the peasant individual producer, will accentuate the peasant's impoverishment. The so-called « Producers Cooperative » system proclaimed by the junta holds no attraction to the peasant and this for good reason as it does not assure him subsistence and the right to dispose of the excess above this produced by him individually. Added to this is the justified suspicion of the peasant vis a vis the state which, in the last five years, has proved its ability only in the field of aggravating the impoverishment and subjugation of the peasant.

The appropriation of the agricultural surplus has also changed with the demise of the landlords. The state, as the virtual landlord, is now the one which appropriates this surplus directly. Surplus appropriation takes the form of a yearly tax paid to the state for the use of land (this is a fixed tax, irrespective of size of farm or income, and was 4 Birr in 1976) and there is also an additional income tax paid according to income (some 3-4 Birr for those with an income of less than 600 Birr). The state also has extended its taxes to machine-operated mills in the rural areas, many of the mills are presently owned by state controlled peasant associations. At the level of taxes the poor peasant has to pay more than he used to pay during Haile Sellasie's rule, though the payments of va-

<sup>43</sup> Stahl, op. cit., pp. 70-74 (emphasis ours - N.A.).

<sup>44</sup> Though price control is artificially maintained by the regime (through the execution of merchants who did not adhere to the arbitrarily-set price limits), it is possible for the price of agricultural products to fall. In a situation where the peasants have weak relations with the market the price of the products is not regulated directly by their cost in money or labour. Marx explains this as follows:

« For the peasant parcel holder to cultivate his land, or to buy land for cultivation, it is not... necessary as under the normal capitalist mode of production, that the market-price of the agricultural products rise high enough to afford him the average profit, and still less a fixed excess above this average profit in the form of rent. It is not necessary, therefore, that the market price rise, either up to the value or the price of production of his product. This is one of the reasons why grain prices are lower in countries with predominant small peasant land proprietorship than in countries with a capitalist mode of production. One portion of the surplus-labour of the peasants, who work under the least favourable conditions, is bestowed gratis upon society and does not at all enter into the regulation of price of production or into the creation of value in general. This lower price is consequently a result of the producers' poverty and by no means of their labour productivity.» (Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 806.)

<sup>45</sup> Marx, op. cit., p. 807.

rious kinds to the feudalists has stopped. But this again needs qualifications. To begin with, by late 1979 the state has increased its tax rates requiring from the peasants a virtually uniform payment of some 22.50 birr. In addition, peasants in all areas have to make payments in cash or kind (forced payments, euphemistically called «voluntary contributions to the Motherland's Defence»!) to the state. In some northern regions like Gondar, the state has also tried to levy taxes on peasants who own guns with the tax rate varying for bolt rifles and automatic ones. Peasant associations are also used as armed pressure instruments to make peasants pay for «construction of schools, roads, clinics», etc, i.e. for services which should have been fulfilled by the government itself and which, nevertheless, hardly materialize. Forced labour is also extracted from the peasants who have to till the lands of those peasants who have been inducted into the militia and taken to the war front, and peasants also have to harvest the crops on the state farms. It is also particular of the Ethiopian reality, that the labour force, at least a substantial number of it, engaged on working in the state farms is made up of political prisoners, forcefully rounded up prostitutes and the urban unemployed who are, in most cases, forced with little or no pay. Another feature of the state's policy is the so-called «Resettlement Project» by which thousands of peasants from the drought-stricken areas are transported to other provinces and settled on better lands. The settlements usually occur in areas where local peasant insurrections are troubling the regime. But what is significant is that the settlers are forced to cultivate a particular type of crop dictated by the government, and their product, with a small amount allocated for their subsistence, is appropriated directly by the state.

Despite the many features that bring to mind the realities of the feudal period, the predominantly existing small scale agriculture and land holding is one which falls within the category of capitalism or the capitalist mode of production. The prevailing nature of feudalism at the level of social relations and ideology in the rural areas cannot negate the overthrow of this mode and the elimination of the landlords' political and economic power. The small scale holding and production manifests the low level of capitalist development, its restricted growth without denying the prevalence of the capitalist mode of production in general. In other words, the present social-formation in Ethiopia, especially viewed from the relations of production prevailing in agriculture, cannot be called feudal. However, the articulation of the capitalist mode is still stunted and the predominant feature is the existence of small-scale land holding and production, which is by itself an obstacle in the development of capitalism. In the other words, agriculture is not yet fully subjected to the capitalist mode of production and as such capitalism manifests a «limited development» and is yet incapable of manifesting all its peculiarities. It is only when capitalism has fully dominated agriculture that one can look for the concentration and centralisation of capital.

The stage of development necessarily calls for the qualification of

the assertion that the capitalist mode predominates. This domination has yet to develop to its full potential, large-scale farming has yet to replace the small-scale agriculture, and the peasant has yet to be fully drawn into the market, etc... The development of the situation is further affected by the process in which the whole situation came about and the general class struggle in the formation and its impact on the policies of the ruling class. However, it seems to us that one point that can be asserted emphatically is that the feudal mode has been overthrown and the capitalist mode, with all its imperfections and the limitations imposed by the concrete situation, is prevailing. And as Marx stated, that relations belonging to earlier forms of society exist, in a crippled form or as a travesty of their former self, in bourgeois society, is not a point that belies the bourgeois nature of the society<sup>46</sup>.

A projection of the future development of the situation is qualified by the war situation prevailing in several regions and the instability of the ruling class. However, it is possible to state that left to its course, the full application of the state's agricultural policy will inevitably lead to the break-up of the small scale agriculture/holdings and the dominance of capitalism in this sphere. This process is, nonetheless, a variegated one and the dependent as well as undeveloped state of capitalism in Ethiopia will imply that the proletarianization of the small farmer will be a relatively slower process. Meanwhile small scale production, with its accompanying features of «infinite fragmentation of the means of production», the isolation of the producers themselves, with monstrous waste of human energy, the progressive deterioration of conditions of production and the increased prices of the means of production<sup>47</sup> — will prevail. Abundant harvest in good seasons will alternate with famine and starvation during droughts, the peasant, in most cases, left to his own means, isolated. What we are dealing with here is not a developed bourgeois society or the situation described by Marx in which the feudal landlord is gradually turned into a landowner and the serf into a modern farmer or agricultural day-labourer<sup>48</sup>. The process of the transformation in Ethiopia has traversed a different path, with the feudal lords ousted by a popular revolutionary struggle, with no industrial or agricultural bourgeoisie strong enough to assure the domination of capital over agriculture, with small scale agriculture predominating and coexisting with state farms. The peasantry, despite the class differentiations within it, desires and is able to perpetuate its petty production hovering between life and death yet savour-

<sup>46</sup> Marx, «*Gründrisse*», *op. cit.*, p. 105-06.

The relevant passage from Marx is as follows:

«...since bourgeois society is itself a contradictory form of development, relations derived from earlier forms will often be found within it only in an entirely stunted form, or even travestied. For example, communal property. Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this is to be taken only with a grain of salt.»

<sup>47</sup> Marx, «*Capital*», vol. III, p. 807.

<sup>48</sup> Marx, «*Gründrisse*», *op. cit.*, pp. 252-253.

ing its possession of a piece of land, « the index of one's worth! » The bourgeoisie, though it commands the state and owns land, is hampered in its drive to accumulate capital by its dependent nature and the low level of development of the productive forces<sup>49</sup>. The recent proclamation on the setting-up of the « Producers' Cooperative » laid down as its fundamental article the duty of peasants to abide by the economic, cultural and political directives issued by the state, but the violent resistance of peasants in several provinces indicates the peasant's reluctance to follow the regime's plans. In other words, the bourgeoisie's drive to subjugate agriculture under the heel of capital and to develop large scale farming so as to accumulate capital faces a serious obstacle. The regime's solution to the dilemma is indicated by its stepped-up propaganda attacks against « selfish and individualist peasants » and its constant recourse to force, which in turn has fuelled the peasant rebellions and aggravated the disruption of agricultural production.

Just as the dissolution of feudalism and the control of « the important national resource » (land) by the state is necessary for the transformation of the petty bourgeoisie as a state bourgeoisie, the control by the state of the basic industries, financial and banking as well as insurance agencies is also indispensable. The consolidation of the state bourgeoisie requires its command of the economy as the primary force. By utilising its full control of political power (the state) and extending this to the economic sphere, the new bourgeoisie expands and consolidates itself. The nationalisation of industries, financial institutions and banks carried out by the regime in January and February 1975, though taken in an unplanned and sporadic manner as much as a means to deflect popular pressure demanding the dismantling of the socio-economic structure of the ancien regime<sup>50</sup>, was vital for the new ruling class. The Ethiopian bourgeoisie was weak and comprador, and was also discarded by the February Revolution. The new bourgeoisie, in order to form and consolidate itself, had to impose its hegemony not only politically but also economically. Through the nationalisation measures it moved to realize this, and it is not accidental that the bureaucracy expanded immensely — two years after the nationalization measures — some 30,000 new posts were added to the state sector<sup>51</sup> and almost all the nationalised firms and units were being managed by Ethiopians. The number of ministries has increased — National Resources, Industry, Public Works and Housing, Coffee and Tea, etc... — and several specialised agencies and operational bodies were also established. All these are staffed by military and ci-

<sup>49</sup> The question as to whether the ruling class, which is assured dominance only thanks to the all-round backing of imperialism, can revolutionise the conditions of production is, by itself, a relevant question.

<sup>50</sup> See, *Democracia*, organ of the EPRP, No. 14, Nov 1974.

<sup>51</sup> *Ethiopian Herald*, (daily newspaper in English, Addis Abeba, which is state owned), dec. 28/1977.

vilian elements. The growth of the bureaucratic apparatus is but a characteristic of state capitalism.

The bourgeoisie in power in Ethiopia can be called « emergent » in so far as it is being formed and has yet to consolidate itself, notwithstanding its dependent nature vis a vis imperialism. It is basically drawn from the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie and is being supplied its newer members from the upper echelons of this same class ensconced within the bureaucracy. The state bourgeoisie manifests politically a bureaucratic character, juridically private ownership of the means of production is non-existent while the surplus is appropriated by the bourgeoisie by virtue of its control of the state which owns the land, factories, etc... The inroad made by the state into the field of retail trade, transport, etc... shows the bourgeoisie's attempts to expand its economic hegemony, and the accelerated expansion of state farms is also indicative of this. At the same time, the war situation and the state's need for increased revenues assure the intensification of this practice thus leading to the closing down of small privately-run enterprises and trade establishments.

Given the overall low level development of the economy and the subsequent weakness of the ruling bourgeoisie (due to political and economic reasons), the drive by the state bourgeoisie to accumulate capital in the face of a prevailing small scale production and spreading rebellions against the state can only be through a violent process. The absolute subjugation of the worker and the peasant masses to the state is a *sine qua non* of this accumulation. The denial of the right of workers to organize themselves autonomously, the proclamation of an anti-worker draconian labour law, the setting-up of associations and trade unions whose primary function it to serve as the ideological, organizational and repressive apparatus of the state<sup>52</sup>, the hijacking of revolutionary slogans and the distortion of the proletarian ideology, fascist terror (actual and hovering)... and the like are the accompanying features of the bourgeois rule in its drive to stabilise itself and consolidate its political and economic power. The state as the owner of land (the landlord) over the peasant and as an employer of the worker deprives both the « freedom » to sell their labour power on the market, « socialism », « revolutionary discipline », « duty to the motherland », etc., are invoked to legitimise the intensified exploitation of the worker and the peasant. The outlawing of strikes, the freeze put on workers wages, the practice of forcing workers to work overtime without pay, all practices which ill not go

<sup>52</sup> It is interesting to note that the *Kebeles*, urban district associations, used by the junta as its effective arms of repression and control of the people, have been compared by G.C. Pajetta, a leader of the Italian Communist Party, with the Russian *soviets* or the *sections* of the French Revolution! Pajetta arrived at such a stupendous conclusion after a few days of a guided tour in Addis Abeba during the height of the « Red Terror » campaign unleashed by the junta against the EPRP. (See, *Interview with Pajetta*, in *New Left Review*, 107, 1978).

unchallenged in bourgeois capitalist countries where the workers have a degree of trade union rights, are put in action. And despite what the advocates of « development at all costs » may say it makes a tremendous difference, as Marx said, at least to the people, « whether national capital is gradually and slowly transformed into industrial capital, or whether this development (comes about by the way of) accelerated appropriation of the independent direct producers and through the violently accelerated accumulation and concentration of capital »<sup>53</sup>. The fascist repression unleashed by the regime, the attempts to crush all independent political actions on the part of the masses, massacres and terror, along with starvation, misery and accentuated suffering, will thus continue. However, whether the whole process of accumulation envisaged by the state bourgeoisie will be realized or not depends on a variety of factors, chief among which is the course of the class struggle in the social formation.

Focussing on the agrarian situation, we have attempted to generally comment upon the question of the modes of production in Ethiopia. Our assertion is that feudalism as a mode is overthrown while the capitalist mode dominates (not forgetting the dependent nature of this capitalism, a dependence which is heightened, and not reduced by the alliance with the USSR) even though this is at a very low level of development. The existence of a predominant petty production is undoubtedly an obstacle on the path of capitalist development but it is a situation that favours the dominant position of capitalism as a whole. We believe, therefore, that to define the Ethiopian social-formation as feudal or semi-feudal, or even as one « frozen in transition », is erroneous.

Conclusions reached at the level of the determination of the dominant mode of production have direct bearing on revolutionary strategy. For the proletariat and its Party, what is at issue is not a mechanical adherence to this or that model or strategy sanctified by official dogma. The strategy of the revolutionary struggle must base itself on the analysis of the actual contradictions and class struggle in the given social formation. Lenin put it in this manner:

« We do not claim that Marx knew of Marxists know the road to socialism down to the last detail. It would be nonsense to claim anything of the kind. What we know is the direction of this road, and the class forces that follow it; the specific, practical details will come to light only through the *experience of millions* when they take things into their own hands »<sup>54</sup>.

Leaving aside the specific and practical details to those who are engaged in the practical struggle, it seems necessary to us to emphasise that the strategy for revolutionary struggle in Ethiopia has to grapple basically with the question of mobilising the vast mass of the peasantry

<sup>53</sup> Marx, « *Capital* », vol. III, p. 785.

<sup>54</sup> Lenin, « The Land Question and the Fight for Freedom », p. 44, emphasis his.

around the proletariat and its Party. This is easier said than done. The alliance of the peasantry and the workers is not inscribed by the relations of production, the fundamental interests of both are not identical; the congruence sought can be actualised on temporary grounds and it presupposes a necessary compromise on the part of the worker with the objective of winning over the peasant. This itself requires the transformation of the peasant, the peasant as peasant will not opt for socialism or collectivization<sup>55</sup>. The process of transformation relies on « the force of example », as Engels emphasised, and not on the use of force against the peasant. The problematic of the worker-peasant alliance is beyond the scope of this article but suffice it to note that the problem is not solved by an approach which neglects the class characteristics of the peasantry or which negates the indispensability of the support of the peasant for the proletariat's victory.

In light of this, the correct policy towards the peasantry is that which, generally, *serves to rally peasant to the side of the proletariat*. Taking the concrete situation as the launching pad and sufficiently grasping the interests of the peasantry, it is possible to adopt fitting tactics to win over the peasants for the struggle against the state bourgeoisie. The complexity of the whole problem is best highlighted by Engels' apt comment: « we can win over quickly to our side the mass of small peasants only if we make them promises which we notoriously cannot keep. »<sup>56</sup> Assuring the proletarian leadership of the struggle renders the politicisation of the peasantry, through the course of the struggle itself, in a revolutionary manner. The problem of the peasantry posed at the

<sup>55</sup> Lenin had this to say in this connection:

« The peasants are involved in small commodity production; given a favourable conjuncture of historical circumstances, they *can* achieve the most complete abolition of feudalism, but they will *always* — inevitably and not accidentally — show a certain vacillation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between liberalism and Marxism » (ibid, p. 33 emphasis his).

And in his other post-1917 writings, Lenin, after clearly pointing out that « peasant farming, which continues to be petty, commodity production, (gives) an extremely broad and very sound, deep-rooted basis for capitalism... », states that the peasant so long as owns his piece of land, is capable of trading in grain and making profit out of it will remain « a semi-working man, a semi-profiteer » and as a profiteer will stand opposed (hostile) to the proletarian power.

Lenin's proposed solution to the problem was not, however, the use of force against the peasantry. Like Engels, he advocated the « force of example », trying to win it over to the side of the working class by ideological persuasion and by paying close attention to its needs, etc..

<sup>56</sup> This does not mean that one can mobilise the peasantry only by duping it. Engels view is quite categorically opposed to such an approach to the question. What Engels states is that it is not possible to mobilise the peasantry by declaring from the outset that all land will be collectivised. To the concrete desires and needs of the peasant, the response given is not a ploy. In other words, a revolutionary party that has in its program the actualization of land to the tiller will adhere to this while at the sametime working, politically and through the force of example, to influence the peasantry towards the formation of cooperatives and collectivisation. The use of repression against the peasant, in this respect, can only be counter-productive.

time of the transition to socialism is not an isolated problem, it is inscribed within the whole struggle to destroy the rule of capital and to emancipate the people. The question is not so much that of collectivisation, industrialization or increased production, though these are essential for the transition to socialism<sup>57</sup>. The crux of the problem is political, it is one of making each member of society or the people participate equally in popular sovereignty. In other words an increase in the productive forces that is not accompanied by an all-round development of the individual and by the return of man himself, as Marx put it, as a *social*, really human, being, such 'growth', such 'development' stands in the final analysis against the emancipation of the labouring masses.

<sup>57</sup> For all its importance, the question of economic development cannot be posed in mere economic terms. That politics should have precedence over economics is no antiquated cliché... As Marx pointed out: «Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the *subject* of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth... In this respect it can in fact be shown that *all* human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence upon it.» (Marx, in «*Theories of Surplus Value*»).

«The human being is», as Marx pointed out, above all «a political animal, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society.» (Gründrisse).

Lenin also puts it this way: «Politics must take precedence over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of Marxism. Without a correct political approach to the matter the given class will be unable to stay on top, *and, consequently*, will be incapable of solving its production problems either.» (Collected Works, vol. 32).

## Some Aspects of the Debate on the Proletarian Party

*Tsigereda Aklilu*

The nature and actual characteristics of the USSR and more generally of the E. European and other such regimes, the social and economic mechanisms which govern the relationship between classes in the societies, and the whole dynamic of struggle and of power on which they base part of their specificity give rise to several complex problems.

The problems are on the one hand traceable historically through the theoretical and practical experience of the the international workers movement, and on the other verifiable also by the way of overcoming the conceptions which affect, when not directly responsible, the actual, tragic caricatures of «socialist realizations». If in a general sense the process leading to the bureaucratic articulation of the soviet society, and thus perpetuated in the national peoples' revolutions, is still to be discovered, some aspects of the problematics of the «party question» are nevertheless recognizable i.e. the type and form of organization of the proletariat as well as the deep imprint left by its action and political strategy. In spite of the obvious link between these facts and the whole process of social bureaucratization it is however possible to state which political and organizational aspects result from the class struggle during its historical course, letting the particular and specific conditions of the development of this struggle remain in the background. This is, as Lenin warned, the substance of internationalism: to be able to critically evaluate and personally verify the experience of the international workers movement, and not to limit oneself to knowing about it or «copying the final resolutions».

The actual conception of the party and its establishment are, however, influenced by the socio-economic and political conditions within which the struggle develops, by the national boundaries and the historical framework of its development. In the same way, the organizational criteria

\* The article is a translation. Since the author did not indicate quotations with precise footnotes, we have translated the quotations directly from the original article-EMR.

take into account the orientation and basis of the existing social organism, so that in transformation, the main political tactics and form of social alliance are able to withstand the strain of political change and the transformation of the society. In other words, the problems of organization of the proletariat involve the substance of the proletariat revolution, the essence of political power and of its « conquest » by the people, the connection between instrumentalization and political articulation of the working class and other social classes in relation also to the mechanism of the state as a politico-organizational aspect of interests which are considered general. Basically, in order to consider the subject of the proletariat party, account must be taken of a certain political vision and of its conquest, of centralism and democracy, and of the characteristics necessary for the transformation of the society within a socialist perspective.

## 2. *The problem of the organization of the proletariat in the thought of Marx and Engels*

According to Marx and Engels the formation of the International Association brought about an attempt at formulating the organization of the working class on other bases, and not on those of socialist or semi-socialist sects. One initial aspect was concerned with the overcoming of isolated worker societies and of uniting them into national organizations even if each local independent society retained the faculty of being able to refer directly to the International Association. In the same way, Marx did not underestimate the burden of the national and historical characteristics which weighed upon the workers and their struggle, which is by definition national « not in content but in form », since « generally speaking in order to fight, the working class must organize itself in its own country as a class ».

In opposition to national division and the existence of sects, the International Worker Association counterposed unity of action through the International Association of workers, since if it is true that « so long as the sects are (historically) justified, the working class is not yet mature for an independent historical movement », it is equally true that the « the worker who has to take political power one day to establish a new organization of labour must overthrow the old politics which sustain the old institutions », and in order to « reach this goal (we maintain) that the means are not everywhere identical ». Marx therefore pays great attention to what he calls « *historical encrustations* » of the working class (institutions, customs and traditions which are different in each country) and of the national background within which the class struggle organizes itself. This flexibility and this way of considering things is reflected also in the forms of organization of the proletariat struggle not referring only to the actual moment of association but

also to « all other forms by which the proletarians are accomplishing... their organization into a class ».

The necessity of the existence of a party was shaped on the one hand as a historical affirmation of the proletariat as a class, and on the other as an essential means « in its struggle against the unified power of the ruling classes ». « The organization of the proletariat into a political party is necessary to assure the success of the social revolution in reaching its ultimate aim: the abolition of classes. The union of the working class forces, which has already been attained thanks to the economic struggle, must also serve it as a lever in the struggle against the political power of its exploiters... so that the conquest of political power becomes the main task of the proletariat » (*General Statutes of the International Workers Association*). Thus, Marx and Engels never considered the party as separate from those factors which are relative to a revolutionary process in its practical and historical class movement and from the role of proletarian organization in the transformation of the society.

The singling out of the antagonism and collision between classes as seen in the Marxist concept not only brings to light the economical aspect of the relationships of production but also points it out as a focal aspect in the « mode » of production in its being above all a way of domination which has to be overthrown. The exploitation of man by man which comes from the utilisation of wage labour by capital, a relationship therefore which presupposes historical relationships of subjugation of the labour-force by which the social, economic and political mechanism is characterised. It is from here that the origins of the distinction between the classes may be traced, and of revolutionary processes as « organized political opposition of civil society » and emancipation and hegemony of a particular class that « takes over, starting off from a given situation, the general emancipation of the whole society, but only presuming that the whole society finds itself in the same situation as this class », whereas the proletariat, « by organizing all the conditions of human existence on the presupposition of social liberty », and « not merely political », overcomes the « partial » or « bourgeois » emancipation into a « general and human one ». The conception of the party reflects in synthesis a complete and detailed Marxist analysis from the moment that an instrument « in order to elevate the proletariat to the dominant class » to « organize it » in the « conquest of democracy » is being dealt with — « we are not communists who want to abolish personal freedom and make the world into a large barrack or factory ...we have no wish to buy equality at the expense of liberty » — and in the transformation of public power which by this process « will lose its (own) political character ». This in as much as « freedom consists in changing the State from a means which stands above the society to a means which is absolutely subordinated to it » and the same role of the proletariat party is directly involved in the phase of revolutionary

transformation since in no way can the working class « be satisfied by simply taking a ready made machine into its own hands and wielding it for its own purposes », — « the political instrument of its enslavement must not serve as a political instrument for its emancipation » — neither must it adapt its goal of radical social change at the actual act of the overthrowing of « the old political power ». Political power therefore must be transformed from the actual moment of the setting up of organizational action, in socialism, by the working classes, bearers not of a particular administration of power but of its dissolution, not of a specific relationship of domination, either by a majority or a minority, but of a necessary destruction of every means of domination. If « the principle of politics is will » and « revolution in general — the overthrowing of the existing power and the dissolution of old relationships — is a political act », socialism cannot anyway do less than « shed this political covering ». The struggle of the proletariat overcomes and destroys therefore the system of power and domination of capital, not conquering power and wielding it for its benefit, but transforming the actual essence of « power », taking over and changing the political form so that, by this act, it adapts and transforms the relationship that linked it to the production of capital and the social product of expropriated labour, private property.

The experience of the Commune becomes, therefore, essential and innate to the Marxist conception: « it is this political form which has finally been discovered which allows the actualization of the economic emancipation of labour », starting right from the political power of the producers intended as that capacity of the working class to take over and indicate how to resolve the problem of the middle classes and the peasantry and get itself recognised in the revolution as the only class capable of social initiative ». The power of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the working class acquires the significance of a violent eruption, in as much as accelerated by the revolution, of the oppressed classes organised for a different social administration. « The Commune therefore did not mean a revolution against one or the other forms of state power, legitimist, constitutional, republican or general. It signified a revolution against the actual essence of the State, this supernatural abortion of society; it was the reappropriation by the people of their own social life ».

« The Commune is the winning back of the power of the State on behalf of the society, from which it takes its vital force, instead of being the force which dominates and holds it subject. It is the winning back by the people themselves who substitute their own force for the force organised to oppress them ». If the period of revolutionary transformation from a capitalist society to a communist one corresponds to a « political transition period » characterized by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, the Commune presents itself as the « organic

instrument » of the real movement of the working classes. The organization of the Commune does not suppress either the class struggle or the State but establishes conditions for the emancipation of labour and, by destroying the power of the State itself whose functions are « reduced to those few functions which fulfill general and national requirements ». Thus, the autoemancipation of the proletariat which is at the same time the conquest of power and the management of the State by the proletariat. In Marx's view therefore, no particular instrument of self organization of the class is privileged (like for example, the party was for the whole Bolshevik group), but the self government of the producers, and the various instruments by which this is carried out, assuring basically the revolutionary transformation of the society. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the self government of the producers, being the owners only of the personal conditions of production (of the labour force) as opposed to those who own the material conditions of production « under the form of ownership of capital ». A reappropriation, therefore, of the material conditions for the existence of the working class, « collective ownership by the workers » which is fundamentally a different way of producing and consuming to that of capital, and that has a vitality and a perspective that belongs to the process of reappropriating social life if the working class « has taken into its own hands the actual direction of the revolution and has found at the same time the means to hold it firmly in its own hands... ». The power of the Commune created in opposition to « the old centralized government, represents a political form « fully prepared to expand itself », actually a worker leadership which aims at revolutionizing the social enslavement of the producers ». « It wanted to make individual private property a reality by transforming the means of production, the land and the capital, which are today essentially a means of enslavement and exploitation of labour, into simple instruments of free and associated labour ».

The experience of the Commune singled out furthermore, another important aspect that will be seen later in the revolutionary processes of 1905 and 1917 in Tsarist Russia: it determined the limits of utopistic ideals held by the preexisting groups, the Commune of the *Blanquists* and the *Proudhonians*, and at the same time confirmed that the real movement of the working class, at the moment of the revolutionary break, should go beyond the objectives posed by their own organizations and develop more advanced associative instruments. Marx was rightly able to state that « the International is not, above all, a government of the working classes, it is more of an organ of unification than an organ of command ...The Association does not dictate any given form of political power ...the worker associations must not be absolutely identical in Newcastle and Barcellona, in London and Berlin ...the workers must change the relationship between themselves and the capitalists and the landlords, and this means that the society must be changed.

This is the common aim of any worker movement: the worker and peasant leagues, the trade-union co-operatives, the consumer and producer co-operatives, they are only a means of achieving the real goal ».

In addition to these observations developed in August 1871, just a few months after the Commune, the International, and Marx himself, admit a year later, with the approvation of article 7/a of the Statutes, the necessity of an autonomous proletarian party for the conquest of political power and in view of the need of a new configuration of the International. In September 1872, the V Congress of the IWA « declaring obligatory political action and the purifying the Association from troublesome elements », consecrates the power of the general Council so that it can « suspend branches, sections councils or federal committees and federations of the International until the following congress », and at the same time decreed the split between the « Marxists » and the « antiauthoritarians » of Bakunin thus revealing the intention of Marx and Engels to dissolve an institution (The International) that « belonged to the period of the Second Empire, a period during which the dominant oppression over all Europe required of the workers a period of ...unity and abstention from any form of internal polemic ».

It was dealing with an institution which had been surpassed and « the new role which belonged to it, that of finding the organizational form which was capable of a universal representation of the proletariat (which had) gone beyond all the means at its disposition »: it was necessary to begin again from new bases starting from the consolidation of the national states and from the advancement of the workers movement particularly in England and in Germany. However, the polemic and internal battle of the International did not base itself so much on the workers' party within a single national background so much as on the necessity of the identification of political struggle as a fundamental aspect for the emancipation of the proletariat. It is the enunciation of a strategy more than an analysis of the organizational steps for the success of the proletariat revolution: « the political movement of the working class naturally has as its ultimate aim the conquest of political power for the working class itself, and in order to attain this end it is naturally necessary to have an organization of the working class which has to be developed up to a certain stage and born from its own economic struggles. » For Marx, « the concept of party » continues to correspond to the concept of class, since « every movement of class, as such, is necessarily, and has always been, a political movement. » The only clear organizational factor in the strategy of the International is that of the autonomy of the proletarian party which Engels expresses thus: « The politics which counts must be proletarian politics, the workers' party must not see itself as the tail end of some bourgeois party but must instead constitute itself as an independent party which has its own goal, and its own policies ». The defeat of the Commune

influenced the discussion within the IWA. For Marx and Engels, the Commune, whose lack of « centralization and authority » was behind its defeat, had « put as its main objective the political action of the proletariat », and it was therefore the factor that had destroyed « that original collaboration of all the elements » which was the International, and had to make people realise that socialist sects had been surpassed by proposing as a central question of the revolution the organization and intervention of the working class.

For the emerging German social-democratic tendencies this lesson presented itself, instead, in terms of the structuralization of the workers' party as W. Liebknecht clearly observes: « First of all the French workers have no organization, apart from the International; moreover, they went through a revolutionary school that our people have not had any experience of. If our workers had had such a school, we would be further ahead than the French, and that thanks to our organization. With such an efficient organization, the Commune would never have been defeated. »

### 3. *The « party in the conception and practice of German Social Democracy in its first period.*

At the dissolving of the I International, which formally took place at the conference of Philadelphia in July 1876, there began the development of party-like and trade-union organizations of the proletariat.

The development of Trade-Unionism in England and the birth of the German social-democratic party embodied the more significant aspects of this new organizational process. In the background of Bismarkian Germany, the debate on the problem of the party was based on the need to reawaken the consciousness of the working class, placing it at the centre of all historical development and proposing the political « domination » of the proletariat as a lever by which it could attain its own emancipation — as the *Workers' Programme* of Lassalle declared — and of unifying the various poles of worker associations which were being formed.

The flowering of workers' cultural associations, the formation of which began in 1860 inside the organization of the bourgeoisie (The National Society), stimulated this process of disassociation and fusion.

A first question that was considered regarded the singling out of the fulcrum around which the organization would turn. From the moment that there was no possibility of joining the various workers' associations, owing to the legislation in force, an *appeal* made by the central committee of Leipzig — born for the purpose of establishing a general workers' congress — stated that free workers' assemblies had to be considered as the focal point of the organizational aims which in their turn gave rise to a local committee. Another question was concerned initially with who was to be considered as a « worker », this problem was connected

to the complex social stratification of the period as well as the presence of workers' associations and of the co-operative movements.

Lassalle's *Open Letter*, cited by the committee, pointed out some fundamental difficulties when it insisted on the need of the working class to constitute itself as an independent political party with a programme based on equal and direct universal suffrage brought about by all available legal means. Lassalle's vision therefore went beyond the field of action of the worker's societies and consumer co-operatives and directed the German workers' movement towards a revendication of a national and general character (universal suffrage), and towards objectives which he considered were able to embody the embryo of further development of the working classes — the producers' associations with state credit, like universal suffrage, were considered a means to an end —: the socialisation of production. In the *Open Letter* there is a concretisation of the perspectives of the proletariat organisation based essentially on a research into the effective strategic means necessary to the vitality and political and associated presence of the working class. This concept was behind the birth of the General Association of German Workers which, in the *Statute* (1863), indicated structural and organizational principles. In particular the *Statute* set as the member of the association, the workers who agree to become members, and who could leave when they wanted to, and it asserted the prerogative of the leadership to decide on the definition of a « worker » and to welcoming members of other classes or to exclude any member from the association. The leadership which dealt with all these matters and which decided by simple majority, save the possibility of the president making urgent provisions, was composed of a president and 24 members among which the secretary was to be elected at the Annual General Assembly.

The president was elected for the first time for five years, and then for a year if there was an absolute majority; the organizations of the Association at a local level were directed by members with specific powers nominated by the leadership who had the power to dismiss them; the president could only suspend the members temporarily.

The organizational form that was taken over by the Association was, consequently, of an accentuated presidentialism which under the direction of Lassalle tended to develop itself — the actual president had the job of nominating 'trustees' at a local level — and met right from the beginning with a certain resistance.

The successive developments following the death of Lassalle — who had indicated Bernhard Becker as his successor — testified to the importance that the matter of organization objectives for which it was born and created. It was concerned with singling out and developing a political line which gave a new effect to the Association and confronted a different aspect of the class struggle, in a background characterised by the recrudescence of the prussianism of Bismark.

Two fundamental questions presented themselves: that of the tactic to follow regarding the feudal reaction of the *junker* and the bourgeois opposition of the progressive party and that of the type of organisation coherent to the adopted strategy and which was capable of mobilizing new worker forces. The debate which started-off inside the Association was also felt at an organizational level in respect to a greater centralization of the party, which was the fusion between the secretariat and presidency, and the emergence of a new mouthpiece, *Der Social Demokrat*, to which Marx and Liebknecht initially collaborated. The party line was becoming more precise, according to Schweitzer, and with the resistance of Marx and Engels who finally refused to collaborate, particularly regarding the hypothesis of universal suffrage. The limitations that universal suffrage would have had if granted by the Prussian Government in an actual German reality in which two thirds of the proletariat found themselves under the domination of feudal masters, made it « not a weapon but a trap », whereas Schweitzer considered that they were dealing with « a trap which could develop as a weapon ». At the various workers' congresses, the first taking place in Westfalia on the Rhine, the majority of the Association were in favour of the tactics of Schweitzer, defending the independence of the party, and affirming the possibility of the government of abolishing the system of the three classes and substituting it with universal suffrage. The General Assembly of 30 November 1865 attempted the reorganization of the Association providing for the exclusion of sectarianism at the organizational level. In actual fact, faced with the conflict between Austria and Prussia, and faced with the proposal advanced by Prussia concerning a German parliament on the basis of universal suffrage, the party had urgent tasks to accomplish. The *Electoral Programme* of Erfurt gave an initial, if somewhat equivocal, answer to these question even if it was not able to have any representation of the Association at the first election of the Reichstag in northern Germany. With the presidency of Schweitzer at the Assembly of Brunswick in 1867 the process of centralization around the office of president was further developed. On the basis of a programme which established among other things a free and united peoples state, the introduction of universal suffrage, the productive associations with state credit (the fundamental aspects proposed by Lassalle), the list of members of the Association had to be reconsidered with the expulsion of all those who did not approve, that the president had the right of nominating the fiduciaries at a local level who, in turn, had to pay into the Association's kitty at least half of the local quota. Following this, the powers of the president were limited in part by the direct election of all members, but these measures increased the prestige of this office in relation to all other party bodies. With the first election of two representatives of the Association to the northern German Parliament in 1867, a distinctly different period for the advancement of the German Workers Movement began.

When faced with the movement of strikes, which had spread not only in Germany, the Assembly of the summer of 1868 deliberated on the non-necessity of trade union organisations according to an order of the day declaring that the strike was not a means by which the basis of capitalist production could be changed, but a means of encouraging class consciousness. The trade unions and the question of its autonomy vis a vis the party became the other important elements of debate on the organization of the proletariat. The problem of the constitution of trade union organizations were in any case considered initially as a result of Schweitzer's initiative. The Workers' Congress called for on 26th September 1868 substantially repeated the type of aggregation of the Association. The League of Workers which was thereby constituted gave great powers to the committee, in relation to the leadership of the Association, since the committee could decide whether a strike regarded a single worker or the entire league. This form of organization was criticised by Marx, particularly regarding the condition of the German worker who was used to authoritarian principles and had therefore to be educated towards autonomous action. Neither did Marx agree with the idea of using the trade unions as a means of political organization, subordinated as a result to party needs. The German trade-union movement was, however, already born fragmented in its own right, and divided over the matter of the various strategic hypothesis corresponding to the Association, to the progressive party and to the Nuremberg society of Bebel.

In the same way, on the other hand, the extension of the class struggle and the development of trade-union movements also marked the beginning of the division of the *Lassallian* and *Eisenachian* theories of the German Workers' Movement, undermining the presidential dictatorship which had been decided *within* the former, and the breaking up of the links which joined the latter to the peoples' party. At Eisenach, the Social-democratic Workers' Party presented itself with a more collegial structure than that of the Association (a committee of five people and a commission of control of eleven members answering to the annual congress) which later would have based its own political intervention on the stimulus of a wider discussion, both internal and in the pages of *Volkstaat*, between the militants, statutory members of the party, the International and a local association. With difficulty, in February 1875 and later in May of the same year, a fusion between the Eisenachian and Lassallian theories was reached on the basis of the *Gotha Programme*: the Socialist Workers' Party was born in Germany. Marx' criticisms are well known regarding the process of unification which had «traded its principles». In particular he referred to state help as an essential contribution to the co-operative movement while the «co-operative societies ... are *only* valuable in as much as they are creation of the independent workers and not under the protection of either the government

or the bourgeoisie», to the strategy of considering all the other social classes and their political associations an «one reactionary mass» in relation to the working class, to the lack of other organizational instruments of the proletariat as the trade unions which are also, as Engels said, «the real class organization of the proletariat»; to the emphasis on the «elimination of every social and political inequality» while the question was one of the «suppression of all class differences» and therefore the inevitable inequality of the conditions of existence. The project of organization resulting from the unification renounced the form of associations, and considered as a party member whosoever adhered to the programme and approved of it; besides the publication of the two mouthpieces (later unified into *Vorwärts*), there were provisions for a leading body, a commission of control and a committee whose job was that of arbitrating the differences of opinion between the two bodies i.e. the leadership and the commission. At Gotha furthermore, two trade union organizations were joined and in occasion of the electoral consultations in 1877 a Central Electoral Committee was created and the salaries for the officials inside the party also decided. A year later the liberticide legislation of Bismark and the anti-worker reaction, effectively brought to light the problem of an organization abroad which had been developed around the two mouthpieces of social democracy, the *Laterne* and *Freiheit*, and finally the *Sozialdemokrat* published in Zurich.

But following the reorganization of the party the question that was subsequently to leave its stamp on the German Worker's Party was raised: the differences between the socialdemocratic faction in the Reichstag and their political positions, and the party. Over the colonial policy of Bismark the socialdemocratic representatives were divided, the majority retaining that some of the maritime lines proposed were not only destined to Bismarkian colonialism but the promoting of international exchange between peoples, and the minority who saw the matter of state subsidies for the development of traffic as a danger leading to a new crisis in Germany. Even if the vote against Germany was unanimous, the internal discussions regarding the socialdemocratic factions involved the *Sozialdemokrat*, the official party mouthpiece, which according to the representatives of the Reichstag, should not have made any publication regarding the merits of the positions taken by the group since «it is not the paper which must define the attitude of the factions but the factions which must control the attitude of the paper.» The polemic was reformulated on the basis of the parliamentary group's recognition of the paper as a mouthpiece of the whole party and not just of a faction, and regarding the unconditional approval required of party members of the decisions of the group acting as the leading body in a state of emergency of exceptional laws.

The singling out of parliamentary instruments as a potential lever for the emancipation of the proletariat brought about right from the

start complex organizational problems which were manifested in recurrent opposition. At Erfurt (1891) the Gotha Programme was revised. The new objectives that the German Socialdemocracy presented in the *Programme of Erfurt* were the work of Kautsky for the programmatical-theoretical part, and of Bernstein for the part concerning the practical objectives. The problematic area which was becoming evident regarded the tasks of a proletariat organization in a modern State, being an organization which had assumed particular characteristics owing to a knowledge of its own historical tasks for mobilization etc., and which tended to « subject to itself, to the interests of the classes which it represented, the state power » and tended « to become the dominant party in the state ». In this way, the socialdemocratic party required its own mechanism of central representation through the assemblies of the delegates and congresses, the only instruments, according to Kautsky, for « bringing out into the light » the collective will and for maintaining unity. Internal democracy is guaranteed by the control of the delegates and by their being representatives in the same way as parliamentarism guarantees adhesion to democratic methods in obtaining power. The party in its autonomy and ideological clarity had as a central problem of its practical requirements, the search for social alliances since « the programme must show what we want from today's society, and not what we expect from it. »

The real question of the tactical revision of the « one reactionary mass » of Lassalle became urgent from the moment that they confronted the problem of the parliamentary struggle and the necessity of conquering the freedom of association, of assembly and of the press which represented to the working class « vital conditions for existence, without which it could not develop itself. These freedoms are like light and air for the proletariat and whoever restricts or repudiates them, or wants to hold back the workers from the struggle for the conquest and development of these freedoms, stands with the worst enemies of the proletariat, despite whatever love such persons have, or pretend to have, for it. »

The early debate in the party on agrarian matters manifested the urgency of the question of alliances for the proletariat organization. The problem of relationships with the peasants on the one hand, and with intellectuals on the other has for Kautsky a strategic importance since the principle task of socialdemocracy is exactly that of reuniting in block the whole mass of the proletariat and furthermore all farmers and industrialists, not as a class but as individuals « apparently independent from their class », and « of gaining this mass, organising it politically and economically, elevating it intellectually and morally, and bringing it to the point where it will be able to inherit the capitalist mode of production ».

Another series of questions which presented themselves with the expansion of socialdemocracy concerned the relationship between trade-

unions and the party. The attack of the revisionist wing of Bernstein regarding this was based on the « theory of neutrality » of the trade-unions, and on their autonomy whilst the « revolutionaries », and particularly Kautsky, maintained that it was the party's job to guide the whole of the workers movement. Taking into account the necessary subdivision of the tasks between the party and the unions, he observed that the link between proletarian organizations comes from the fact that the first could not forego basing itself on a movement which struggles for the defence of the condition of the workers, while for the second socialist strategy could not be absent from the movement and the general objectives otherwise the result being the overevaluation of professional interests and the birth of corporatism. But precisely because the scientific vision of the historical tendencies and social reality is attributed to social democracy, the role of the intellectuals was considered relevant: « the class struggle of the proletariat needs above all a profound and more scientific analysis; it cannot become a socialdemocratic movement without the collaboration of intellectuals. » For Kautsky however, the political-organizational leadership of the party was not the task of the intellectuals in so far as they were a group detached from society.

In the same way, the presence of the *revisionists* inside socialdemocracy, and the contrasts that followed, brought about the necessity of confronting the principle of the unity of the proletarian organization in connection with the problem of dissent. « A party », observed Kautsky, « is an organization in which individuals are joined to each other by a common way of thinking and feeling with the aim of a common action, aiming in this way, at its own reinforcement. The unity of thought and action of the members is the premise of efficient action. It is an organization created in order to struggle against other parties. One should join a party voluntarily ». Differences of opinion and discussion are considered vital for social democracy as long as unity in the common struggle against the enemy is maintained.

This is, however, an epoch (the congress at Dresden 1903) in which other socialdemocratic theories come onto the European scene, such as the Russian one, brought forward by the revolutionary process of 1905, which, basing itself on other historical conditions, placed the problem of tactics and organization of revolutionary forces on another plane.

#### 4. *The Bolsheviks' theories on proletarian organization*

It is well known that it was actually over the concept of the party that Russian socialdemocracy clashed giving rise to two groups — the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks at the II Congress of the RSDLP (1903). This problem appeared in all its urgency in Russia and was at the same time a symptom of the revolutionary situation which was developing in that country and the necessity of fusion on the centralization of

organizational instruments, given the extreme dispersion of Russian organizations which referred to socialdemocracy. In Tsarist Russia, groups of popular propaganda of a populist and socialist flavour were being formed in the period preceding the birth of the party, the *narodniki* and the *Tchaikovski Circle* were the most important examples, as well as organizations based on a programme of social upheaval such as the Workers' Union of Southern Russia, of Odessa and Rostov, and Union of Workers of Northern Russia which was linked to the Plekhanov group of *Land and Liberty*. A coherent vision of the necessity and type of party needed was not lacking in the conception of the latter two groups — an organization, the members of which had to be workers in « strict relationship with factory workers » and who worked for the unification of the workers in southern Russia, or for the constitution of a panrussian organization of workers — nor was it absent from the objectives and revendications principally developed in the programme of the Union of S. Petersburg which included the demands for political and civil liberty, joining thus the « great social struggle » begun in the West. There was immediately a polemic between the Petersburg Union and the *Land and Liberty* group over the political action to take — the « non necessity of political freedom » for the populists whereas the organizers of the Union were concerned with stimulating the active presence and political participation of the proletariat — and over the nature (or particularity) of the Russian situation in relation to that in the West. In this way, and substantially in the same terms, the split took place between *Land and Liberty* into the two branches of the *Narodnaja Wolja* and *Cernyj Peredel*. From the crisis of the populist movement, and from the exigencies of the development the demands for political and social transformation of the country had, an early embryo of Russian social democracy was born abroad, the *Emancipation of Labour Group* (1883) of Plekhanov, Zasluc and Axelrod whereas internally, in addition to the activity of student groups, such as the General Union of Students of Moscow which claimed autonomy from the « actual parties » in as much as the union « had to be a battalion of study which continually annexed the forces of the group in struggle », groups making connections between workers and intellectuals (the society of S. Petersburg) operated, as well as social-democratic organizations of a different kind (the group of Fedosseev, the workers' Society of Borba, the Brusnev group, the Kondratev Circle, Kiev, Odessa, etc.). It was, however, outside the country and in direct connection with developments inside German social democracy that the first steps of Russian social democratic organization were taken. Even if the Russian party was officially formed at Minsk (March 1898) from the group which had formed around the *Rabocaja Gazeta* of Kiev, and from the *Union for the Struggle of the Emancipation of the Working Class* at St. Petersburg — which, having passed through a serious conflict between the « old group », led by Lenin, and the « youngsters », published

the *Rabocée Delo* — from the *General Confederation of Jewish Workers* in Lithuania and Poland (Bund), and also from the Unions of Moscow and Ekaterinoslay, the Tsarist repression and the extreme difficulty of centralizing a political action on the weak bases of the programme adopted by the party at Minsk, determined the movement abroad to be the centre of gravity of the party. This was even more true as a result of the fact that within the country economist theories were beginning to establish themselves and with them the conception of the class struggle instead of being political as being essentially a trade unionist and economic one, and from this resulted the negation of the priority of the task of claiming political and civil liberty by the proletariat and the minimum weight (evaluation) given to the revolutionary democratic movement. This current was contested and criticised by the *Emancipation of Labour Group*, giving rise to a series of splits, while the theoretical and practical influence of German social-democracy, itself at the time in the midst of a controversy over Bernstein's revisionism, was felt more strongly. The contrasts that emerged over the tactics regarding the political struggle and of centralism, which found a logical formulation in the *Credo* of Kuscova, in the *Tasks and Tactics* of Axelrod and the critical answer by Lenin (*The Opposition of the Russian Socialdemocrats*), brought to light the fact that the debate on the proletarian organization and its tactical problems could no longer be postponed.

At the same congress of the Socialist International (Paris 1900) the socialdemocratic group divided over the question of « ministerialism », which came about over the case of Millerand. But, generally speaking, this congress was important as a turning point for the whole European Workers' Movement. The links that Plekhanov, the left wing of social-democracy, was able to establish inside the country with Lenin, Potresov, and Martov, already laid the basis for a central organizational-nucleus of the party to be founded on local committees. These first contacts cleared up the fundamental problem of every initial form organization, i.e. the problem of adhesion of groups and various organizations to the party, in relation also to the policy of the alliances to be pursued. If the Revolutionary Socialdemocrat Group formed within the ambit of the Emancipation of Labour Group realized the necessity of evaluating the whole revolutionary movement struggling against Tsarism, the numerous organization which did not belong to the Russian social democratic party — the *Robocée Znamja*, the socialrevolutionaries of southern Russia and of Svoboda, the Bund, the committees of Petersburg and Kiev etc. — were aware of the urgency of overcoming the organizational and political limits of their own existence, siding in one form or another with the unification attempt undertaken by the bloc of the left.

On the initiative of Lenin and Plekhanov, together with the leaders of « legal Marxism » Struve and Tugan-Baranovski, the Conference of Pskov, gave life to the *Iskra* and later to the theoretical mouthpiece

Zarja. From the beginning, the programme of *Iskra* posed the need for a strong proletarian party capable of guiding the the masses of workers and influencing the people's democratic movement in the struggle against Tsarism; with this background the editorial board of the *Iskra* secured organizational independence as regards the Social-Democrat group.

With the explosion of the revolutionary process, i.e. the one begun in 1901, which particularly involved the students, a reconsideration of the methods of struggle — terrorism was spreading among the youth — and of « political assault » against Tsarism came to the fore; the *Iskra* counterposed to this the encircling of Tsarism by the working class, who, organized by the party, had to guide and push the other social layers to follow the strategy of Russian social democracy.

The difficult process of unification found continual obstacles due to the lack of clarity on the question of practice and the target of this activity, on social alliances and on the type of organizational instruments to adopt within the framework of the strategy to defeat Tsarism and to achieve the revolutionary transformation of Russian society. The attack launched by the current of the economists, the *Robocée Delo* and the *Bor'ba* in particular, and by the growing nationalism of the Bund, linked to its recognised organizational autonomy which pushed for a federative solution of the relationships between the organization and the party, was combined to the growing friction within the editorial board of *Iskra* — between the « old guard » guided by Plekhanov and the « youngsters », Martov, Lenin and Potresov. There was a substantial push from inside the country towards the solution of organizational problems, highlighted by the functioning of the organizational committee (between the adherents of the *Iskra*, the *Južnyi Robocy*, the Petersburg committee, and the Bund) and the foundation of the socialrevolutionary party, and the liberal party of constitutionalists which began the publication of their own mouth-piece, the *Osvoboždenie*. Regarding the whole of the anti-Tsarist democratic movement, the debate within the socialdemocratic current became even more urgent and important. There were those who, like Axelrod, maintained that the « actual content » of socialdemocratic action, that is the spreading of the proletariat struggle with the aim of the liberation of the whole people, would determine the influence of socialdemocracy upon other social classes; and those instead who, like Lenin, maintained that the bourgeoisie democratic movement would have to come under the tutelage of socialdemocracy, and those who, like Martov, saw that as the democratic movement was becoming more influential it was necessary to attract large popular masses to the party through « a whole net of every sort of unions and groups of, that is to say, supporters spread over the vast mass ». In 1902-1903 the political positions taken over the question of the party began to become more defined and exploded in the various opposing positions over the statute at the II Congress of the party.

In Lenin's « *What Is To Be Done?* » his particular vision of organization in the specific Russian situation was established. Starting right from the development of revolutionary tendencies which were not social democratic, Lenin observed « only a party directed by a vanguard theory could carry out the vanguard tasks of the struggle »; the theoretical struggle has, in this way, a role which is just as important as the political and economic ones, since « before unification and in order to unite it is necessary first of all to set the differentiations completely and distinctly ». Over one of the most resolute points of economism which, addressing the growing spontaneity of the working masses, theorised the priority of agitation in the economic sphere, Lenin's criticism is even more unsparing: « The workers are not yet able to have a social-democratic consciousness, it can only be brought to them from without. The history of every country testifies to the fact that the working class by itself is only able to elaborate a trade unionist consciousness... The doctrine of socialism is, however, developed from philosophical, historical and economic theories elaborated by cultured representatives from the possessing classes, i.e., the intellectuals. » And if, « owing to their social position, the same founders of contemporary scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, belonged to the bourgeois intellectuals, » in Russia itself we can see that there was an attempt by the young intellectuals to link the economic struggle to the revolutionary movement against the autocracy. Taking initiative from the Kautskian conception of the socialist consciousness as « something brought to the class struggle of the proletariat class from without, and not something that comes about spontaneously », Lenin develops the ideological issue of the class struggle which may be subordinated and subservient to bourgeoisie ideology, which is trade unionism, or to socialist ideology. « So our job... is to fight against spontaneity and to turn the workers' movement away from spontaneous trade unionism and the tendency to seek refuge in the camp of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary socialdemocracy. » The development of the mass movement serves to indicate « new theoretical, political and organizational tasks » elaborated in a plan which must be rigorously applied since « the bigger the spontaneous awakening of the masses... the clearer and more urgent the need for mass consciousness of the theoretical, political and organizational work of socialdemocracy. » In this way the overthrow of Tsarism is not just one of the many revendications upheld, — revolutionary socialdemocracy « subordinates the struggle for reform to the revolutionary struggle for freedom and socialism », instead of injecting a political character into the said economic struggle. The knowledge and growth of a political consciousness implies the analysis and clear evaluation of the relationships between every class in the society, but this knowledge, and thus « the political consciousness of class » brought in from without, implies that socialdemocrats « must go among every class of the po-

pulation, and must send the platoons of their army in every direction.» From the moment that socialdemocracy must expose and underline «before the whole population, the general democratic tasks» the ideal socialdemocrat is therefore «the tribune of the people» and not the secretary of a trade-union. «The vanguard of the revolutionary forces will know how to become the only party which really organizes the denunciation that interest the whole population» and that will safeguard political independence and the revolutionary education of the proletariat. The «lagging-behind» of the leadership in comparison to «the spontaneous awakening of the masses», which is at the basis of the Russian socialdemocratic crisis, can be overcome, according to Lenin, «through a revolutionary organization which is indispensable for 'carrying out' the political revolution». The Leninist concept regarding this matter is very clear: starting from the analysis of the general situation in Russia within which the class struggle develops — lack of freedom and repression in particular — Lenin warned that there inevitably occur a politico-organizational coincidence between the trade unions and the organization of the party. This coincidence had a bad effect because the dynamic of the trade union presupposes a great involvement of the working masses, not only the social-democrats, aiming at the legalization of the trade-union movement, whereas the organization of the party, founded on «rigorous conspiracy» must be firmly in the hands of the revolutionaries, directed as it is to «guide the *whole* struggle of the proletariat for emancipation» subject to different organizational criteria and task. The party needed an organization which had a «stable leadership assuring continuity», this requirement becoming ever more important because of the greater involvement of the masses, formed from «persons who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activities», and which, by its activity, allows a greater participation of wider social stratas in the movement. The centralization of the «conspiratorial functions» of the organization were not at the expense of the multiplication of political and organizational initiative of the movement in the same way that the «professional revolutionaries» were not to be exclusively drawn from the intellectuals: Lenin's worry during this period was that of overcoming the existing state of affairs from an organizational and political point of view, and not of «lowering» the socialdemocratic organization to the level of a workers' club, or the revolutionaries to that of a mass of workers. It was urgent for the social democratic party to take a qualitative leap so as to really put itself as the vanguard of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat; the concept of a committee of professional revolutionaries which «pushes the movement from without», was connected then, not with an impoverishment of the class struggle but to its enrichment at a political and organizational level, «since the spontaneous struggle of the proletariat could not become a 'real class struggle' until it was guided by a strong revolutionary organization». These observations are, for Lenin, valid

in the social, economic and political background of Tsarist Russia, in the same way as the conception on the internal democracy of the party (the electivity of the members, etc.) if referred precisely within the existing situation of Tsarist autocracy, and thus clandestinity, loses its «democratic» significance because under those conditions control occurs mainly at the moment of the choice and preparation of the revolutionaries. Lenin refers the actual job of propaganda and agitation, the problem of the local and national press, directly to the Russian reality in its historical period. «*What Is To Be Done?*» is not only the affirmation of a model of a party, justifiable, owing to the backwardness of the Russian situation, in regard to another organizational scheme, Kautsky's socialdemocratic one, adopted as an example of a different political and socioeconomic situation. It also affirms a way of conceiving organizational problems on the basis of the internal ideological struggle of the proletarian movement rather than anchoring them to the basic problem of organizational development and political initiative of the party. It is not then necessary, as Lenin states in the preface to the collection «*Za 12 Let*» (1907), to limit historically the conception of the party as found in «*What is to be done?*», nor to consider it separate «from the context of an historical situation determined by a particular period, which today has already been surpassed by the development of our party»; it must be placed «within the framework of the struggle against "revisionism" since "*What Is To Be Done?*" is dedicated to the criticism of the right wing which to longer belongs to the publicist current but is within the social democratic organization.» Lenin was not unaware of the problems ensuing from the extreme centralization of the party which «could... ruin the cause if by chance there happened to be at the center an incapable person to whom 'great power' had been given» (*Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks*) but the remedy to the intrinsic degeneration of the given organizational scheme rests on «the fraternal collaboration exercised by the leaders and on the «overthrow» of personal power (if and when) installed at the centre of the party.»

The polemic over the organizational problems advanced by the Leninist positions were reflected at the II Congress of the RSDLP at Brussels (1903) which consecrated the future split of the party and the birth of Bolshevism. Over the question of centralism, and the definition of a party member, a split occurred formally even if the basic problem was not so much about a greater autonomy for the local social democratic committees to which Lenin and Pleckanov were opposed and had proposed a centralized apparatus — a central committee and the publishing of ISKRA coordinated by a party council — nor that of the definition of the party member (he who participates in the activities of one or the other party organizations, according to Lenin's formula, or he who collaborates, individually and regularly, with the party «under the direction

of one of the party's organizations » according to Martov's formula). Actually what was clearly highlighted was the way of conceiving the proletarian revolution itself, the role of the party in this process and of indicating the organizational form most suitable for carrying out the tasks of political initiative and the leadership of the whole movement. This was realized by the exponents of the Menshevik current, like Martov who declaimed, « the bugbear of opportunism over the organizational question (since) the opportunistic solution of the latter must be linked to the opportunistic interpretation of the actual task of the party » and rigorously affirmed: « he who, either by word or fact, denies *this* task (work for an autonomous political proletariat party); he who, in the name of interest of the struggle against autocracy or in the name of false ideas over the essence of the organization, i.e. in name of idealization of 'the organization from above' which bases itself on the total passivity of the masses organized mechanically, and in the name of lack of faith in the 'spontaneity of the masses', he who ... puts obstacles in the way of the process of the *political self-education* of the proletariat, self-education which takes place through the worker's active participation in the elaboration of the political line of his party, he who hinders the deepening of our political work for which the proletariat (during their daily struggle) receive the stimulus for self-education in the course of their constant intervention as a conscious force in the social life of contemporary Russia, he who tries to deviate their attention from these tactical tasks toward the purely mechanical work of the 'organization from above' in order to obtain from the mass of socialdemocrats a simple technical apparatus for guiding the proletarian masses, this person opportunistically adopts the tasks of socialdemocracy to the miserable political situation in which the proletariat takes its first steps, to the need of a "national" revolution which needs workers only in so far as they are a mass predisposed revolutionarily » (*The Proletariat and Intellectuals in Russian Socialdemocracy*). In the same vein, members such as Rjazanov noted how « a conspiratorial organization of socialdemocrats is a logical absurdity, and when social-democrats talk about it, you can be sure that the distinction between blanquism and socialdemocracy has disappeared from their minds » and that it « revealed intrigue and conspiracy » since it was not the task of the socialdemocrats « to prepare and plot insurrection », and it considered the necessity of a centralised but not centralistic organization that « sacrifices everything to the unity of action ». Axelrod also added his criticism indicating that in a rigorously organized and centralised organization « the product of the revolutionary movement of the intellectuals which, in the name of socialism, has tried to win the support of the masses in order to resolve — objectively speaking — a bourgeoisie revolutionary task », while Trotsky stated how the congress marked the « triumph of the political tendencies the 'centralistic' tendency in the programme and tactics of the organization ».

But this same congress revealed that for many comrades « politics » and « centralism » had simply a formal value and that they were purely an empty antithesis of « economism » and « dilettantism », similarly « centralism » itself appeared not as a synthesis of local and general tasks but as the logical antithesis of « dilettantism », as a formal and contrary construction. (*Report by the Siberian Delegation*).

A few months after the II Congress, Lenin returned to his original conception of organization in consideration of the numerous polemics which had emerged and the political significance of the split in the RSDLP. In « *One Step Forward and Two Steps Backwards* » other characteristics of Lenin's conception of the party are clarified and presented more profoundly, in particular those concerning the revolutionary militant and the centralism of the organization. On one hand presenting the professional revolutionary as « the jacobite linked irrevocably to the *organization* of the proletariat, *aware* of his own class interests, this being *revolutionary socialdemocracy* », and on the other, alongside unity over the question of programme and tactics, Lenin insisted on the « unity of organization that is inconceivable ... without a fixed statute, without the subordination of the minority to the majority, without the submission of a part to the whole ». It is certain, however, that the debate of the II Congress was very heated even over the content of the programme and tactics, since the programmatic perspectives and tactical tasks necessarily affected the question of the type of organization. One only needs to think of the speeches made by Akimov over the fact that « the said methods of struggle, proposed as the acting body not the class, but its organization, the party, in which there had been an attenuation and covering-up of its class traits and the mass character of its activity »; or that of Karskij (Topuridse) on the impossibility for the working class by itself or for the proletariat alone in its daily struggle, for its immediate interests, to arrive at the creation of a harmonious philosophical system, scientific socialism ... », or that of Pleckanov or of Trotsky who reveal how if Akimov denounced the project as having illegitimately shifted the centre of gravity from the daily struggle to the revolutionary dictatorship, from the class to the party, « he forgot that this dictatorship would only be possible when the socialdemocratic party and the working class are as close as possible to identification with each other. The dictatorship of the proletariat would not be a conspiratorial 'taking of power' but the political domination of an organized working class... ».

The affirmation of the Leninist conception and the objective birth of the Bolshevik current was viewed, by Lenin himself, within the framework of the « struggle against economism » and revisionism. Other voices were raised, however, by the Russian revolutionary movement as well as the German ones, against opportunism and the liquidation of Marxist theories, and not all of them saw, as Lenin did, in the organization (in its centralization, of professional revolutionaries and the

ironstrong discipline which had to characterise it) the privileged solution for the advancement of the working class movement.

A year after the II Congress — when the league abroad and Iskra were under the control of the Mensheviks — if Plechanov (*The Working Class and the Socialdemocratic Intellectuals*) made use of the concept of the « instinctive socialism » of the working class in order to criticise the necessity of a Leninist-type of organization, it is certain that all those who in one form or another opposed Lenin formulated a series of tactical organizational replies particularly regarding the party-mass relationship. It is the problem of the self-education of the party, from which the leadership which, according to Axelrod (in, *A Letter to Kautsky*, 6th June 1904) can develop itself, or that of the political self-education of the proletariat, noted by Martov, or the question of the choice between the party « which thinks for the proletariat and substitutes politically the class by itself » and a party which « educates the proletariat politically and mobilizes it ». This debate inside the Russian social democracy was not without importance and strategic aspects; it brought forward further considerations on the essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat because there where those who observed as Trotsky did, that in the Leninist 'organizational — substitutionalism' « that enormous political-social task which is the preparation of the class to State domination is substituted by a techno-organizational task: the elaboration of an apparatus of power » (*Our Political Task*). This is the same problem, as we shall see, which Lenin and the whole social democracy faced in the tumultuous background of the Russian Revolution of 1905.

It is said that the debate did not exclusively involve Russian social democracy. The wide conflict existing within the German Party against Bernstein and revisionism had brought forth the nucleus of a left wing current which proposed at the base of its own formulations factors different from the backward conditions in which the Russian working class found itself under the Tsarist autocracy. It was logical that faced with the emergence of a contrast between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks over the problems of organization, this current too made itself heard.

If Kautsky formally intervened on the side of the editorial board of ISKRA (Menshevik), he did not completely understand the issues and dimension of the conflict. On the other hand, the intervention of Rosa Luxemburg was relatively more incisive. She defined the Bolshevik tendency as « ultracentralist » and underlined its diversity from the « preceding socialist movements, for example, those of the jacobite — blanquist type », in particular over the presupposition of the whole link between social democracy and the struggle of the working class. « There is no ready made tactic which has been worked out and planned in advance and which can be taught to the members of social-democracy by a central committee, » she observed. On the contrary, Luxemburg considered that « social democracy is not linked to the organization of the working class,

but to a specific movement of the working class »; from where the particular quality which social democratic centralism must have, i.e., « a tendency whose realization proceeds contemporaneously with the consciousness and political education of the working masses in the course of their struggle ». Considering that « the role of the social democratic leadership is essentially conservative » since in Russia as well as Germany, faced with the great creative acts of the class struggle, it confines itself to formulating « the step by step conquest of the struggle into a platform standing as a bulwark against each ulterior innovation of great style », Luxemburg's criticism goes more deeply into the historical and social motives for opportunism — that « opportunist as it is ... even over organizational problems, it has one principle only — the lack of principles » — and deals with the question of the proletarian party being open not only to the proletariat but also to elements freed by « the continuous breaking up of the bourgeois society ». « What is important is that it (social-democracy) knows how to firmly subordinate present suffering of this many coloured band of sympathizers to the ultimate goals of the working class » in the same way as, on the other hand, the social democratic movement must, during its historical course « advance between two obstacles: between the loss of its mass character of and the renunciation of the ultimate goal and between the return to sects and degeneration into a bourgeois reformist movement ». For this reason, the overcoming of opportunism, Luxemburg noted, does not come about by means of statutes from the central committee which is « omnipresent and omnipotent » — which means falling into subjectivism — but by the real movement since « false steps which a real workers' movement takes are, at a historical level, immensely more fruitful and precious than the infallibility of the ablest central committee ». (*Problems of the Organization of Russian Socialdemocracy*). In fact the polemic over organization and the internal contrasts within Russian socialdemocracy find a new moment of heightened conflict in the live revolutionary process of 1905, when the proletarian movement began the great creative act of organization into soviets. From this Lenin and the Bolsheviks learned a useful lesson which they used twelve years later to defeat Tsarism.

##### 5. *The Party and the Soviet.*

The process of the formation of the soviet, intertwined with the formation of the trade union organizations, found fertile ground for development in the revolutionary wave which, beginning in 1901, shook Tsarist Russia. Alongside the strike committees emerging as a result of the thrust of worker representation in the factories (the law of the *starosti*), the dramatic Russian situation imposed on the proletarian movement and the more generally democratic movement, the need for an organizational co-ordination which enabled the overcoming, starting from

the mass strike, of the intrinsic limits of an action centered on obtaining better conditions for the working class, and puts in the forefront the struggle against the Tsarist autocracy. If the big political strikes at Rostov (1902) and at Baku (1903) — which extended quickly over the whole of southern Russia and developed in the background of the Russo-Japanese war for the conquest of Korea — and that at Petersburg (The Bloody Sunday of 1905), induced the Tsar to form the *Sidlovski Commission* to investigate workers' agitation, and to promise a National Assembly, the State Duma, these strikes, on other hand, rendered the working class more conscious of its own strength. The workers' delegates (the majority were not social-democrats) battled straight away to force the government to concede civil liberties and to render public the reunions of the commission. To the repression of the military insurrection of Potëmkin and Odessa and to the institution of limited universal suffrage (by census, region etc.) of the Duma, the masses responded with the general political strike of October 1905.

The first soviet of workers' deputies with a national resonance emerged, in the frame of this strike at Petersburg, « as an answer to the objective need, emerging from the actual course of events, for an organization which was authoritative without necessarily having a preceding long existence, which can immediately gather under it the dispersed masses while avoiding its becoming an obstacle to this effort, which can act as a confluence for the revolutionary currents within the proletariat, which is capable of taking the initiative... » On what basis should it be founded? The answer was automatic, since the only link between the proletarian masses, 'virgins' from an organizational point of view, was found in the process of production, so that the only thing that remained to be done « was to make the representation coincide with the factories and the workshops ». The delegates who assembled in the halls of the Technological Institute, the greater part of whom were already elected to the Sidlovskij Commission, launched an appeal for a general political strike to all the workers of Petersburg, in the struggle against Tsarism, under the leadership of a « Central Workers' Committee » to be elected on the basis of one delegate per five hundred workers. « This committee », it was affirmed, « will give our movement compactness, unity and strength. It will be the interpreter of the needs and desires of the workers of Petersburg before all social classes ».

A long way from being the automatic answer of the proletariat, the constitution of the Soviet at Petersburg was prepared and anticipated from the clash between the various strategic formulations of the two socialdemocratic factions and was materially favoured by the Menshevik « Group » at Petersburg. On this basis its birth brought, right from the beginning, a serious consideration of the relationship between the party and the Soviet and also on the role of the said party in a revolutionary process and at the moment of socialist transformation, which

is both, as Luxemburg said, « a destruction of class domination and the construction of socialism ». (*The Russian Revolution*). The congress of the Bolshevik faction held in London (April 1905) and the Ist Pan-Russian conference of the party workers belonging to the Menshevik wing, held in Geneva (April-May 1905), considered both series of questions.

The Menshevik resolution (*On the Conquest of Power and Participation in a Provisional Government*), considering the tactical problems of the struggle « in order to definitively liquidate... the caste regime and the monarchy » insisted on the bourgeois character of the revolution, and assigned to the provisional government which would have emerged, not only a thrust which would « advance the revolutionary process », but also the function of « combatting those of its factors which threatened the basis of the capitalist regime ». The role of socialdemocracy was thus conceived by the Menshevik not as one of taking over of power nor of sharing it in a provisional government but in being « a revolutionary party of extreme opposition ». Naturally if power « fell into the hands » of the social democracy, it could prepare itself and utilise it since if « the proletariat as a class takes the reins of power, it cannot fail... to conduct an open struggle against the whole of bourgeois society. Basically this means either a repetition of the Paris Commune or the beginning of a socialist revolution in the « West » and its extension into Russia. And it is our obligation to struggle for the second ».

On the contrary, the Bolsheviks and particularly Lenin, while they were in agreement over the democratic bourgeois character of the revolutionary process of 1905, they pointed out that the proletariat also had the task of « terminating the democratic revolution and allying the mass of peasants to it in order to forcibly crush the resistance of the autocracy and paralyse the instability of the bourgeoisie ». In opposition to the Menshevik thesis of the subordinate role assigned to the proletariat in a bourgeois revolution, the Bolshevik slogan of « democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry » assumed full weight, and the admissibility on principle of the participation of socialdemocracy in the provisional government, conceived as « an organ founded directly on a victorious armed insurrection and not as a purely representative organism », was affirmed. The same Leninist conception of permanent revolution differed from that of Trotsky and the Menshevik theories on the subject since it distinguishes between « the minimum democratic programme and the maximum socialist one », insisting on « the bourgeois character of the imminent Russian revolution » which means that social democracy cannot directly undertake a socialist revolution, notwithstanding its desire to do so. (*The Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry*). Only after the democratic revolution had been conducted to its conclusion could the Russian proletariat put as the order of the day the defense of democratic

conquest « in as much as it is an instrument of the socialist revolution. This struggle would be almost desperate if the Russian proletariat is left alone, and its defeat would be inevitable... if the European socialist proletariat does not come to its aid » (*Phases, Orientation and Aims of the Revolution*). Over the question of preparation for armed insurrection one notes similarly the fundamental contrast between the two social-democratic factions — the Mensheviks paying more attention to the process of the autonomous struggle of the proletariat and the Bolsheviks, focussing on organizing the insurrection as « one of the most important and most urgent tasks of the party ». (*Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*). This reflected clearly on the immediate task of the party, and on the prospective strategy that each group formulated for the development of the Russian revolution. The Mensheviks formulated, taking as a starting point the Duma elections, an organizational strategy of « revolutionary self-government » through the formation of workers' agitation committees for the constituent assembly, as a nucleus of mobilization for the birth of popular agitational committees and of popular organisms which would have assured the indirect participation of the popular masses in the elections and would have given a different function to the political strike.

Lenin oposed these strategic objectives, exposed particularly by the Mensheviks. Dan (*The present situation*) and Martov (*The proletariat and the Duma*), and proposed the tactic of armed insurrection and the creation of a provisional revolutionary government as an organ of the insurrection since « the organization of revolutionary self-government is not a prologue but an epilogue of the insurrection ». The popular representation therefore had to come about after the overthrow of the Tsarist state, while the provisional government, being the representative of the revolutionary classes and the organ of insurrection, had to be formed prior to the victory of insurrection. The tactical and strategic questions briefly described here, and confronted in 1905 by the two factions, were linked to attempts to carry out organizational restructuring in the face of the multiplication of organisms and groups not linked (not making any reference) to either one or the other current in Russian social democracy. This debate assumed more precise lines immediately after the exhaustion of the revolutionary eruption in 1905, when Russian social democracy as a whole made a first estimation and learned its first lesson from the errors committed during this period. However, it was not only on a theoretical basis that the two different strategic definitions faced each other. More revealing is how they inserted themselves into the proletariat's complex and difficult real movement for emancipation which characterized Tsarist Russia in 1905, and particularly in the process of self organization of the workers. The influence of the Mensheviks was a determining factor in the formation of the Soviet at Petersburg. As a result of the agitation undertaken by the Petersburg Group there was an election of a Workers'

Committee in agreement with the Menshevik conception of large mass organizations and revolutionary self government. The Bolsheviks immediately assumed what was defined « a boycott position » regarding the election of the Soviet and the limitation of its role in the revolutionary process. Participation in the Soviet was primarily conditioned by the fact that this was no more than a strike committee which would break up after the end of the strike for which it was originally formed. In the *Letter to all Party Organizations*, in October 1905, the Bolshevik central committee showed the grave danger the workers' movement was in by the continued existence of the Soviet, outside of the strike action, in as much as the Soviet presented itself as a non-party organization, politically amorphous, and therefore not able to guide the whole struggle of the social democratic party; from this it was concluded that « there was no other way other than the recognition of the programmes and the leadership of the social democratic party by the Soviet, or rather, the abandoning of the latter's non-party character ». On the presupposition that if the Soviet « stands outside of social democracy there is objectively the danger that it will carry back the proletariat to a primitive political level and thus subject it to the bourgeois parties » it was called upon to accept the programme and recognize the leadership of the party, otherwise the social democratic members of the Soviet would have to denounce its anti-proletariat nature.

Lenin's proposal for the creation of revolutionary committees, in particular the peasant committees, as a means of the tactical unification of social democrats, members of other revolutionary parties and the non-party mass was found more congenial and coherent with the interpretations and elaborations of the Bolshevik current. This strategy did not diminish the leading role of the party, nor did it impose a reconsideration of the Leninist criticism of the spontaneity (and such organizations) of the working class. The Soviet, instead, had decided the admission of the representatives of the three socialist parties (Menshevik, Bolshevik and the Socialist Revolutionaries) with a consultative vote; it carried out an activity which entwined the struggle for bascally social and economic revendications, to the objective of overthrowing the tsarist autocracy, and it proposed itself as a unifying synthesis, as a mass organization for the revolutionary struggle of the proletarian. It definitively negated the leading role of the party and that conception of organization of professional revolutionaries which was behind the birth of Bolshevism. Lenin's attempt at opposing Radin — who maintained that it was not the job of the Soviet « to assume the political leadership of the working class » and to expressly declare « which party it recognised and accepted as a leader... » — posing the question *Soviet or Party?* presented arguments weakened by the idea « of a provisional revolutionary government », the nucleus of which was considered to be the Soviet, itself essentially taken as an alliance (for the struggle) between the social democrats

and the revolutionary bourgeois democrats. Lenin had said: « Not only do we not fear such a large heterogeneous composition, but on the contrary we welcome it because without the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, without the combative agreement between the social democrats and the revolutionary democrats, the entire success of the great Russian Revolution is impossible ». The Soviet of Worker's Deputies, maintained Lenin, was not a worker's party, nor a means of proletarian self government; in general it is not a means of self government but a combat organization to obtain determined objectives... it is a vast informal fighting alliance of socialists and revolutionary democrats in order to conduct political strikes and other more active forms of struggle for immediate democratic demands, recognised and approved of by the large majority of the population » (*Socialism and Anarchy*). Lenin's conception is clearly seen in the criticism of the liberal proposition of forming the « Soviet of deputies taken from the whole population », to which he counterposed the positive value of « the organs of popular power... These organs are the revolutionary parties, and the fighting organizations of the workers, peasants and other elements of the people who conduct a really revolutionary struggle » (*The Dying Autocracy and New Means of Power for the People*). The Leninist position is, thus, quite clear: democratic revolutions through armed insurrection, which would link the democratic demands of the proletariat and the peasantry, break up the autocracy and isolate the bourgeoisie. Hence, the Soviets are « the organs of a general revolutionary struggle » and « embryo of revolutionary power » whose political leadership had to be assumed by the provisional revolutionary government which was capable of assuring « the freedom of electoral agitation and the convocation of a constituent assembly elected on the basis of a universal suffrage of equal, direct and secret votes ». While focussing on the Soviet, Lenin continued to affirm that these must have to be transformed into central organs of the victorious revolutionary power subject to and guided by the party and he traced the defeat/fall of the soviet of workers' deputies to the lack a firm support from the fighting organization of the proletariat.

Lenin's views did not lack critics. One of the harshest critics of the Leninist and Bolshevik conception was Trotsky who declared: « if the Mensheviks, starting from the abstract concept — 'our revolution is bourgeois' — arrive at the idea of adapting the whole tactic of the proletariat to the conduct of the liberal bourgeoisie right up to the conquest of power by the latter, the Bolsheviks, starting from a no-less abstract concept — 'a democratic but not a socialist dictatorship' — will end up by supporting the voluntary limitations of the proletariat in power into a regime of bourgeois democracy. It is true that between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, there is an essential difference: while the anti-revolutionary aspects of Menshevism already manifest themselves to their full extent, the anti-revolutionary aspects existing within

Bolshevism will endanger us, and very seriously so, only in the case of a revolutionary victory. » (1905) Within European social democracy, especially in Germany and Holland, the question was posed if the relationship between the party and the soviet, posed in this manner, is really the central question of the revolutionary process or if it was particular to the tactical and organizational positions of Bolshevism.

#### 6. Criticism of the Leninist conception of the party

Rosa Luxemburg was one of the main critics of Lenin's principles on the organization of the proletarian party.

Luxemburg's polemic against the Leninist organization and principles of organization regarded three kinds of problems; the party — mass relationship, the nature of the spontaneity of the revolutionary struggle, the form and modes of socialist transformation.

In the Luxemburgist conception, the idea of the party being a bearer of an external consciousness is absolutely rejected: « The class struggle of the proletariat is older than social democracy; elementary product of class society it had already flared up at the start of capitalism in Europe. It is not socialdemocracy that has first educated the modern proletariat for the class struggle but rather the proletariat who brought it to life in order to advance the consciousness of its aims and to co-ordinate the various local and temporal fragments of the class struggle ». (*The Crisis of Socialdemocracy*). In this way social democracy introduces political consciousness into the development of the class struggle, while the organization « is not an artificial product of propaganda but an historical product of the class struggle ». Even though Luxemburg does not deny the 'centralistic tendencies' of social democracy, she observes, « that a completely different problem was that of the degree of centralization and its particular nature within a united Russian social democracy ». The problem of organization must differ from that tried by the Jacobines and Blanquists, since for social democracy the organization is geared to the struggle and it is in this the proletariat army looks for the clarification of its aims.

If there exists no detailed tactic fixed in advance, and if it is the development of the struggle which creates the organization « social-democratic centralization cannot base itself on blind obedience to the central authority, on a mechanical subordination of the party militants... and no watertight compartment can be erected between the nucleus of the proletariat who are conscious of their situation and already firmly enrolled in the party, and the surrounding stratum who have already been gripped by the class struggle and are in the midst of the process of the formation of their consciousness ». Since social democracy « is a specific-movement of the working class », the point of unity is « the auto-centralism of the leading stratum of the proletariat ». The discipline and organization typical of the factory, mentioned by Lenin, « is not

inculcated in the proletariat only by the factory but also by the *barracks* and by modern bureaucratism » and is different from discipline as a « volutary co-ordination of conscious political action of a social stratum ». The « ultra-centralist concept of Lenin » denies the need of « keeping alive in the party a just historical appreciation of the form of struggle which dominated each time, the relative appreciation of every phase of struggle and the necessary accentuation of revolutionary means from the point of view of the ultimate goal in the struggle of the proletarian class », and so his conception is fundamentally directed « at controlling the activity of the party and not *fertilizing* it, at *restricting* the movement and not *developing* it, at *suffocating* and not *unifying* it » (*Problems of the Organization of Russian Socialdemocracy*).

Luxemburg's criticisms of the Leninist type of party is therefore directed at the identification between the proletariat organization and the working class movement. On the other hand, Luxemburg's analysis is coherent with her ideas which tend to privilege the action of the struggle of the masses and the organizational aspects that the popular masses create and choose during their historical battle. In « *Mass Strike, Party and Trade-Unions* » this interpretation is clearly in evidence, which, when referring to the Russian revolution, strongly denounces the Leninist conception of the party and its tactics. « If, therefore, the Russian revolution teaches us something, this is above all the fact that a mass strike cannot be 'done' artificially, cannot be 'decided' out of the blue, nor 'advertised', it is an historical phenomenon which at a particular moment is the result of social conditions which have the strength of historical necessity ». A subjective judgement on the possibility or impossibility of revolutionary action is not important then, but « the objective research into the origins of the mass strike from the consideration of that which is historically necessary ». In this way the distinction between the economic struggle and the political one, dear to Lenin, but already adopted by European social democracy, is disapproved of by Luxemburg since « as a result of the general strike breaking up into economic strikes it was not the political action that was broken but viceversa; after the content of the political action... was exhausted and divided itself or rather transformed itself into an economic action ». « This is the vast many-coloured picture of the rendering of accounts between labour and capital, which reflects all the multiplicity of the social structure and political consciousness of every stratum and every region and which goes through all levels from a real trade-union struggle of an experienced elite troop of big industry right up to a disorganized explosion of protest of a handful of agricultural proletariat and to the first confused moment of a garrison of excited soldiers, from the elegant well-educated revolt of white-collar workers right up to the timid-audacious grumbling of a large assembly of discontented policemen who are on watch in a dark, smokey and dirty room ». The defeat of Tsarist absolutism must be the work of the

proletariat, observes Luxemburg, but for this the proletariat needs « a high level of political education, class consciousness and organization ». All these conditions can be procured « only by a living political school which is alive because of the struggle and in the struggle, during the progressive course of the revolution ». The real significance of the Russian revolution of 1905 is not the fact of the lack of active presence of the party, as Lenin said, but lies in « the result which is of a lasting social nature: *a general improvement of the standard of life of the proletariat* both in an economic, social and intellectual sense ». « The most precious thing, since it is a permanent factor in this up and down situation is its '*spiritual precipitate*': the intellectual and cultural growth which was obtained in fits and starts by the proletariat which offers an inviolable guarantee of its further irresistible progress in a political and economic struggle ». Lastly, Luxemburg maintains that a task of organization is born from the struggle and from the revolutionary process which is the finishing line, in proletarian action, of the inseparability of the economic aspect from the political one. The element of spontaneity is thus given a pre-eminent role in the revolutionary process « which cannot be predisposed on the basis of the decision of the leaders of the party and the discipline of the party », even if Luxemburg takes into account the role of political leadership in this struggle, so that « the tactic of the social-democracy regards its decision and its rigour, must never be *below* the level of effective relationship of forces ». The concept of organization as « a product of struggle » and of the proletarian class movement which must never be seen as « a movement of an organized minority » is in opposition to the « pedantic scheme of a mass strike organized by a minority, commanded artificially in the name of the party and the trade union ». The « double character of the Russian Revolution » of 1905 and the role which the mass strikes assumed in it convinced Luxemburg of the artificiality of the division between political and trade union struggle and of the non-necessity for independence between trade union organisms and the party, « a historically conditioned product of the parliamentary period ». The question of party — trade union links which in the Luxemburgist vision, involve the theory of the « neutrality » of the trade-unions, with the base manifesting unity while the vertex claimed organizational autonomy, was not resolved by dissolving of the trade-unions within the party but in the re-establishment of « that natural relationship between the leaders of social democracy and the trade unions... which actually corresponds to the relationship between the workers' movement as a whole and its partial trade-union manifestations ». It is certain, however, that Luxemburg's vision, apart from affirmations which concerned more or less a criticism of German trade-union actions, covers, as a central strategic point, all the organizational articulation which was able to elevate and improve the general emancipation of the working class. The same denunciation of the measures adopted by the Bolsheviks

after the Revolution of '17 (*The Russian Revolution*) are to be seen within the framework of the extremely positive evaluation that Luxemburg assigned to the various political-organizational expressions of the proletariat, from the Constituent Assembly to the Soviet, since « the suppression of democracy suffocated active, free and energetic life of the popular masses ». She observed that in Russia, they certainly had to exercise dictatorship and privilege the Soviet as the real representative of the working masses, « but the suffocation of the political life of the whole country is fatal because the life of the Soviet itself is paralysed more and more. Without general elections, and without unlimited freedom of the press and the freedom to hold meetings, without the free struggle of opinions, public institutions will have no real life, and the bureaucracy remains the only-active element ». Luxemburg's view on the problem of socialist democracy, of dictatorship which does not reserve freedom only for the members of one party because « freedom is always and only freedom for those who think differently », otherwise it is transformed into privilege, concretises her elaboration on the conquest of political power which is different from Lenin's conception of the socialist state as the State which will oppress the bourgeoisie.. Luxemburg adds: « Socialist democracy commences alongside the task of the destruction of class domination and of the construction of socialism. It begins from the moment the socialist party obtains power. It is no other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in *applying democracy*, not in *its abolition*. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not and that of a small guiding-minority acting in the name of the class ». For this reason, the conquest of power is the development of workers' and soldiers' councils which, taking over the complete power and involving « the same currents of the socialist revolution » determines the conditions and realizes the basis of social-transformation. « It is by exercising power that the masses learn to exercise it. » The fundamental point in the thoughts and elaborations of Luxemburg lies basically in her analysis of the question of social democracy as a central matter, and thus the essence of proletariat dictatorship, individualizing the lever of the council system in the conquest and structure of proletarian power.

The workers' council current of the workers' movement renews this vision by its critical approach to the problem of the role of the party in a western revolutionary process. With the victory of the Russian Revolution, the installation of the Soviet Republic, and the outbreak of revolution in Europe immediately following the I World War, the interest of the revolutionary forces moved onto the question of the formation of communist parties linked to the III International and to the 21 conditions of acceptance which it formulated. The concrete experience of councils that the actual class movement had engaged upon raised itself against the conception of the repetition/duplication, in various national contexts, of the political-

organizational conditions which led to the development of Bolshevism in Tsarist Russia. The Linkskomunismus (left communism) in Germany and Görter and Pannekoek in Holland expounded this experience, the importance of which, here, derives from their criticism levelled at the conception of the role of the party, as parallel to the affirmation of other organizational instruments such as the workers' councils, rather than the type of party which took root. The different national situation that this theory found itself faced with — particularly the presence of strong parties and social-democratic trade-union organizations — contributed to the appearance of a different strategy which placed at its centre, along with the constitution of workers' councils, the anticapitalist struggle and the refusal of opportunist and revisionist political and trade-union leadership.

« The General Workers' Union » (AAU), affirmed Görter, in *A Reply to Lenin on Communist Extremism*, « and the Rank and File Movement, based in the *factories* in the places of work, and *only* on themselves, are the precursors of the workers' councils, the Soviet. The revolution in western Europe will be more difficult because of the fact that it will develop slowly, will go through a long period of transition in which the trade unions will be non-functional and in which the Soviet will not yet be ready. This period of transition will be characterized by the struggle against the trade unions towards their transformation and their substitution by superior organizations... I insist on saying that this will not happen because we 'extremists' want it, but because the revolution needs this organizational form without which it cannot win ». Talking of the tactics « to follow at the beginning and in course of the revolutionary process and not « at the end of the revolution »... « when victory is near, capitalism in pieces » and the classes precipitate towards the proletariat, the tendency towards the constitution of a *union sacrée* between « the big bourgeoisie, the agrarians, middle classes, middle peasants, lower ranks of the bourgeoisie and the peasant against the workers becomes clear ». For this reason « in the revolutionary process in the west », the importance of the classes increases and, in proportion, the importance of leaders diminishes. This does not mean that we must not have the best possible leaders... it only means that regarding the importance of the masses the importance of leaders diminishes. If seven or eight million proletariat must conquer power in a country of one hundred and sixty million inhabitants, yes, then, leaders are enormously important. Infact, in order to win such a vast number of people with so few men, tactics must have to be given a pre-eminent position. What about Germany? There the genius of the leader is not essential nor is it the principal factor, the most intelligent tactic is the maximum clarity of ideas. There the classes are inexorably arrayed: one against the other. There the proletariat must decide alone, as a class ». Görter did not deny the necessity of iron discipline and of an absolute centralization, but observed that « this matter has another significance for us from that which it can have in Russia. The issue

here is to construct a vanguard, having a solid nucleus « a strong as steel and yet also like crystal », as the base for « the construction of a large organization » which makes the major part of the proletariat, i.e. the masses, communists, because « the *workers* and *only* the workers must introduce communism ».

If in the *Program* of the German Communist Worker's Party (KAPD) it was clearly stated that the « struggle for the recognition of revolutionary factory councils and workers' political councils would logically, in the ambit of a certain revolutionary situation, transform itself into a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat against the dictatorship of capitalism », and that « this revolutionary struggle, where the project of councils forms the real political axel..., orients itself, by historical necessity, against every bourgeois social order and as a consequence against its form of expression, i.e. the bourgeois parliamentary system », there was also (in the Program) the beginning of an outline of a strong criticism of the « socialist construction » embarked upon in the USSR, where the revolution was « bourgeois » but « done by communists ».

In the theses on the role of the party in the Proletariat Revolution clearly in evidence was the fact that the « most important task of the communists in the workers economic struggle of the lies in the organization of the weapon of struggle... the communists must see to it that the revolutionaries (and not only the members of the communist party) regroup in the factories and... the factory organizations (betriilsorganisationen) to form together the Unions (AAU) and to give form to the instrument aimed at the administration of production by the workers ». The party-council relationship is lastly resolved entirely in favour of the latter since after the political victory of the Revolution the Unions « will earn more importance than the Party » and when « the dictatorship transforms itself... into a communist society the party reaches its ultimate aim: autodestruction ».

The schematism of the official documents of the KAPD does not give full justice to the broad elaboration of some exponents of the current (of Councils) who put the situation of post-revolutionary Russia at the centre of their analysis and who denounced the role assumed by the Bolshevik party in connection with the perspectives of socialism, of the socialization of the means of production and of workers' control. One of these, Karl Korsch (in *Political Writings*) considers that the « doctrinarian attitude of Lenin is... parallel to his political practice. It corresponds to his jacobite faith that one can rely on a given political form (a party, a dictatorship, or State) which has been revealed as useful in the past for a bourgeoisie revolution, and use it to realize the aims of the proletariat revolution ». The same measures of nationalization do not render the activity of the worker freer and more human « since in the place of the director there is a functionary nominated by the government »; today modern socialism requires socialization and « beneath these terms there is no longer

only the request for the transference of the means of production into the hands of the collectivity or control from above ». Socialization « must instead realize itself » in a « control from the base, which is brought about in a determinate measure by the participation of the mass of workers themselves... in the management of the enterprise or at least the control of its management ». (*Factory Council and Socialization*).

Pannekock's analysis regarding the question of the party is more detailed, centered entirely on the working class and its instruments of social re-appropriation rather than on the predominant role of the party. Pannekock shows how « the old movement is incarnate in parties » and that « belief in the party constitutes today the strongest brake on the working class' capacity to act... Against this type of organization we propose the following principle: the working class can affirm itself only on the condition that it takes its destiny into its own hands ». The conception of the party, as a means of clarification of the proletariat, which has a role of great importance in the struggle of the proletariat for its own emancipation, bases itself on the distinction, he observes, that a party is a grouping on the basis of certain ideas, and a class is a grouping on the basis of certain common interests. « Membership to a class is determined by the function actualised in the process of production, a function that has as a consequence definite interests. Belonging to a party means instead, linking oneself to a group of people who have an identical point of view as far as important social questions are concerned... Until recently it was believed... that this fundamental difference would disappear within the party of the class... since theory states that identical interests would necessarily generate identical aims and ideas, and thus the distinction between class and party... would gradually be eliminated ». But this is not so and if « those animated by the same conception meet to debate their goals of action, reach a clarification through discussion, and make propaganda for their ideas, it is naturally possible... to call these groups parties. A name is of little importance once it is clear that these parties give themselves a role which is entirely different from that to which the actual parties aspire ». For parties conceived in this manner « rigid and immutable structures » are not important since « when faced with a change of situation, or a new task, the members separate in order to reunite in a different way; other parties emerge with different programmes ». Pannekock does not see the actual or existing workers' parties in this way « since their aims are to obtain power and exercise it for their exclusive advantage ». These organizations are not concerned with contributing to the emancipation of the working class but « their intention is that of governing by themselves, presenting everything under the guise of the liberation of the proletariat. Social democracy which conceives « power under the form of a government basing itself on a parliamentary majority » and « the communist parties who insist on their desire to dominate right up to the dictatorship of the party »

must have instead, « a political formation which is characterized by rigid structures, a cohesion which is assumed by means of statutes, disciplinary measures, procedures for admission or exclusion. In their capacity as an apparatus of power they struggle for power ».

The actual term of revolutionary party is inconceivable because it means admitting that the working class could not do without a « group of leaders capable of overcoming the bourgeoisie in its name and in its place », in other words « it should be admitted that the working class is incapable of carrying out a revolution by itself... (but) what kind of power will a similar party be able to install thanks to the revolution? Either the masses rise up and persist in their action, answers Pannekoek, and « thus, far from abandoning the field in order to leave the government in the hands of the new party they organize their own power in the factories and workshops and prepare a new struggle aimed at the definite abolition of the power of capital ». In this background the emergence of « a conflict between the masses and the new party » is unavoidable since the « activity of the masses is none other than an element of disorder and anarchy ». Otherwise, he continues, the mass of workers abandon the leadership of the struggle into the hands of the party which is too weak to hold back the offensive of the bourgeoisie. When the historical circumstances force the mass of workers into the front line of action they « must organize themselves autonomously, taking in hand the means of production, breaking out in an attack against the economic powers of the capital ». And « any would-be vanguard force which tries, in conformity with its own programme, to direct and play master to the masses by means of a revolutionary party would reveal itself as a reactionary factor owing to this conception ».

The matter of the party is however, intimately linked to that of the phases of the revolutionary process before the conquest of political power, then to the expropriation of the capitalist class and finally to the transformation of the process of production. This scheme, however, cannot be proposed according to Pannekoek because the proletariat may become « master of its own destiny » only if it has « simultaneously both its own organization and the forms of new economic order ». Neither the party nor the trade union can carry out this new function, 'it will be the job of the councils as the Revolutions in Russia in 1905 and 1917 have shown'. « The old forms of organization, the trade-unions and political parties, and the new form of councils belong to different phases of social evolution. The first had as objective the reinforcement of the situation of the working class within the capitalist system... the aim of the second instead is to create workers' power... the workers' councils are the means of proletariat dictatorship... In this way the dictatorship of the working class corresponds exactly to the most perfect democracy, to real proletarian democracy ».

In conclusion, despite its obvious limitations, it is the merit of this

current that having analysed the role and function of the workers' councils since the '20s, in relation to the organizational principles of the proletariat party, it has given due emphasis to the active participation of the popular masses as the most important factor of the proletarian revolution.

## 7. Conclusion

At the end of this lengthy but schematic presentation, it appears proper to us to make some concluding observations. Though the Leninist conception of the party is alluded to his successors and there is the theses which asserts the existence of a logical continuity between Lenin and those who came after him, we have omitted here any mention of the Stalin period and the East Europe and other national popular revolutions, so as to limit ourselves to a treatment of the experiences of Leninist party in a non-dogmatic manner.

Within the problems of successful revolutions and revolutionary struggles still going on, the place assumed by the question of (the form and role) the party is not negligible. This is not to underestimate the role of 'external' factors — as in the case of Russia the imperialist intervention and civil war, the presence of Tsarist functionaries in the Soviet apparatus, etc. — as the link between the internal and international aspect of the question is not incidental. However, our examination of how the dictatorship of a party has been established in present-day Russia necessarily implies our readiness to analyse and scrutinise the problem of the Party. Is there any way in which one can avoid tracing back to the basic question of the party the existing situation in which the revolution of the proletariat has resulted in the exclusion of the working class from the reins of power and its subjugation to undisguised authoritarian rule? In his last days, Lenin himself observed the dilemma, the spread of bureaucratisation, the party-soviet problems, the concentration of power in single persons and organisms, the increasing marginalization of the workers vis a vis the political power... and the solidification of the view which takes the party as the all-knowing all-doing force standing above the proletariat and the masses. Lenin's proposed administrative changes (enlargement of the central committee, legislation concerning workers and Peasants' Inspection, etc...) may or may not have removed the malaise. The debate on this is important but the issue lies in grasping the role of the party itself.

In the proletariat's struggle for socialism, the party is nothing but an effective instrument, an organ which assumes its *raison d'être* from the class struggle of the proletariat and which becomes a higher and effective form of organization in so far as it expresses the overcoming of the economist limitations usually ascribed to trade unions and joins

the political and economic struggles with the view of realizing the takeover of power by the proletariat. It is the proletariat which makes the revolution, and it is its dictatorship which becomes established at the time of victory. The party assumes its importance to the degree that it serves as the expression and vehicle of the struggle, aims and objectives of the proletariat. The vanguard role which many parties attribute to themselves generously nowadays not only contradicts the actual state of affairs but exhibits also an underlying erroneous premise which takes the party as a body above the working class, as an organ that has its own existence over and above the working class and its struggle. As a consequence, instead of the party serving as the instrument of the proletariat it tries to use the proletariat for its own purposes and this remains a fact even if subjectively the party believes that it is really serving the interest of the proletariat. The guiding role of the party can be justified and actualised in so far as it is effectively an instrument of the working class and contributes to the struggle of the working class to reappropriate power, to administer itself, to control the means of production, etc. The party cannot replace the working class nor can it rule in its name — it must be the workers who make the revolution and who takeover power and wield it to administer themselves and to realize their class objectives. All other conceptions of the revolutionary party standing opposed to this fundamental truth are actually or will end by being crude caricatures of the proletarian party.

Experience teaches that the working class and the masses not only have initiative but give vivid testimony of this during times of revolutionary upheavals. It is not accidental that in such times, many revolutionary parties are actually found tailing behind the revolutionary movement of the masses. During a revolutionary process, the proletarian party must not only welcome but strive to develop the thrust of the mass initiative and activity. A party which sets itself as the « guiding light » and « the point of reference » and tries to shape/curtail or move the movement in accord with its plans acts objectively against the mass revolutionary struggle. The various organizational forms in which the proletariat expresses its desire to reappropriate power, to guide and to administer itself, are not to be dissolved, controlled and muzzled but to be accorded support. In other words, the genuine party of the proletariat not only respects the autonomy of trade unions, popular committees, etc... but sees it as an important function to hasten the formation of such organizations whose scope cannot avoid being political in so far as they tend to contribute to social transformation by bringing about proletarian mobilisation and organisation.

The revolutionary party has its intrinsic significance, its role and life within the process of social emancipation and the struggle waged to this end by the proletariat. The rules and statutes of the party, necessary as they are, cannot have coercive functions shaping up an abstract party which stands above the proletariat and even above its own members.

Thus, the existence of democracy within the party, the elaboration of the collective line from the practical and theoretical contributions of each member, practice of inner-party debates and contrasts, the tolerance of minority views which are also useful elements providing for further study and verifications, etc., is neither a luxury nor something to be brushed aside till « after the revolution ». Clandestinity and the prevalence of armed struggle cannot also be used as justifications to deny this. In fact, the more backward the conditions prevailing, the more prevalent the antidemocratic traditions, the more the emphasis that should be given to democratic participation be it within the party or outside of it. The adoption of democratic rules in the functioning of the organization is not to satisfy some generic sense of democratic formalism. On the contrary, it is to give life to the party, to avoid its suffocation by backward conditions existing in the society. The party in order to live needs the thousand heads and thousand arms of the proletariat and the revolutionaries, while, on the other hand, the distortion of the role and function of the party and its severance from the proletariat is manifested by the degree of the concentration of power in the hands of one or a few leaders or organisms.

The problem of the party emerges with full force in so far as it is substituted for the working class and instead of being the party of the proletariat becomes the body standing above the proletariat itself. The party can advance a long way into becoming the organization which fulfills the conditions needed by the proletariat to realize its complete emancipation if it does not put itself above the working class but serves the needs and interests of the working class, if it does not stifle the initiatives of the proletariat but serves as an expression and means of development of the political and organisational initiative of the working class, if it does not put itself as the « alpha-omega » of proletarian organization but acts in union with and fully respecting the autonomy of the other forms of proletarian organizations (trade unions, soviets, etc.), if it does not take itself as the appropriator of power in the name of the proletariat but serves to bring about the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is none other than the working class organized as the ruling class.

The working class has been deprived of power and the struggle it wages is to assume control of power, to have the power to decide, to choose, to organise its life. The party that genuinely serves the interest of the proletariat is thus the one which contributes fully to the realization of this objective. The structures of the party assume their relevance in so far as they facilitate or block this contribution. To the question of party or soviet? it is proper to add another one: what type of party? It is to respond to this that an examination, in a non-dogmatic manner, of the debates of the past on the question of proletarian organisation becomes extremely important.

## The Struggle for Democracy in Africa

F. Gitwen

In many parts of Africa where the word « socialism » has more or less become a shibboleth, Lenin's affirmation that « proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy » seems to have a bizarre ring to it. In fact, it is precisely in those African countries where the regimes claim adherence to « Marxim-Leninism » that one notices the virtual absence of democracy and the existence of rule by terror. In countries ruled by such regimes and actually in greater parts of Africa, the ruling classes consider « democracy » as a tainted world, « un-African and western » and, at best, as « the unrealistic demand of hyphenated or de-Africanized intellectuals ».

The negation of democracy revolves around two basic premises. The first one considers Africa's tasks as being one of « coming out of economic backwardness » and this is assumed to be incompatible with notions of democracy which « sap discipline », « scatter the nation's forces » and « invite anarchy ». In such cases, democracy is counterposed to economic development and rejected consequently as a « luxury that the African masses cannot afford ». The second premise attributes to socialism the function of negating democracy, the limitations of democracy within bourgeois society are taken to exclusively define democracy, and, consequently, a rejection of what is termed as « fake bourgeois democracy » becomes in reality a rejection of « democracy as a whole ». In such cases, the declared attempt to establish a « socialist » society is deemed incompatible with all notions of democracy, and the « need for the iron fist of the proletarian dictatorship » is invoked in order to justify the extensive repression which, as in Ethiopia, claims the proletariat as its main and favourite victim. Official socialism in Africa, whether it takes the label « African » or « scientific » to define itself, is basically authoritarian and professedly anti-democratic.

The struggle waged by African revolutionary forces for democracy, be this within the framework of a general struggle for socialism or within limited perspectives, cannot revolve around a banal defence of democracy in general. The essence of the question itself lies in posing the question

in the concrete, within the framework of the class struggle and social development of the given society. Admittedly, the level of development of each country and the class struggle within each demonstrate different stages and features. However, a general look, with all the apparent drawbacks of such generalizations, discloses that Africa's problem is not so much the existence of « limited western type of democracy » — the problem lies in the absence of even a limited variety of democracy. For, a closer look at some of the countries which claim to have adopted parliamentary forms of rule or western-type bourgeois constitutions reveals that this adoption remains virtually at the formal level, with no actual democratic guarantees and with a presidential system giving wide executive and legislative powers to the president. The existing political parties, in many cases the president's party, being caricatures of political parties within the western bourgeois republics.

The whole situation is entwined with the level of social development, with the fact that the majority of African societies are just emerging from various degrees of pre-capitalist relations and being integrated into the fold of international capitalism. The process of integration is itself a complex one, the imperialist domination militating against the emergence of a national bourgeoisie in the classical sense, and the introduction of capitalism in this form perpetuating, in a weak and distorted form, the old relation with all the backwardness involved. The absence of an « independent » bourgeoisie and the impossibility of an independent capitalist development militates against the existence of bourgeois democracy even in its restricted form. What exists is in fact a caricature of bourgeois democracy that takes the limitations of the latter as virtual excesses and, instead, establishes an all-embracing authoritarian rule.

The struggle for democracy in Africa cannot be equated with a yearning for bourgeois democracy per se. But, at the sametime, it is also indisputable that, with all its limitations, bourgeois democracy represents an advance over feudalism or absolutist rule. While it is true that proletarian democracy is qualitatively higher and broader than any type of bourgeois democracy, it is also a fact that bourgeois democracy represents an advance over feudalism. Hence the argument that bourgeois democracy is « bourgeois » and « totally unimportant » for those struggling for socialism in Africa is wrong and exhibits the infantilism castigated by Lenin in his celebrated text: *Left-wing communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Africa doesn't necessarily need to pass through capitalism to arrive at socialism, but Africa necessarily needs democracy to get anywhere near socialism.

The struggle for socialism requires and is significantly assisted by the democratization of the society. The more democratic concessions the proletariat and the masses wrest from the ruling classes, the more the situation improves for the struggle towards socialism, for carrying out the fight to get rid off the limitations imposed by the bourgeoisie on demo-

cracy. This is why Lenin affirmed that the bourgeois revolution is not only highly advantageous to the proletariat but is also absolutely necessary in the interest of the proletariat<sup>1</sup>. The proletariat's attitude to the bourgeois democratic revolution is summed up by Lenin as follows:

«...The very position the bourgeois holds as a class in capitalist society inevitably leads to its inconsistency in a democratic revolution. The very position the proletariat holds as a class compels it to be consistently democratic. The bourgeoisie looks backwards in fear of democratic progress which threatens to strengthen the proletariat. The proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains, but with the aid of democratism it has the whole world to win. That is why the more consistent the bourgeois revolution is in achieving its democratic transformations, the less it will limit itself to what is of advantage exclusively to the bourgeoisie. The more consistent the bourgeois revolution, the more does it guarantee the proletariat and the peasantry the benefits accruing from the democratic revolution»<sup>2</sup>.

The fashionable argument amongst the apologists of existing African regimes is that the struggle in Africa for democratic rights (freedom of the press, of association, etc...) is either «bourgeois!» (in which case «reactionary») or «elitist». The tragedy is that this type of argument is also echoed by certain African left-wing groups in an ironic reproduction of the position of the infantile «leftists» of Lenin's time—«we are struggling for socialism and hence it does not interest us to struggle for democratic rights under the bourgeois system». The argument that bourgeois democracy is limited should at least be justifiably presented within a context of existing socialist democracy. In the concrete context of Africa, bourgeois democracy is absent and thus the rejection of it by the regimes and their apologists amounts to no more than a rationalization of authoritarian rule. As for the socialist struggle, it is, as Lenin pointed out, effectively assisted by the democratisation of the society.

Marxists do know for sure that «bourgeois democracy and the parliamentary system are so organized that it is the mass of working people who are kept farthest away from the machinery of government»<sup>3</sup>. But the Marxist criticism of bourgeois democracy is directed not at democracy per se but at its limited and restricted nature under bourgeois rule. In the criticism, there is no underlying exaltation of «pure democracy». So long as classes exist, it is not possible to speak of «pure democracy», says Lenin in his celebrated polemics against Kautsky<sup>4</sup>. And even in ancient Greece, despite Nyrere's assertion that pure demo-

<sup>1</sup> V.I. Lenin: «Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution», (Selected Works, Vol. 1, Moscow 1970, p. 488).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 490.  
1977, p. 117).

<sup>3</sup> V.I. Lenin. «On Soviet Socialist Democracy», (Progress Publishers, Moscow,

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 61.

cracy existed<sup>5</sup>, what was evident was not so much the rule of the people (demos) but, as Thucydides said of Athens, the rule by «the greatest citizens». If Marxism lays bare the fallacy of «pure democracy» and situates the question within its relations to classes and class struggle («under communism democracy will itself wither away and will not turn into 'pure democracy'-Lenin), the criticism of bourgeois democracy does not fall within infantile limitations. The question is not one of rejecting the forms of bourgeois democracy (parliament and the like) but of rejecting the basis of the democracy envisaged by the bourgeoisie and of asserting in its place a qualitatively higher and different form of democracy. To the argument of Kautsky projecting parliament as «the master of government», Lenin countered with the people as «masters of parliament» — in other words the suppression of parliament as such. But this position bases itself on a fundamental premise involving the question of power and the establishment of a new order. The suppression of parliaments and constitutions in several African countries does not fall within the category of a revolutionary action as it is not an act directed at eliminating the limitations of bourgeois democracy. On the contrary, the suppression manifests the regime's unwillingness and incapacity even to tolerate the limited rights granted by bourgeois democracy, it is a recourse to a blind authoritarian rule. The «people as masters of parliament» means the abolition of the separation of power from the masses, it means the concrete assertion of the people as the holders of power and the end of their subordination to it. What is at issue is thus not mere change of forms or a quantitative problem—it is the destruction of the old order and state («the mechanisms of the bourgeois state exclude and squeeze out the poor from politics, from active participation in democracy»)<sup>6</sup> and the replacement of the institutions of the old order by other institutions of a fundamentally different order<sup>7</sup>. Hence, a seizure of power which is accompanied by the preservation of the state and old order cannot surpass or come out of the limitations of bourgeois democracy, and, as many African cases show, will actually exhibit more retrograde and repressive institutions and rule.

The critics of the struggle for democracy in Africa sever Lenin and Marx from the above fundamental points and seek to legitimise their anti-democratic actions of criticism bourgeois democracy. But a genuine criticism of bourgeois democracy cannot be viewed outside of a genuine struggle for socialism, i.e. a real effort to eliminate the limitations of bourgeois democracy establishing a fundamentally different type of democracy, proletarian democracy. A seizure of power or even a revolution which

<sup>5</sup> Julius Nyrere, «Democracy and the Party System», in J. Nyrere «Freedom and Unity», (Oxford University Press, London).

<sup>6</sup> V.I. Lenin, «State and Revolution», *Selected Works in 3 volumes*, Vol. II, p. 371-72.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 335.

perpetuates the separation of the masses from power and their dependence to the State cannot be considered socialist or will not, at least, realize the transition towards socialism.

In many countries in Africa the struggle for democracy is being waged in a situation in which bourgeois democracy as practiced in the developed countries of Europe and America does not exist. The struggle is waged in a situation in which the winning of even limited democratic rights becomes a significant victory. The winning of bourgeois democratic rights represents a contribution to the struggle for socialism, overcoming the existing practice of total censorship and prohibition of organization opens up broader possibilities for revolutionary struggles and helps to eliminate the limitations imposed by clandestine struggle. The struggle cannot be waged as part of a strategic belief that one can gain concessions from the ruling class and through this win over a majority in parliament and... institute fundamental changes. This is nothing but a reformist illusion. The struggle for bourgeois democratic freedom is waged in the correct perspective only when posed as a stepping stone, as a useful and necessary step for the proletariat's struggle for power, for the destruction of the State and the creation of a new society. Consequently, this assumes that there should be no continental or economic indexes set for prescribing broad democracy for one people and limited ones for others. For, there are those who call themselves « communist » but who do not hesitate to declare that while demanding broad democracy maybe justifiable in Europe, such is not the case for Africans and others from the so-called « under-developed » countries.

Admittedly, the path to be traversed by each country towards socialism will differ, however, it is incongruous to assert that there can be any transition to socialism without the existence of broad democracy for the people. Santiago Carrillo, the leader of the Spanish Communist Party, states in his book, *Euro-communism and the State*, that to demand pluralism in countries like Vietnam is like braying at the moon. This is not because Carrillo considers the demand unrealizable, but it is because he considers such a demand is not relevant for the masses of this countries due to their level of development. Carrillo's position has also been echoed by others who justify the antidemocratic actions of the juntas in Africa by asserting that though these acts may be considered undemocratic and paternalistic in Europe they are not so in Africa. It is a vicious argument which victimises the African masses—their economic level of development, which is itself linked to the existing state of oppression and exploitation, is invoked to deny them the right to demand broad democratic rights. While it is true that the level of democracy existing in a given country is determined by a combination of factors (level of development, class struggle, etc), there is absolutely no justification for severing democracy from socialism when the latter is applied to Third World countries. In fact, the demand for advanced or broad democracy is as legitimate in

Gambia as it is in Spain and as relevant in Ethiopia as it is in Europe, despite the existing differences in the degree of development on the socio-economic level. If freedom and democracy are not to be viewed through racially-tinted glasses, the struggle for democracy waged in Africa, the opposition to unique parties, the rejection of despotic and paternalistic rule, etc... are more than justified. As to economic development, while it is true that men are the products of circumstances, it is all the more true, as Marx explained, that circumstances are changed by men. The way out of economic backwardness is via a revolution assuring the masses power and a qualitatively different kind of democracy. In other words, democracy is not only necessary for the transition towards socialism, it is also indispensable for the success of the struggle of the proletariat to assume power. This is why the struggle for democracy assumes its importance, this is why in waging the revolutionary struggle it is repeatedly emphasised that the revolutionary forces must themselves have democratic structures, working-methods and the alternative organization of the masses (in clandestinity, in the liberated areas, etc) must manifest the existence and practice of democracy and the exercise of power by the masses themselves. Viewed from this angle, many of the movements waging armed struggle in Africa are found lacking—their opposition to the anti-democratic regimes is not expressed by an alternative different democratic practice and, in fact, in some so-called « liberated areas » the only change for the masses is the change in the identity of the oppressors. Like the regimes, the movements also invoke « revolution » and « socialism » to stifle democracy and the militarist bent is assisted by the dominant form of the struggle being waged.

The struggle for democracy in Africa is also an affirmation of the existence of classes and class struggle in Africa. In this way it is a clear rejection of the views which project pre-colonial or traditional Africa as essentially being devoid of class differences and antagonisms. Though the 1960s' brand of « Africanists » who denied the existence of classes in Africa has become more or less extinct the recognition of the class divisions pertaining in Africa has not been accompanied by a consistent admission of the reality of class struggle. The link between the denial of the reality of class struggle and democracy is highlighted by the position of many African regimes and their apologists vis a vis the organization of political parties and the right of dissent and assembly/association. In the rationale presented to defend the unique party and to reject pluralism or the right to freely organize, there appears a firm rejection of class struggle.

Many years back, one of the fervent defenders of the unique party system, Madeira Keita, put it as follows:

« We think that there are forms of democracy without political parties. We also state that if a political party is the political expression of a class and the class itself represents interests, we cannot affirm that

the African society is without classes. But we state that the differentiation of classes in Africa does not imply diversification of interests let alone opposition of interests<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, the unique party, whether identified as a mass party or a patron one, becomes an identification or actualization of the « oneness of the community » and the mesmerism of the name of the people and the 'oneness of the community' is invoked to oppose all attempts to form other parties. And, as Sekou Toure stated in 1963, the unique party is identified with the people and the regime has the virtue of being the expression of the people within a party. The arguments of the advocates of the unique party, ranging from M. Keita to Sekou Toure, Nyrere and Kaunda, revolve grosso modo around the denial of class antagonisms, invocation of a non-existent 'oneness' of the people as a whole and the need for « unity » to overcome « backwardness and other enemies ». The denial of the right to organize parties is only an aspect of the absence of democracy but it emphasises the problem. While for those like Madeira Keita, democracy does not imply the plurality of parties (the issue is actually as to whether the denial of the right to organize implies a restriction of the right of the people, a negation of democracy), for Nyrere, and others like him, the foundations of democracy are more firm if there is one party (« identified with the nation as a whole ») rather than many (« which represent only a section of the community »)<sup>9</sup>. For the latter, the existence of several parties in a country, as in the Congo of the 1960s, leads to division and anarchy. Nyrere's argument not only mixes up cause and effect—parties are the political expression of existing class struggles and not vice versa—but is not supported by empirical observation—the one-party states are, if not more, at least as trouble-prone and as problem-ridden as the ones with several parties.

The identification of the unique party with the whole nation automatically makes all attempts to exercise the right to association « subversive ». It also opens wide the door for apologetic positions vis a vis the repression unleashed by the regimes in such countries against the opposition which is ipso facto considered « anti-national » and « divisive ». Writing about the one-party government in Ivory Coast, Zolberg put forward a striking apology of the repressive actions of the state in the following manner:

« sanctions (of coercion), however severe, are usually temporary; and coercion is not used methodically to induce a climate of terror. Re-

<sup>8</sup> in *Presence Africaine*, no. 30, Paris 1960.

<sup>9</sup> This view of the African socialists is echoed also by the exponents of « Arab Socialism » as the following quote from Kamal Rifaat shows:

« ...we find that from the multi-party system arises the division of the community into various classes, each of which tends to constitute a political party to defend its own interest, regardless of the wider interests of the community ». (in A.M. Said, *Arab Socialism*, Blandford Press, London 1972, p. 70.

lationships between rulers and dissenters retain the air of a family quarrel, followed by grand reconciliations when the crisis is over »<sup>10</sup>.

A « family quarrel » resulting in massacres, a « grand reconciliation » that is consumed with corpses or presumed from the absence of opposition due to repression—it is bizarre to say the least, and very characteristic of the apologists of the repressive African regimes.

The resort to sanctified arguments about the unity of the community, the absence of diverse, let alone antagonistic, interests is a practice of both the exponents of « African socialism » and of the decared adherents of « scientific socialism ». The basic approach in both cases is « productionist »—dissent or opposition is ostracised under the guise of the need for unity to combat backwardness and to come out of the mire of underdevelopment. Thus, the whole people, from the president downwards will for one regiment of disciplined citizens (Nkrumah) and the unique party « assures discipline by moulding the amorphous collection of people into an organic and dedicated body of men and women sharing an identical view of human society ». The party accomplishes this task by « curbing those social groups struggling for influence » and by impeding them from « unleashing class warfare inimical to the collective interests of the nation ». And this collective interest is expressed, as Senghor maintains, by the State, which means that obedience to the State and loyalty to its policies is the « necessary duty of the responsible citizen ».

The regimes who claim adherence to « socialism » of the Moscow variety have other justifications in their arsenal. They resort to the fallacious Soviet conception of « the party of the whole people » (that dissent in the USSR is considered a schizophrenic sickness is quite indicative of the consequences of this conception) and conjure up the name of the proletariat, whose name and power they have actually usurped, in order to raise the spectre of proletarian dictatorship. The problem is not solely the fact that the dictatorship being exercised is not that of the proletariat (be it in Ethiopia, Angola or Mozambique, for example) but that the conception of the proletarian dictatorship itself is wrong. The proletarian dictatorship, at least as conceived by Marx and Lenin, basically assumes the possession of power by the proletariat *itself*, its organization and self-administration in the concrete and the prevalence of broad democracy for the workers and broad masses. The suppression of the bourgeoisie is linked to this basic conception and thus contradicts any premise which bases itself on the use of power in the name of the proletariat and against the proletariat by a party or any other body. If the pro-Moscow African regimes make repeated reference to the Soviet experience, especially during the Stalin period, the critical evaluation of

<sup>10</sup> Aristide R. Zolberg « *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast* », (Princeton Univ. Press, 1969, p. 332).

this experience itself lays bare the weakness of the arguments. The fact is that the particular features of Bolshevism in practice and especially the limitations and aberrations imposed, and adopted as temporary measures, during the period of the Civil War and War Communism, cannot be equated with the basic tenets of socialism even if these were affirmed as dogma in the 1930s. The issue raises the problematic of the role and nature of the proletarian party, but an identification of proletarian dictatorship with the exclusion of the workers from the exercise of power and the impositions of restrictions on the democratic rights of the masses cannot trace its rationale/justification to Marxism or socialism.

The struggle for democracy in Africa gives politics its rightful place of dominance over mere economics, it asserts that there can be no deliverance from the grip of underdevelopment unless political power is captured by the masses and an economic endeavour that claims as its purpose their emancipation is undertaken. Official socialism, of all varieties, upheld by the regimes in Africa does not take such emancipation as its motive force, democracy is thus considered as an « obstacle » on the path of economic development. If Kaunda says that the « whole idea of opposition is alien to Africans » he reflects more the desire of the African ruling classes to stamp out all opposition as « un-African ». The idolization of a president as a « father figure » or the substitution of an omnipotent and unique « Vanguard party » for the oppressed masses in all directed at strengthening the authoritarian rule of the classes in power and the perpetuation of the subordination of the people to the State. Therefore, the struggle for democracy in Africa embodies a rejection of the paternalist and elitist conception and affirms the right of the masses to appropriate power and to govern themselves, to organize themselves, etc. ...

In this respect, then, the struggle for democracy in Africa is not an elitist struggle, as some so-called « Africanists » from the metropolises seem to suggest. For example, a certain Marina Ottoway writing about the Ethiopian Revolution declares that workers in countries like Ethiopia (« with dual economy ») are members of the « modern system and as such a very privileged group »—she bases herself on this argument to label the Ethiopian workers' demand for democracy as « elitist demands »<sup>11</sup>. Another writer, Santarelli, argues in the same vein and characterizes the EPRP as « westernised » and « representative of the intelligentsia emanating from the most privileged classes »<sup>12</sup>. Such arguments, and to some extent the extended « labour aristocracy » analysis of Arrighi<sup>13</sup>, lead up

<sup>11</sup> Marina Ottoway, « Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution », (in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 3, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Enzo Santarelli, « The Many Variants of a Revolution », (in *Politica Internazionale*, no. 8, Roma, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> G. Arrighi and J. Saul, « *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* », (London 1973).

to or are directed at favourably counterposing the ruling juntas — « representative of the rural population »! — to the « privileged » urban masses-workers and intellectuals. Behind the seemingly-populist arguments of this genre, it is possible to discern a basically distorted premise - the rural population and way life, at least till the colonial period, represent the « ideal » while the urban masses and way of life, 'connected with imperialism', represent what should be extirped. Consequently, anti-worker and anti-intellectual juntas are generously called « progressive » and the « representatives of the rural people » by such writers. Connected with this is the recurring theme which asserts that the « bread question » (economic development) is more important than the « freedom question » (democratic rights).

The arguments, which in some cases demonstrate prejudices outside the scope of theoretical/empirical analysis, are fallacious. Colonialism did not bring bourgeois democracy to Africa but neither did it put end to an African « Golden Age of democracy and classless society ». Nyrere's argument about the existence of a communal classless and idyllic African traditional society is very well known but it is known for its baselessness. A correct presentation of the question indicates that Africa's problem does not lie in the existence of what some call « the modern system » but rather than in the limitation of « the modern system », the preponderance of an isolated rural populace, and, above all, the existence of a system of exploitation and oppression which subjugates the masses. The exaltation of the rural areas or the peasantry can satisfy the populist and complex-ridden conscience of western writers but cannot respond to the exigencies of Africa for coming out of the system of oppression. The democratic foci in Africa approach the question of imperialism not by counterposing it with some idyllic and illusory rendition of a classless traditional society but by attacking imperialism's domination and exploitation. The spread of factories and industries, the break up of the rural state of isolation, etc... are not by themselves reactionary; in fact, the break-up of feudal relations and ideology and its replacement by bourgeois ones is an advance when evaluated per se. Thus, to label the forces struggling for democratic rights in Africa as « western » and « elites » while exalting repressive and retrograde juntas (such as the one in Ethiopia) and leaders (Amin and Bokassa not excepted) as the « true representatives of Africa's majority » or as the « mirrors of the souls of Africa untouched by the west » is to manifest crass ignorance and prejudices.

Socialism is a step towards complete human emancipation which will be realised, in the words of Marx, « when the real individual man has absorbed in himself the abstract citizen, when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *social being* and when he has recognised and organised his own powers as *social* powers, and consequently no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power ». The existence of « bourgeois right » (to

each according to his labour rather than according to his needs) under socialism does indicate that actual inequality persists and that the stage is but the first phase of communism. But, the criterion for evaluating the level of development of socialism is none other than the level of development of democracy. The more power the masses have and the more extensive their self-administration, the more it can be said that the level of development of democracy is higher, and so also the progress in the transition from socialism to communism. In a country where power is monopolised by a bureaucratic elite, where centralism stands against the self-administration of the masses, where the State/party apparatus converge to marginalise or eliminate the rights of the workers and the masses in the field of organization and administration, etc., in other words where political power is separated from the masses and where this separation continues to deepen, what is in place is not socialism. Socialism is not identified by the existence of a ruling party claiming adherence to Marxism-Leninism, it is not derived from external alliances, or as a consequence of nationalisation measures or adoption of the Plan in the economic sphere. The political transition period in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is deemed necessary is also a period which should realize the development of the level of democracy existing in the society, the use of the State in suppressing the bourgeoisie or defending the proletarian power cannot be extended to the suppression of the masses and their exclusion from power. The self administration of the masses and the free expression of this at the organizational level must be extended, the masses as the holders of power, armed and organized must be the main defenders of their own power from bourgeois assaults.

The struggle for democracy in Africa justifies itself not merely by a general reference to the tenets and ideals of socialism even though this by itself is a heavy indictment against the antidemocratic regimes in the continent who claim to be « socialist ». There is also the question of practical experience, of historical lessons. The experience of the USSR and its satellites as well as that of African « socialist » regimes show that without democracy, without power fully evolving into the hands of the masses, it is not possible to realize even mere economic ambitions let alone socialism. If socialism or the transition towards it is to have any meaning in Africa it must be posed in such terms with firm emphasis on the question of power and democracy. The revolutionary forces presently struggling in Africa must, thus, address themselves to the question in a Marxist manner. The struggle for democracy is not an end in itself and is truly subservient to the struggle for socialism but the latter cannot be realized without political democracy for the masses. This is made especially clear in the countries like Ethiopia where regimes allied to the USSR and following its repressive conceptions are ruling. As Marx said, « freedom consists in transforming the State from an organ dominating society into one completely completely subordinate to it, and even at the present time

the forms of State are more free or less free to the extent that they restrict the 'freedom of the State' ».

What Lenin called a truism, the fact that bourgeois democracy is progressive as compared to medievalism, cannot be termed as such in many places in Africa. Distortion of the nature of pre-colonial societies, illusory attempts to « return to the source » and populist mystification by so-called « Africanists » have militated against a correct appraisal of the whole question. If we insist that bourgeois democratic freedom can assist the struggle for socialism, it implies no « liberal twaddle to fool the workers » or to present this as the aim of the struggle. Our emphasis is that « the proletariat and the revolutionary forces must unfailingly utilise it in the struggle against the bourgeoisie ». At the same time, it falls on the revolutionary forces themselves to evaluate the concrete situation so as to avoid tactical and strategic blunders. By firmly struggling for democracy and by linking this to the struggle for socialism, it is possible to assert the proletariat's dominant role as the fervent and vanguard fighter of the rights of the masses. Any advance made or victory gained in the democratic struggle will be advantageous for the socialist struggle.

If so-called « Africanists » inclined towards apologetic positions vis a vis existing regimes tend to negate the importance of democracy and to champion « firm rule », « discipline » and « an all-out drive to combat economic backwardness », there are also others of the same brand who hail to the sky every national liberation movement or organization which claims to be waging armed or political struggle against the existing regimes. The movements are labeled « revolutionary », « democratic » and their radical rhetoric is identified with a commitment to socialism. In this way, another mystification and distortion is let loose. A closer observation indicates, however, a different reality.

To be sure, the struggle waged against national oppression has a democratic content in so far as it is directed at the practice of national domination and affirms the right to self-determination of the people. Struggles waged by movements with mere bourgeois democratic demands have also their progressive content in so far as they stand against absolutist rule and authoritarian domination. However, these struggles are fundamentally different from the struggle for socialism waged by revolutionary forces for whom the struggle for democracy is directed not only at overcoming the limitations imposed on democracy by the bourgeoisie but also for realizing the transition towards socialism and communism, i.e. towards the withering away of democracy itself. Aside from this fundamental difference, there is also the question of the actual feature of the so-called national liberation movements themselves. If these movements in the objective and limited sense assume a progressive function, it is also to be borne in mind that they present no socialist alternative in the concrete. Their method of work, of organization, their relations with the masses and their conception of the future organization of the society manifests

no substantial difference from that of the regimes they are combatting. Thus, underneath their radical rhetorics, in some cases itself an eclectic mixture of nationalism and socialism, and the catchword of anti-imperialism, there stands a basically elitist, anti-democratic and authoritarian position. The leadership of these movements is in most cases in the hands of the petty-bourgeoisie, populist and radical in words but repressive and hegemonist once it appropriates power.

The struggle for democracy in Africa manifests, therefore, various features. The one upholding the perspectives of the proletariat is radically different from the others; the latter cannot be called socialist and fall within the framework of the system of exploitation and domination itself. The African petty-bourgeoisie, in general, be it as the leader of nationalist movements or declared « democratic organizations », cannot break out of the limitations of the bourgeois conception of society. By coming to power, it can and does reorganize the society in accord with interests; however, its general weakness and class optics account for extremely repressive actions once it comes to power. Contrary to this, the revolutionary forces struggle for democracy having in mind an objective that will assert the workers and masses as the rulers of society. For such forces, the question of the struggle is not « to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another » but to smash the whole state apparatus and set-up new, fundamentally different institutions which reflect and make possible the self-government of the masses their rising to the level « of taking an *independent* part, not only in voting and elections, *but also in the everyday administration of affairs* ». For, as Lenin added, « under socialism *all* will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing »<sup>14</sup>.

The struggle for democracy waged to realize this objective needs no other *raison d'être*—its commitment to the emancipation of the people from domination and subjugation is its primary and strongest rationale. This commitment and this aspiration overcomes all artificial barriers, be they continental, racial or economic, and it is thus that the struggle for democracy in Africa assumes its importance and forms an integral part of the world-wide struggle for socialism, for communism.

<sup>14</sup> V. I. Lenin, « State and Revolution », *ibid*, p. 396.

## COMMENTS

### Socialist Political Opposition in the East

B. Zelalem

*The truth and honesty you sought.  
Let them slander let them curse  
Remember, as you face the worst,  
There is no jail for thought.*

by Lev Kopelev  
(USSR dissident)

The phenomenon of dissent in the USSR and East European countries presents various features and even if the western mass media focusses on the conservative or bourgeois liberal variety (Solzhenitsyn/Sakharov, etc.), the current of socialist opposition in these countries is not negligible. In other words, the opposition in the USSR and its satellites is not merely local nationalist, anti-socialist or pro-West — there is a developing trend of socialist opposition which strives to base itself on Marxism and to chart a socialist alternative.

Not that dissent of a nationalist colour or the movements for human rights are unimportant. These type of oppositions, aside from manifesting the malaise and antidemocratic rule existing in these societies are also important, as the dissident Weil stated, in so far as they raise the fundamental question of liberty which is encompassed by socialism itself. They also give the opportunity for the socialist opposition to break its isolation by championing the general democratic demands and linking these to an overall socialist alternative to transform the society. « Political democracy », as the dissident Egorov stated « is not a superstructure of socialism but its *sine qua non* condition ».

The current of political opposition in the East which claims adherence to Marxism is not homogeneous. The differences lie in the characterization of the existing societies themselves and in the strategy foreworded to realize a revolutionary change. Rakovski put it succinctly as follows:

« (in E. Europe) ... there are marxists who state that capitalist exploitation has been abolished in the Soviet-type societies; other marxists assume, on the contrary, that this type of society is based on the same mechanisms exploitation as capitalism. There are others who accept the theses that the East European working class has been expropriated by an all-powerful bureaucracy. Some marxists expect that the rapid development of the productive forces will create the economic basis of what they call "socialist democracy"; others believe that the Soviet type of

development is a mere imitation of the economic and technological structure of capitalist accumulation, and consequently it cannot sustain any social relations other than those of capitalism...» (in *Towards an E. European Marxism*)

and so on, and so on. The variation is wide. If Weil considers these societies to be state capitalist characterised by the state property, the sale of labour force as a commodity, etc..., there are others who consider that these societies can still be called socialist despite their « deformations ». However, a relatively prevailing characterization is one that defines these societies as ones which are neither socialist nor capitalist but which are exploitative, class societies *sui generis*. That the Soviet-type societies manifest different features from that of capitalist ones in the west is indisputable and the mode of ownership of the means of production is one feature of this difference. The question is not one of deformation — this view which is dear to trotskyites is more than outdated. Rudolf Bahro, who along with Rakovsky represents lucidly the marxist current in the dissident movement, described the problem in the following manner:

« ... it is high time for revolutionary Marxists to abandon all theories of "deformation" and put a halt to the old anger about the distortion and "betrayal" of socialism, understandable as this at one time was. If the historical drama is reduced to a problem of poor realization, then one is proceeding from unreal assumptions and theory is led astray. Certainly, we can confront the practice of actually existing socialism with the classical theory, and must do so, in order to preserve in the face of this practice the substance of the socialist idea. But this practice must be explained on the basis of its own laws. For it is very far from arbitrarily produced, or "permitted" by some weakness. It has completely different foundations to those originally conceived. And so it does not require justification, apology or embellishment, but rather truthful description and analysis ».

(in « *The Alternance for Eastern Europe* »)

The starting point for this analysis, for both Bahro and Rakovski, is the fact that the existing societies (which Bahro calls « actually existing socialism ») are not socialist and they contradict the basic Marxist conception of such societies, i.e. socialist societies. The axis is put on the pyramidal division of labour and the centralised and strengthened power of the state. The old division of labour has neither been surpassed nor suppressed and the state, in contradiction to the Marxist view on the question (the Commune, etc), is taken as an indispensable element which is progressively strengthened and centralised instead of being progressively weakened. Hence, Bahro and the others go back to Marx of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, the *German Ideology*, etc... in their critical examination of the actually existing societies.

The analysis inevitably focusses on the experience of the Russian Revolution. For Leonid Plyusch, there was no class in Russia which could

support socialism and the Bolsheviks are « guilty » of trying to jump a historical stage on the basis of voluntarism and the consciousness of militants- "Leninism is (thus) a combination of experiences of German social democracy and that of the asiatic Russian one". For Bahro, who starts from Marx's premise that communism must proceed from the abolition of capitalist private property in its most developed form, Russia of 1917 did not present such a picture. Defining Russia as one in which the semi-asiatic mode dominated, he states that in 1917 Russia there was little capitalist private property and its abolition thus could have no big significance. The situation led, in his view, to the tragedy in which the Russian Socialist vanguard found a different task to fulfill in practice from that which the influence of their West European models had suggested to them. Hence, Bahro argues, the October Revolution introduced a completely different process from the socialist revolution anticipated in Western Europe. If the new organization of society does bypass capitalism, it is not, according to Bahro, a transition period between capitalism and socialism. Once again the reference is to a class society *sui generis* which is neither capitalist nor socialist but existing alongside capitalism. This again calls for a reevaluation of the tenets of traditional historical materialism as in this, to quote Rakovski, "there is no place for a modern social system which has an evolutionary trajectory other than capitalism and which is not simply an earlier or later stage along the same route".

Bahro, Rakovski and the Marxist opposition in general put the necessary emphasis on the fact that socialism and communism are incompatible with the maintenance of the old division of labour and the perpetuation of the State. Mere change in the forms of property ownership are not sufficient for the transition to socialism unless this is accompanied by concrete steps to abolish the old division of labour and the state. Hence, Bahro and the others correctly discard the official position which defines the Soviet-type societies as "relatively autonomous socialist societies". If this definition is different from that of the early period which asserted socialism not as a transitory period, anti-chamber of communism, but as an autonomous socio-economic formation in its own right, it still does not escape Marx's scathing criticism (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*) against considering the socialist stage as an autonomous or stable one. Thus, whether the existing societies are defined relatively autonomous or provisional, so long as they maintain the old division of labour and the State in its form cannot be called socialist and are in fact an obstacle on the path of socialism and communism. Egorov, on his part, takes the whole issue further by asserting that transition from private property directly to socialism is utopist since the dictatorship of the proletariat accelerates the economic power of the state. According to Egorov, neither Marx nor Lenin saw this development.

If Roy Medvedev and others focus on showing that Stalin and the Stalin period are not logical continuations of Lenin and Leninism, Bahro

and Rakovski point out that Leninism or the Bolshevik experience cannot be equated with Marxism. In other words, the analysis of the Soviet experience must take these experiences as they are and seek out their own particular laws rather than counterposing this to the Marxist conception from which it differs fundamentally. To Bahro, the new social order created by the Bolsheviks could in no way have been a system of real freedom and equality — « at the head of the apparatus state it created, Lenin's Bolshevik Party in Russia was to a large extent the extraordinary representative of the expelled capitalist exploiting class (without, however, taking the place of the class), which had not been deeply rooted enough in the economic life of a gigantic peasant country that was still primarily semi-asiatic... ». The new order itself is a barrier that has to be dissolved if socialist transition is envisaged. Thus, in the analysis of the dissidents claiming adherence to Marxism there is a recurrent theme — socialism is possible only with a high development of the productive forces. To Bahro, therefore, a new organization of society in countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa can at best be 'a non-capitalist development towards industrial society', towards the development of the productive forces 'to the threshold of socialist restructuring' and cannot at all be a transition period between capitalism and communism.

In the theoretical formulations of the Left dissidents there is also an examination of the role of the party, its relations with the mass organizations, its role in the proletarian dictatorship, etc... all with reference to the experience of the Soviet-type societies. It is not my intention here to deal in detail with the analysis presented in this respect, especially by Bahro and Rakovski. Suffice it to state that they present arguments which call for serious reflections so as to use the past in the service of the future if only by learning to avoid past mistakes. The different interpretations and emphasis that one finds in this particular current leads its exponents to various positions vis a vis the question of « what is to be done? » to transform the existing societies.

The gradualist position is best reflected by Medvedev who entertains the view that there are still healthy elements within the ruling parties who can act as forces of renovation. He sees the radicalization of the intelligentsia as the motive force for change and supports detente and inter-governmental relations as it will create a favourable atmosphere for reform demands. The position of Medvedev is not shared by others (especially his yearning for an able reformer — in an interview to the *Observer*, 15 June, 1975) but it highlights the dilemma of a significant portion of the dissident intellectuals — their isolation from the working masses and their fear of violence from below. Hence, it is not surprising that Medvedev calls Grigorenko (who called for the abolition of existing bureaucratic institutions and the institutions of workers' control and management of industries) « anarcho communist » and labels Alexei Kosterin (who condemned the CPSU, in toto, in 1968) as « too emotional ». For Bahro, on the other hand, the existing structures in the Soviet-type

societies have to be dissolved and not reformed. For him and Rakovski, liberalization under the existing situation can only be relative. Rakovski believes that with the rise in the standard of living there is the possibility of an increase in the non-conformist attitudes of the new generation of workers. These, with others, could constitute an autonomous social base for Marxism standing opposed to official Marxism and exhibiting non-reformism, i.e. a rejection of the notion that the dominant class and the system can be reformed. Bahro also inclines towards the need for a new party to carry out « the cultural revolution », a party of a new type which has no intention of remaining a party alongside the old one. Such a party must be formed 'outside of the existing state apparatus' and must be ultra-democratic both in its functions and relations with society. The task of the party will be « to shape the forces of society », (the new consciousness stored up in the society serving as a base), « in such a way that they massively confront the apparatus as autonomous powers and are able to force it towards progressive compromises. This requires the organization of communism as a mass movement. In principle, this signifies a division of social power; the establishment of a progressive dialectic between the state and the forces of society. The communists must themselves bring the contradiction into the government apparatus. The result will be a situation of regulated dual power, in which the etatist side of the equation gradually loses its predominance. Stick fast with étatism or go forward to the cultural revolution—those are the two alternatives. »

Quite a number of interrogations can be made in respect to Bahro's position. The reality we observe makes us dubious about the possibility of forcing the apparatus into progressive or increased compromise. The fate of Bahro, of Vladimir Borisov (who had formed an unofficial trade union in the USSR) and of all the others expelled to the West or sent to the labour camps indicates that there are more than a few obstacles in maintaining the intellectual opposition nucleus let alone forming a communist mass movement. The problem raised by Egorov/Kopelev/Elaguine and others about the difficulty of defending an ideology that quite a few may consider « oppressive » is not one to be brushed aside. The dominant classes have also a system of propaganda which, as Kopelev stated, has created a situation in which we can replace and interchange diverse ideas and ideals, slogans and political notions without much effort and without changing the essence. The problems are real even if one discards Plyusch's statement that « the masses have no political consciousness whatsoever and since their living condition is improving there is no revolutionary situation which is said to take place from the masses 'no longer being able to live as before'. » The debate is open... but one of the primary questions remains to be the link between the Marxist intellectuals (up to now the marxist opposition is composed by them) and the working class. Is this unity to be realized via a common program based on a struggle for sovereignty and national

independence, as the Czechk Jiri Pelikan suggests...? The general points which unite dissidents of all colours (an end to political repression, respect of human rights, etc.) are not enough. Charter 77, for all its positive aspects, cannot be the communist mass movement or a programmatic basis for one. The question that faces the marxist opposition in the East is not merely what kind of party but is also the path of change. Is there a possibility of constructing an organizational instrument, whatever its name, that can exist as a reflection of the autonomous power of the masses so long as an answer is not given to the question of how it is possible to envisage a revolutionary confrontation with a violent dominant class without countering it with the *violence* of the masses?

The Marxist opposition is struggling to emerge out of its isolation and assert its existence. To this, the analysis presented by Bahro, Rakovski and others is very important. In fact, the importance of the Marxist opposition in the East is not limited geographically. To all the forces everywhere struggling for socialism the reflections and debates, as well as the struggle and the fate, of the marxists in the East is of paramount importance. The opposition is trying to clarify itself on the past and the present so as to understand what should be done to realize socialist changes. At the sametime, steps towards one or other forms of organizations are being taken. The USSR itself and Poland are good examples. Also Cuba, where according to Carlos Franqui (in an interview to the Italian *Il Manifesto*, May 11/1980) the people, especially outside the urban areas, organize themselves to occupy houses and take other measures in opposition to the Castrist apparatus. Out of these tentative organizational steps, weak at the moment, and from the theoretical clarifications that are being sought, the revolutionaries in the Soviet-type societies will surely find the political-organizational means to overthrow the oppressors and destroy the repressive apparatuses.

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## African Unity and National Self-Determination

*Itafu Ali*

Luiz Cabral, president of Guinea Bissau, stated recently in a newspaper interview (*Afrique Asie* May 26/1980) that the solution to the conflict in Eritrea must be one which satisfies the aspirations of the Eritreans while taking into account Africa's drive for unity. Cabral's answer is, to the say the least, evasive but it highlights the cardinal problem facing Africa in the present decade — how to reconcile the drive for unity with the nationalist movements convulsing many multi-national states of Africa.

The OAU as an organization traces its origin not much to the desire for unity as to the desire of the states to maintain the status quo and establish a *modus vivendi* amongst themselves. The OAU charter consequently affirmed all frontiers as sacred and inviolable, the arbitrary colonial division of nationalities was upheld to block the supposed spectre of « balkanization ». In actual fact, the rather misplaced and dogged insistence on the inviolability of frontiers distorted the whole picture without in any way presenting a viable alternative to the settlement of the thorny issue of the struggle of the oppressed nationalities within the multi-national states. Biafra, South Sudan, Eritrea and the Ogaden, the Burundi situation, etc. give glaring affirmation of this.

In principle there should be no contradiction between the desire for African unity and the right of oppressed nations/nationalities. However, for this to be true it is necessary to redefine the basis of unity. African unity to which the entire masses of Africa aspire is basically different from the « unity » envisaged by the present ruling classes and which is consecrated in the OAU. The masses yearn for unity that is based on a recognition of their rights, a unity that does not negate their national identity and autonomy, a unity that expresses sovereignty from all forms of foreign domination and oppression. In other words, the path towards this unity can only be via political democracy, via the recognition of the rights of the oppressed nations/nationalities to self-determination and through equal and voluntary association.

The modern nation-states in Africa are in their majority multi-

national states forged by violence of be it the European colonial powers or the indigenous ruling classes as was the case when Emperor Menilik of Ethiopia occupied vast areas in the south and south east of Shoa to form the present-day Ethiopia. The source of the nationalist movements can be traced to this but its basic reason is historical. The stage of social development at which many African countries/societies find themselves in militates for the apparition of bourgeois nationalist movements. Thus, we witness the petty-bourgeoisie leading the nationalist movements in opposition to the dominant bourgeoisie linked to imperialism. Where the petty-bourgeoisie led the anti-colonial movement and turned dominant and bourgeois with independence, the new petty bourgeoisie of the nationalities in the society raises up the banner of local nationalism to struggle for its own exclusive domain, to assert its domination.

The question is not that of tribalism. While there are tribes in Africa the great majority are either nationalities or even nations. This tallies with the epoch of social development and helps to avoid the incongruity of calling a nation of some ten million people a « tribe »! In relation to the right to self-determination, the question of whether a particular people has evolved into a nation or is still at the nationality stage carries no significance. At the sametime, the dogmatic interpretations of the definition of nations given by Stalin (common territory, language, economic life and psychological make-up), in relation to a different situation, cannot also serve as a working argument to deny the oppressed their rights on the grounds that they are not nations. Be they nationalities or national groups the people have the right to decide their destiny. This is not absolute, but being a question that belongs to the sphere of political democracy its negation can only result by aggravating the conflict.

The invocation of unity and the use of force to uphold it has proved itself counter-productive. It is not the recognition of the right to self determination that is threatening to split Africa but the fact that national oppression exists in one form or another. The repressive bourgeoisie in power seeks a unified state and this has resulted in the negation of the right of nationalities to equality or self-determination. At the sametime, the low level of capitalist development favours contradictions along national lines. The solution to the problem does not lie in a general and formal recognition of the right to secede. Recognition of this right is important, but the main panacea is to eliminate the grounds leading to the contradictions amongst the various nationalities. This itself requires that there should be broad political democracy in the given country, a democracy that respects the right and equality of the nationalities. If the national question can get its solution only through a social revolution aimed at emancipating the masses from their conditions of oppressions (and in this way making them human beings who do not have to refer to their nationality to assert their existence or identify themselves), it is also true that the path towards unity can only be through the recognition

of the right of nationalities to self-determination, up to and including secession.

The struggle of oppressed nationalities in Africa, from that of Biafra up to that of Eritrea at present, is democratic in so far as it upholds the right of the masses to determine their destiny and opposes the use of force to deny the masses their legitimate rights. But this is as far as the democratic nature of these movements goes. If the dominant bourgeois invokes chauvinism and unity in order to realize a unified state ad market under it, the petty-bourgeoisie leading the nationalist movements seeks on its part also to establish its own exclusive domination. In both cases, the rights of the oppressed are not the cardinal issue, social revolution is not envisaged. Thus, in Biafra, the Ibo-dominated leadership of the movement did not recognise the rights of non-Ibo nationalities in its Biafra-scheme and the Eritrean nationalist movements also have no place for the right of nationalities to self-determination in an independent Eritrea. Therefore, the national question, in many cases, manifests this characteristic — the struggle between the dominant bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie of a given dominated nationality striving to fulfill its desire to turn dominant and bourgeois « in its own turf », For Marxists, as a consequence, the support given to the struggle for the right to self-determination cannot be equated with an automatic support to the leadership of such movements. The democratic content of the leadership has to be inferred from its attitude to the overall class struggle and multi-national revolutionary parties, to the democratic aspirations of the masses of the struggling nationality itself, to its organizational principles and internal functioning. These considerations are crucial not only because many of such movements are themselves repressive in their relations with the masses and their members but also because they are not independent and are, in some cases, utilised by regional or international powers seeking hegemony over the country. This is by no means to allege that the struggle should be condemned on the grounds that the movement leading is not independent itself.

If today the search for African unity and the right of self-determination exist in a state of contradiction, it is mainly because the type of unity upheld by the states in place and their method of realizing stands it opposed to the realization of African unity itself. To arrive at a correct perspective, the question of unity must be posed on new grounds, as a result of political democracy and social emancipation and not that of forceful subjugation. At the sametime, the struggle of oppressed nationalities has also to be progressively detached from the petty bourgeois nationalist perspectives and linked to the struggle for social emancipation under the leadership of the proletariat.

## FROM THE CLASSICS

### Excerpt from « The German Ideology »

Marx & Engels

Marx/Engels: *Communism. - The Production of the Form of Intercourse Itself.*

Communism differs from all previous movements in that it overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse, and for the first time consciously treats all natural premises as the creatures of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of the united individuals. Its organisation is, therefore, essentially economic, the material production of the conditions of this unity; it turns existing conditions into conditions of unity. The reality, which communism is creating, is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible that anything should exist independently of individuals, insofar as reality is only a product of the preceding intercourse of individuals themselves. Thus the communists in practice treat the conditions created up to now by production and intercourse as inorganic conditions, without, however, imagining that it was the plan or the destiny of previous generations to give them material, and without believing that these conditions were inorganic for the individuals creating them. The difference between the individual as a person and what is accidental to him is not a conceptual difference but a historical fact. This distinction has a different significance at different times—e.g., the estate as something accidental to the individual in the eighteenth century, the family more or less too. It is not a distinction that we have to make for each age, but one which each age makes itself from among the different elements which it finds in existence, and indeed not according to any theory, but compelled by material collisions in life. What appears accidental to the later age as opposed to the earlier—and this applies also to the elements handed down by an earlier age—is a form of intercourse which corresponded to a definite stage of development of the productive forces. The relation of the productive forces to the form of intercourse is the relation of the form of intercourse to the occupation or activity of the individuals. (The fundamental form of this activity is, of course, material, on which depend all other forms—mental, political, religious, etc. The various shaping of material life is, of course, in every case dependent on the needs which are already developed, and the production, as well as the satisfaction, of these needs is an historical process, which is not found in the case of a sheep or a dog (Stirner's refractory principal argument *adversus hominem*), although sheep and dogs in their present form certainly, but *malgré eux*, are products of an historical process.) The conditions under which individuals have intercourse with each other, so long as the above-mentioned contradiction is absent, are conditions appertaining to their individuality, in no way external to them; conditions under which these definite individuals, living under definite relationships, can alone produce their material life and what is connected with it,

<sup>1</sup> K. Marx/F. Engels: «*The German Ideology*» (Moscow 1968, pp. 87-96).

\* [Marginal note by Marx]: Production of the form of intercourse itself.

are thus the conditions of their self-activity and are produced by this self-activity\*. The definite condition under which they produce, thus corresponds, as long as the contradiction has not yet appeared, to the reality of their conditioned nature, their one-sided existence, the one-sidedness of which only becomes evident when the contradiction enters on the scene and thus exists for the later individuals. Then this conditions appears as an accidental fetter, and the consciousness that it is a fetter is imputed to the earlier age as well.

These various conditions, which appear first as conditions of self-activity, later as fetters upon it, form in the whole evolution of history a coherent series of forms of intercourse, the coherence of which consists in this: in the place of an earlier form of intercourse, which has become a fetter, a new one is put, corresponding to the more developed productive forces and, hence, to the advanced mode of the self-activity of individuals—a form which in its turn becomes a fetter and is then replaced by another. Since these conditions correspond at every stage to the simultaneous development of the productive forces, their history is at the same time the history of the evolving productive forces taken over by each new generation, and is, therefore, the history of the development of the forces of the individuals themselves.

Since this evolution takes place naturally, i.e., is not subordinated to a general plan of freely combined individuals, it proceeds from various localities, tribes, nations, branches of labour, etc., each of which to start with develops independently of the others and only gradually enters into relation with the others. Furthermore, it takes place only very slowly; the various stages and interests are never completely overcome, but only subordinated to the prevailing interest and trail along beside the latter for centuries afterwards. It follows from this that within a nation itself the individuals, even apart from their pecuniary circumstances, have quite different developments, and that an earlier interest, the peculiar form of intercourse of which has already been ousted by that belonging to a later interest, remains for a long time afterwards in possession of a traditional power in the illusory community (State, law), which has won an existence independent of the individuals; a power which in the last resort can only be broken by a revolution. This explains why, with reference to individual points which allow of a more general summing-up, consciousness can sometimes appear further advanced than the contemporary empirical relationships, so that in the struggles of a later epoch one can refer to earlier theoreticians as authorities.

On the other hand, in countries which, like North America, begin in an already advanced historical epoch, the development proceeds very rapidly. Such countries have no other natural premises than the individuals, who settled there and were led to do so because the forms of intercourse of the old countries did not correspond to their wants. Thus they begin with the most advanced individuals of the old countries, and, therefore, with the correspondingly most advanced form of intercourse, before this form of intercourse has been able to establish itself in the old countries\*. This is the case with all colonies, insofar as they are not mere military or trading stations. Carthage, the Greek colonies, and Iceland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, provide examples of this. A similar relationship issues from conquest, when a form of intercourse which has evolved on another soil is brought over complete to the conquered country: whereas in its home it was still encumbered with interests and relationships left over from earlier periods, here it can and must be established completely and without hindrance, if only to assure the conquerors' lasting power. (England and Naples after the Norman conquest, when they received the most perfect form of feudal organisation.)

Nothing is more common than the notion that in history up till now it has

\* Personal energy of the individuals of various nations—Germans and Americans—energy even through cross-breeding—hence the cretinism of the Germans; in France and England, etc., foreign peoples transplanted to an already developed soil, in America to an entirely new soil; in Germany the natural population quietly stayed where it was.

only been a question of *taking*. The barbarians *take* the Roman Empire, and this fact of taking is made to explain the transition from the old world to the feudal system. In this taking by barbarians, however, the question is, whether the nation which is conquered has evolved industrial productive forces, as is the case with modern peoples, or whether their productive forces are based for the most part merely on their association and on the community. Taking is further determined by the object taken. A banker's fortune, consisting of paper, cannot be taken at all, without the taker's submitting to the conditions of production and intercourse of the country taken. Similarly the total industrial capital of a modern industrial country. And finally, everywhere there is very soon an end to taking, and when there is nothing more to take, you have to set about producing. From this necessity of producing, which very soon asserts itself, it follows that the form of community adopted by the settling conquerors must correspond to the stage of development of the productive forces they find in existence; or, if this is not the case from the start, it must change according to the productive forces. By this, too, is explained the fact, which people profess to have noticed everywhere in the period following the migration of the peoples, namely, that the servant was master, and that the conquerors very soon took over language, culture and manners from the conquered. The feudal system was by no means brought complete from Germany, but had its origin, as far as the conquerors were concerned, in the martial organisation of the army during the actual conquest, and this only evolved after the conquest into the feudal system proper through the action of the productive forces found in the conquered countries. To what an extent this form was determined by the productive forces is shown by the abortive attempts to realise other forms derived from reminiscences of ancient Rome (Charlemagne, etc.).

Thus all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse. Incidentally, to lead to collisions in a country, this contradiction need not necessarily have reached its extreme limit in this particular country. The competition with industrially more advanced countries, brought about by the expansion of international intercourse, is sufficient to produce a similar contradiction in countries with a backward industry (e.g., the latent proletariat in Germany brought into view by the competition of English industry).

This contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse, which, as we saw, has occurred several times in past history, without, however, endangering the basis, necessarily on each occasion burst out in a revolution, taking on at the same time various subsidiary forms, such as all-embracing collisions, collisions of various classes, contradiction of consciousness, battle of ideas, etc., political conflict, etc. From a narrow point of view one may isolate one of these subsidiary forms and consider it as the basis of these revolutions; and this is all the more easy as the individuals who started the revolutions had illusion about their own activity according to their degree of culture and the stage of historical development.

The transformation, through the division of labour, of personal powers (relationships) into material powers, cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind, but can only be abolished by the individuals again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labour\*. This is not possible without the community. Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible. In the previous substitutes for the community, in the State, etc., personal freedom has existed only for the individuals who developed within the relationships of the ruling class, and only insofar as they were individuals of this class. The illusory community, in which individuals have up till now combined, always took on an independent existence in relation to them, and was at the same time, since it was the combination of one class over against another, not only a completely illusory community, but a new

\* [Marginal note by Engels]: (Feurbach: being and essence).

fetter as well. In the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association.

It follows from all we have been saying up till now that the communal relationship into which the individuals of a class entered, and which was determined by their common interests over against a third party, was always a community to which these individuals belonged only as average individuals, only insofar as they lived within the conditions of existence of their class—a relationship in which they participated not as individuals but as members of a class. With the community of revolutionary proletarians, on the other hand, who take their conditions of existence and those of all members of society under their control, it is just the reverse; it is as individuals that the individuals participate in it. It is just this combination of individuals (assuming the advanced stage of modern productive forces, of course) which puts the conditions of the free development and movement of individuals under their control—conditions which were previously abandoned to chance and had won an independent existence over against the separate individuals just because of their separation as individuals, and because of the necessity of their combination which had been determined by the division of labour, and through their separation had become a bond alien to them. Combination up till now (by no means an arbitrary one, such as is expounded for example in the *Contrat social*, but a necessary one) was an agreement upon these conditions, within which the individuals were free to enjoy the freaks of fortune (compare, e.g., the formation of the North American State and the South American republics). This right to the undisturbed enjoyment, within certain conditions, of fortuity and chance has up till now been called personal freedom. These conditions of existence are, of course, only the productive forces and forms of intercourse at any particular time.

If from a *philosophical* point of view one considers this evolution of individuals in the common conditions of existence of estates and classes, which followed on one another, and in the accompanying general conceptions forced upon them, it is certainly very easy to imagine that in these individuals the species, or "Man", has evolved, or that they evolved "Man"—and in this way one can give history some hard clouts on the ear\*. One can conceive these various estates and classes to be specific terms of the general expression, subordinate varieties of the species, or evolutionary phases of "Man".

This subsuming of individuals under definite classes cannot be abolished until a class has taken shape, which has no longer any particular class interest to assert against the ruling class.

Individuals have always built on themselves, but naturally on themselves within their given historical conditions and relationships, not on the "pure" individual in the sense of the ideologists. But in the course of historical evolution, and precisely through the inevitable fact that within the division of labour social relationships take on an independent existence, there appears a division within the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it. (We do not mean it to be understood from this that, for example, the rentier, the capitalist, etc., cease to be persons; but their personality is conditioned and determined by quite definite class relationships, and the division appears only in their opposition to another class and, for themselves, only when they go bankrupt.) In the estate (and even more in the tribe) this is as yet concealed: for instance, a nobleman always remains a nobleman, a commoner always a commoner, apart from his other relationships, a quality inseparable from his individuality. The division

\* The statement which frequently occurs with Saint Max that each is all that he is through the State is fundamentally the same as the statement that bourgeois is only a specimen of the bourgeois species; a statement which presupposes that the class of bourgeois existed before the individuals constituting it. [Marginal note by Marx to this sentence]: With the philosophers *pre-existence* of the class.

between the personal and the class individual, the accidental nature of the conditions of life for the individual, appears only with the emergence of the class, which is itself a product of the bourgeoisie. This accidental character is only engendered and developed by competition and the struggle of individuals among themselves. Thus, in imagination, individuals seem under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental; in reality, of course, they are less free, because they are more subjected to the violence of things. The difference from the estate comes out particularly in the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. When the estate of the urban burghers, the corporations, etc., emerged in opposition to the landed nobility, their condition of existence—movable property and craft labour, which had already existed latently before their separation from the feudal ties—appeared as something positive, which was asserted against feudal landed property, and, therefore, in its own way at first took on a feudal form. Certainly the refugee serfs treated their previous servitude as something accidental to their personality. But here they only were doing what every class that is freeing itself from a fetter does; and they did not free themselves as a class but separately. Moreover, they did not rise above the system of estates, but only formed a new estate, retaining their previous mode of labour even in their new situation, and developing it further by freeing it from its earlier fetters, which no longer corresponded to the development already attained\*.

For the proletarians, on the other hand, the condition of their existence, labour, and with it all the conditions of existence governing modern society, have become something accidental, something over which they, as separate individuals, have no control, and over which no *social* organisation can give them control. The contradiction between the individuality of each separate proletarian and labour, the conditions of life forced upon him, becomes evident to him himself, for he is sacrificed from youth upwards and, within his own class, has no chance of arriving at the conditions which would place him in the other class.

Thus, while the refugee serfs only wished to be free to develop and assert those conditions of existence which were already there, and hence, in the end, only arrived at free labour, the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to the present), namely, labour. Thus they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression, that is, the State. In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State.

\* N.B. It must not be forgotten that the serfs' very need of existing and the impossibility of a large-scale economy, which involved the distribution of the allotments among the serfs, very soon reduced the services of the serfs to their lord to an average of payments in kind and statute-labour. This made it possible for the serf to accumulate movable property and hence facilitated his escape out of possession of his lord and gave him the prospect of making his way as an urban citizen; it also created gradations among the serfs, so that the runaway serfs were already half burghers. It is likewise obvious that the serfs who were masters of a craft had the best chance of acquiring movable property.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Books on post - 1974 Ethiopia

*Addis Hiwot, Raul Vivo, David & Marina Ottoway, Nega Ayele & John Markakis.*

*Ethiopia: Empire In Revolution*, by Marina and David Ottoway, (Africana Publishing Co., New York & London 1978).

*Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, by Nega Ayele and John Markakis, (Spokesman Publications, London, 1978).

*Ethiopia: The Unknown Revolution*, by Raul Valdes Vivo, Havana, 1977.

*Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution*, by Addis Hiwet (published by Review of African Political Economy, London, 1975).

*Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Bourgeois Dictatorship*, by Addis Hiwet, (distributed in a mimeographed form, march 1976).

For long, Ethiopia suffered not only under a despotic rule, with misery, repression and death being the common features, but it had also the particular misfortune of suffering under the pens of a wide variety of so-called « historians » and « Ethiopicists ». Royal chroniclers like Edward Ullendorff told the world that the history of Ethiopia was nothing but the history of « its glorious kings » with the emphasis on the latest and the last of the rapacious breed. Donald Levine wrote *Wax and Gold* and told the world about the life of the Amhara peasant—reading it could be a worthwhile experience if the book is taken more as a novel rather than as a realistic study of the Amhara society. Many others also wrote one book after another claiming to depict the Ethiopian society, but in almost all cases what emerged, aside from the statistics and data, had practically little to do with the reality of Ethiopia<sup>1</sup>. The overall picture that was presented was of « an Ethiopia in the process of modernization (ref. R. Hess - *Modernization of Autocracy*), backward yet grappling with development at its own pace, multi-national yet held together by the divine emperor, a traditional society living by its own laws under an emperor loved by his people, etc. »

It was misinformation pure and simple, notwithstanding the parti-

<sup>1</sup> Among the few better books on pre-1974 Ethiopia are the ones written by John Markakis (*Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*) and Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion*, (London 1975).

cular motives of the authors. Ethiopians, on their part, had no say in the matter, theirs was the voice of the downtrodden, submerged by the outpourings of the professionals of superficial history and shallow scholarship. It was a voice awaiting its time, to hurl its cry in a dramatic manner.

The February 1974 Revolution caught the so-called Ethiopicists and experts on Ethiopian affairs by surprise. How to explain this vast revolutionary movement, this united upsurge of the broad masses? How to explain the expressed hatred against the « enlightened king » whom people « loved and revered »? How to explain the revolutionary demands of the masses, of « the ignorant and unconscious masses »? The February Revolution shattered the standing of the chroniclers and apologists of the Haile Selassie regime. Some like Ullendorff, who was telling the BBC that the « Emperor has everything under control » just a few weeks before the autocrat's downfall, faded away. Others like Blair Thomson described the revolution as « a folly » and Ethiopia as « a country that cut off its head »<sup>1</sup> and that has lost « its glory » (the « head » and the « glory » of Thomson is none other than the Emperor!). The February Revolution could be nothing but a folly of the highest degree to these elements as it destroyed the base and premise on which they built their ostentatiously learned theses and books. Good riddance, we say!!

The February Revolution asserted the Ethiopian peoples' desire and determination to shape their destiny. This struggle for democracy and political power embodied within it also a struggle to reappropriate the history of the people (which is, and not that of kings, what makes up the history of the country), to set truth in its proper place and to shatter the lie and misinformation spread by the ruling class, imperialism and their cohorts. However, the Ethiopian masses were not politically organized and armed to realize their objectives. Power was usurped by the military and the junta undertook the task of falsification and mystification in earnest. Though, presently, more and more Ethiopians are making their voices heard, and for this the existence of an organized fighting proletarian party has helped significantly, the predominant area of the field of analysing the Ethiopian reality is again monopolised by apologists of the power in place, virulent enemies of the Ethiopian masses' struggle, uninformed, self-baptised experts on Ethiopia and other dilettantes<sup>2</sup>.

One of such books is the one written by Raul Valdes Vivo, who, we are informed, is a member of the central committee of the « communist » party of Cuba. Juggling sensational fact and unadulterated fiction, Vivo's book tries to tell the reader that Ethiopia has been saved from eternal feudal and imperialist exploitation by none other than a « great hero » and « Marxist-Leninist of long-standing » called, you have guessed it,

<sup>1</sup> Blair Thomson, *Ethiopia: The Country that cut off its Head*, (Robson Books, London, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> For some outrageous and uninformed articles on the Ethiopian Revolution see *Horn of Africa*, a quarterly journal, (Summit, New Jersey, USA).

Mengistu!!! In Vivo's book, Mengistu emerges as « a committed Marxist-Leninist » since the 1960s, as one who practically singlehandedly (another Fidel!) geared the country towards « radical and socialist lines ». To prove this, Vivo resorts to crude falsifications (about Mengistu's life) and negation of the existence of any « revolutionary movement » prior to 1974. With one sweep he destroys years of struggle waged by revolutionary intellectuals to spread socialist consciousness and to organize the masses. Vivo has a problem and it is the same problem that plagues the Ottoways: how to present the military regime as progressive and as the only existing organizer of the society unless one deals with the workers' struggle, the student movement, the peasant rebellions? How to deal with the EPRP and with the general Left movement which not only preceded the junta but continued to struggle under and against its rule? Vivo presents the « ostrich solution » — there were no Marxist-Leninists in Ethiopia, there was no civilian revolutionary movement, not even an officers group like the Free Officers of Egypt. In his zeal to prove his point, Vivo goes out to affirm that the February Revolution was spontaneous as no one set the precise date for it (maybe there was no Moncada Barrack to assault?!) and because there was no advance preparation in terms of organization and education. Marxist analysis indeed! Vivo's falsification is rivalled only by his theoretical shallowness. His whole book is nothing but an unabashed attempt to sell the military regime and Mengistu (and we know why just as Moscow does!) as « revolutionary ». His book could have had a fitting title if it was called « Mengistu: the unknown revolutionary » and came under the category of « Fiction ».

The Ottoways, on the other hand, are not Cubans (they are north americans), nor do they sit in the central committee of a party (she worked in the Addis Abeba University while he is the Africa correspondent of *Washington Post*), and it is unlikely that their pens or the ink came from Moscow. But they have the same malady as Vivo — they want to give historical and popular legitimacy to the military regime. The Ottoways tell us that « Ethiopia was held together by the divine rule of the Emperor for half a century » but this does not in anyway hinder them from asserting that « class and ethnicity » are the concepts they use for the analysis of the Ethiopian Revolution<sup>1</sup>. However, as it is to be expected, despite their nominal recognition of the existence of classes in Ethiopia, the authors make no attempt that could be accused of having even a distant relation with class analysis. They say nothing about the class

<sup>1</sup> Marina Ottoway has also written previously another article on the Ethiopian Revolution. The article, entitled « *Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution* » (published in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1976), forewords a novel version of class analysis which makes the Ethiopian proletariat as whole « a labour aristocracy » or « an elite privileged by the modern system » as opposed to the rural masses, neglected and down trodden. She bases herself on her own strange concoction mentioned above to attack the anti-junta struggle of the workers and urban masses as « elitist ». So much for her grasp of the Ethiopian Revolution and scientific class analysis!!

struggle but assert that the army became radicalized. How? Vivo answers: « thanks to Mengistu ». The Ottoways leave the question unanswered and judging from their incapacity to understand the dynamics of the February Revolution and the overall class struggle, their silence means nothing but ignorance.

Admittedly, the national question in Ethiopia is one of the fundamental questions of the revolution. For long, Ethiopian Marxists have been dealing with question both theoretically and in the field of practical political agit-prop work. The backwardness of social development, the dominant position of isolated small-scale peasant production in the country, the link between the land and national question, have all meant, along with the chauvinist policies practiced by the ruling class of the past and the present, that this question is not to be simply brushed aside under demagogic calls of unity, solidarity and class struggle. The solution to the question, as Ethiopian Marxists believe, is very much linked to the social revolution and the revolutionary transformation of the society under the rule of the proletariat. The Ottoways seem to understand that the problem exists but their understanding of the question stops right there. To begin with, they have adopted the term « ethnicity » whose relevance as a concept in the field of revolutionary studies leaves much to be desired. They shun from using « nations », « nationality » or « national groups » without explaining why, and the reader is inclined to speculate that they may have a residue of the colonial-supremacist bias which shudders at the thought of calling African nationalities anything other than « tribes ». Ethnicity is not a historical category to be used in the place of « nationality ». Furthermore, the Ottoways do not actually explain how the weight and consequences of what they call « division along ethnic lines » and how this division affects the contradictions within the society. For the Ottoways, the ethnic concept is merely used for simplistic, and utterly groundless, classification of political forces (Meisone = Oromo; EPRP = Amhara-Tigre, etc).

Like Vivo, the Ottoways give exaggerated importance to the role of individuals. Unable to explain the situation in which various classes united to wage a revolutionary struggle, they resort to the argument that the « revolution was spontaneous » while ignoring the basic question-how come the various classes and social groups (within whom were no class struggles, according to the authors) confronted one another or united to wage a common battle against other classes? The Ottoways, who give popular legitimacy, gratis, to the regime and who are very hostile to the mass revolutionary movement opposing the junta, could in no way arrive at an understanding of the « Empire in Revolution » as they dismiss with hostility the classes and forces whose movement is the key to this process. Thus, they dismiss the momentous March 1974 general strike by workers as « insignificant » and, in fact, go on to call the whole labour movement as « politically insignificant ». To add insult to injury, they also tell us that CELU (the central trade union organization dissolved by

the junta forcefully) was moulded by Americans thereby ignoring the change that occurred within CELU during the Revolution and making believe that they do not know that thousands of officers from the army (including Mengistu) have been moulded and trained by America. Even Vivo admits that Mengistu was trained and pampered by Americans (in America) though he wants to qualify this by saying that Mengistu witnessed racism and the Detroit riots by Afro-Americans and thus became politically conscious! The Ottoways reserve their vitriolic attacks to the students whom they call « arrogant », « elitist », « carrerist » and a few other names of the same genre. The EPRP and the opposition movement to the junta are given the labels « doctrinaire », « emotional », etc... For the Ottoways, adjectives and insults take the place of a sober and objective political analysis. Judging from this and what they write about the EPRP, it is clear that they are totally ignorant of the lines or policies of be it the EPRP or others. Moreover, they also dish out some false assertions in order to beautify the regime and to disparage the opposition-according to them the junta tried to secure the participation of civilians in the government but the latter refused due to their « intransigence » and « factionalism »! It will be interesting to hear what the Ottoways will say about the demise of Meisone which was not « intransigent » but totally malleable and whose alliance with the junta did not save it from being crushed by the regime. But then, the Ottoways have given us the answer already. It may be undialectical, ahistorical and totally ridiculous but it is their answer-they say: « thanks to the scheming and manoeuvring of the opposition the regime is turning into a military dictatorship ». Class analysis goes out by the window as the Ottoways flay the opposition (whose provisional popular government slogan is said to be a drive to form a « corporatist system of government under the control of the urban elite »!) for pushing the regime (which was dutifully trying to carry out « the revolution from the top ») to become a military dictatorship. Meison used to say, before it was crushed by the junta, that the EPRP was pushing the junta towards fascism! The junta, not particularly known for its political clarity, cannot be blamed for accusing the EPRP of having stopped the rain!! The Ottoways, like Meisone, need to read on contradictions and social development. Frustrated by the « emotional and doctrinaire » opposition, the Ottoways come full circle at the end of their book to replace the king by the military junta. Now that the « divine king who held Ethiopia together for fifty years » is gone, they declare that « it appears only the military could somehow hold the country together ». For the Ottoways and Vivo, the Ethiopian people do not exist except perhaps as secondary characters in a drama of great individuals. The uninformed reader who wants to understand about the Ethiopian revolution will benefit little from the book by the Ottoways. « The Empire in Revolution » is actually « The Book of Confusion ».

The only books which address themselves to the Ethiopian Revolution with some seriousness are the ones written by Addis Hiwet and

by Nega and Markakis<sup>1</sup>. In both cases, there is a clear effort to rise above the usual banalities written about Ethiopia and to delve deep into the contradictions of the society and the struggle waged by the masses. A general disadvantage that affected both books is the fact that at the time the books were written, the Ethiopian revolutionary process was actually in a very volatile stage and hardly lent itself to anything other than a report of the events and the projection of trends in the development. Hence, while the books' general approach or narrative style (this, in Nega/Markakis) could be understood, their characterization of the regime as bonapartist (« bonapartist pretensions » in Nega/Markakis) needs to be analyzed. Addis Hiwet, whose writings on the formation of the centralized « modern state » and the « transitional social-formation in pre-1974 Ethiopia » are very pertinent, also advances the proposition, in his 1976 book, that the regime is a « Corporate state ».

Underlying the errors in this respect (though Addis Hiwet does not sufficiently explain why he adopts the « Corporate » label while firmly rejecting the « fascist » one), there emerges a wrong understanding of the nature and dynamics of the February Revolution itself, a negation of the proletarian character of this revolution and attributing to it the petty-bourgeois label as Nega and Markakis do in the conclusion to their book. Without clearly grasping the character of the Revolution itself, it is evidently difficult to identify « the hidden secret » of the policies and line of the military regime.

The 1974 February Revolution caught in its whirlpool all the classes associated with decaying feudalism (landlords, the aristocracy and nobility the peasants) and with « emergent » capitalism (workers in the factories and industries, in the public administration, the petty bourgeoisie, lumpenproletariat...). The February Revolution was not merely a revolution directed against feudalism and the comprador-bureaucratic bourgeoisie, it also, at the same time, manifested an internal crisis for the trade unions, the armed forces, the state administration, and for the workers, peasants, women, students, etc... The assault on the conditions of oppression led to or was intrinsically linked to the attack on the organizational forms of this oppression. Therefore, the February Revolution negated the political and economic forms of domination, in the place of feudal Ethiopia, which recognised an individual's political existence only via the possession of land and the subjugation of the peasant, the revolution forwarded a radically different conception of the organization of the society. The issue is not as to whether a particular class homogenized and led the whole movement. It was rather of a question of which class best embodied the liberation of other classes in its fundamental drive for liberation; in other words the question was not which class

<sup>1</sup> For serious and worthwhile articles on the Ethiopian revolution and politico-economic reality, see the quarterly journal *ALTRAFRICA*, published in Rome, Italy.

imposed its particular class liberation as the « liberation » of the others but rather which class *had to* liberate the others in order for itself to be really free.

The Ethiopian Revolution was not, therefore, a bourgeois revolution. The existing bourgeoisie, in most cases linked to the land and thus to the feudal system, was not capable of transforming the society on its behalf, to reappropriate and accumulate the mass of labour power under its own rule and to assure the dominance of capitalism. Bureaucratic and comprador in its majority, the bourgeoisie, as the Michael Imru experience showed, failed to recuperate the movement and to put it on its own bourgeois rails. If the February Revolution was not a bourgeois revolution, it was neither a petty-bourgeois revolution. The Ethiopian petty-bourgeoisie, though it played a prominent role in the revolutionary process, was not able to impose its hegemonic hold on the revolution, to assure its privileged position vis a vis the proletariat and to realize its bourgeois aspirations. The contradictions which exploded in February were so great that they surpassed the petty-bourgeois limitations, the petty-bourgeois blueprint of economic and political development were insufficient, and this class had to tie itself to the demands of the proletariat during the revolution. This is why the petty-bourgeois, unable to impose its hegemony over the revolutionary process, had to resort to a coup in order to assert its autonomy as a class in front of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

The proletarian character of the February Revolution is not to be automatically derived be it from the number of the proletariat in the country or the absence or presence of a proletarian party, nor is it dependent on the nature of the trade union in place. The Revolution posed the question of political power not in the form of replacing the rulers with new ones but in the revolutionary sense i.e. the social content of this power and the reorganization of the society in new forms which express the utilization of power by the masses, their social participation. The partial and sectarian demands and, thus, partial liberation, could be expressed only within this general struggle for political power and this is why all the various demands could find consensus around this fundamental issue. And this question of power and reorganization was not simply an item on the future plan but one that was being actualized (the popular committees in various areas, of which the People's Committee in Jimma is but one example) is also an important feature of the process as a whole. The revolution, therefore, could not be confined within the limits of the bourgeois democratic revolution (and even the agrarian question was linked to the question of power and a revolutionary organization of the society in opposition to the conditions and organizational forms of oppression), it was not a simple antifeudal struggle (abolition of landlordism, distribution of land, etc), nor did it confirm to the « orderly and gradual » process which the petty-bourgeois dreams of in order to realize its aspirations to turn bourgeois. The only class which could stand as a pole uniting the various revendications of the classes and thus

expressing the unification of the individual and collective conditions of the various classes was the proletariat. The February Revolution, as a revolution for social emancipation, had a predominantly proletarian character, a character that cannot be exclusively framed within the actual number or organizational strength of the proletariat in the country.

This being the case, the section of the petty-bourgeoisie which appropriated the state power via a coup had to move in two interlinked directions. One was to destroy to the last all the means and instruments which could enable the proletariat to appropriate power and social emancipation. And thus the abolition of the various committees set-up by the people, the dissolution of CELU and others and the relentless terror against the EPRP and against any attempt at autonomous organizational action. Secondly, the military regime had to present its own liberation, i.e. the liberation of the petty-bourgeoisie from its conditions of oppression by the Haile Selassie state apparatus and the bourgeoisie as the liberation of the people as a whole, the general interests of the people are thus said to be incarnated in the interests of the regime and, its logical development, in Mengistu. Hence, once again the political existence of the individual or group exists only within the framework of the subjugation of the individual by the state. Within this framework, the resort to « socialism » as an ideological facade highlights the repression and beyond it the subjugation of the individual to the state. The military regime did not express the interest of one particular class in this respect as it was striving to mould all classes in its interest. True enough, like a bonpartist state it had the appearance of conflict with all classes but unlike such a state it did not enjoy the support of a vast section of the peasantry. The realization of the liberation of the petty-bourgeoisie, actualized on the political level by the taking over power and the setting-up of new organizational forms (*kebele* and the like), required on the economical sphere the appropriation of surplus both from the peasant and the proletariat. The nationalization measures are intended to facilitate the extraction of increased surplus, the accumulation of capital, etc, i.e. the transformation of the petty-bourgeoisie into a state or bureaucratic bourgeoisie. This transformation necessarily implied a contradiction with the landlords and also with the comprador and bureaucratic bourgeoisie which were compromised (by their role within the Haile Sellassie state apparatus and their link with land) and attacked as strategic enemies by the February Revolution. The transformations also called for regimentation of the mass of peasants and workers within the options of the military regime. From this drive by the regime to impose its interests as the interest and needs of the society at large follows its conflict with almost all the other classes (including the fraction of the petty-bourgeoisie which has gone to the side of the proletariat) and its drive to shape and reorganize the whole socio-economic formation. The overall weakness of the bourgeoisie as a whole, the weakness of the petty-bourgeoisie as a consequence, the continuing revolutionary struggle of the masses and

the international crisis of capitalism lie at the root of the weakness of the regime in realizing its aims, a weakness that the intervention of the USSR has partially eliminated while opening up new forms of contradiction accentuating the regime's overall weakness in the long-term. In this sense, then, while the regime may have at one time or another manifested certain features that could be stretched to be called « bonapartist », such a characterization of the regime is off-mark. However, aside from these and other points on which comments could be made at length, the books by Addis Hiwet and Nega/Markakis are valuable beginnings in the analysis of the process of the Ethiopian revolution, its causes and development. Nega Ayele was a member of the EPRP and he was killed on september 1976 by the military regime and thus did not live long enough to see the book published. Our criticism of the books by Addis Hiwet and Nega/Markakis has the advantage of hindsight and can, therefore, detract nothing from the value of these books. That we should appropriate the experience gained at the expense of the blood of martyrs like Nega to criticise our failings and deepen our understanding of the revolution in its totality, both at the level of theory and practice, is only a duty.

by Mulugeta Osman

## Article in Monthly Review by Befekadu on « Leftist Juntas »

Befekadu Zegeye: *On the Nature of « Leftist Juntas »*, Monthly Review, vol. 31, No., 3, July-August 1979, pp. 51-61.

Historical materialism operates at different theoretical levels, but it will be an exercise in confusion if one attempts to deduce mechanically the concrete situation from the theoretical abstractions. For all their outward similarities, the so-called « Leftist Juntas » in Africa and Latin America do not bend easily to general treatments which, by necessity, obliterate the very particular features which play a key role in moulding the features of the juntas themselves.

Befekadu's article, which arises from a correct premise — that these juntas are not socialist — suffers from such a general and unscientific approach. As a consequence, it makes blanket declarations which are deemed to be applicable to all such juntas while an examination of the concrete situations manifests that such is not the case. For example, that « in the Third World, the military, along with the bureaucracy, tends to represent the most modern, technologically advanced, highly educated sector of society » (page 51) is a more than debatable assertion when one examines the military in Ethiopia, in the Congo, Sudan, etc... Other examples within the article could be cited. However, it is clear that only the concrete analysis of the given situation can be the starting point of any attempt at general abstractions. The so-called « leftist juntas », aside from their similar demagogic claims to socialism and anti-imperialism, have different features that are particular to each and which are shaped/influenced by the existing class struggle and the level of the development of the society itself. A junta in Chile and a junta in Ethiopia or Benin require a distinct analysis which takes their economic structure and class struggle into consideration.

Befekadu, like other authors who show scant interest in considering the masses as an active history-making force, gives the juntas an independent function. The leftist juntas are created suddenly, explosively (p. 56-57), the masses have no hand whatever in the shaping of the corporate state (p. 57) and the petty bourgeoisie, realizing that the modernization process is slow and that power should come into its hands moves to takeover power and then to build its economic base through nationalizations, etc... And the leftist juntas are led by the two junior sectors of the organizational bourgeois — the military and technocrats or even intelligentsia (p. 54). That Befekadu's starting assertion itself off-mark is plain to see. The petty bourgeoisie, or what he mistakenly calls organizational bourgeoisie, does not trace the cause of its coup or power-appropriation to the dominant role it has been playing in the state administration. In fact, the coup makers of Africa come primarily from the sector which had little or no administrative power. If one observes Ethiopia, the junta had, prior to coming to power, no way of « feeling its importance », its weight in the state was marginal and the junta leaders had not even realized the

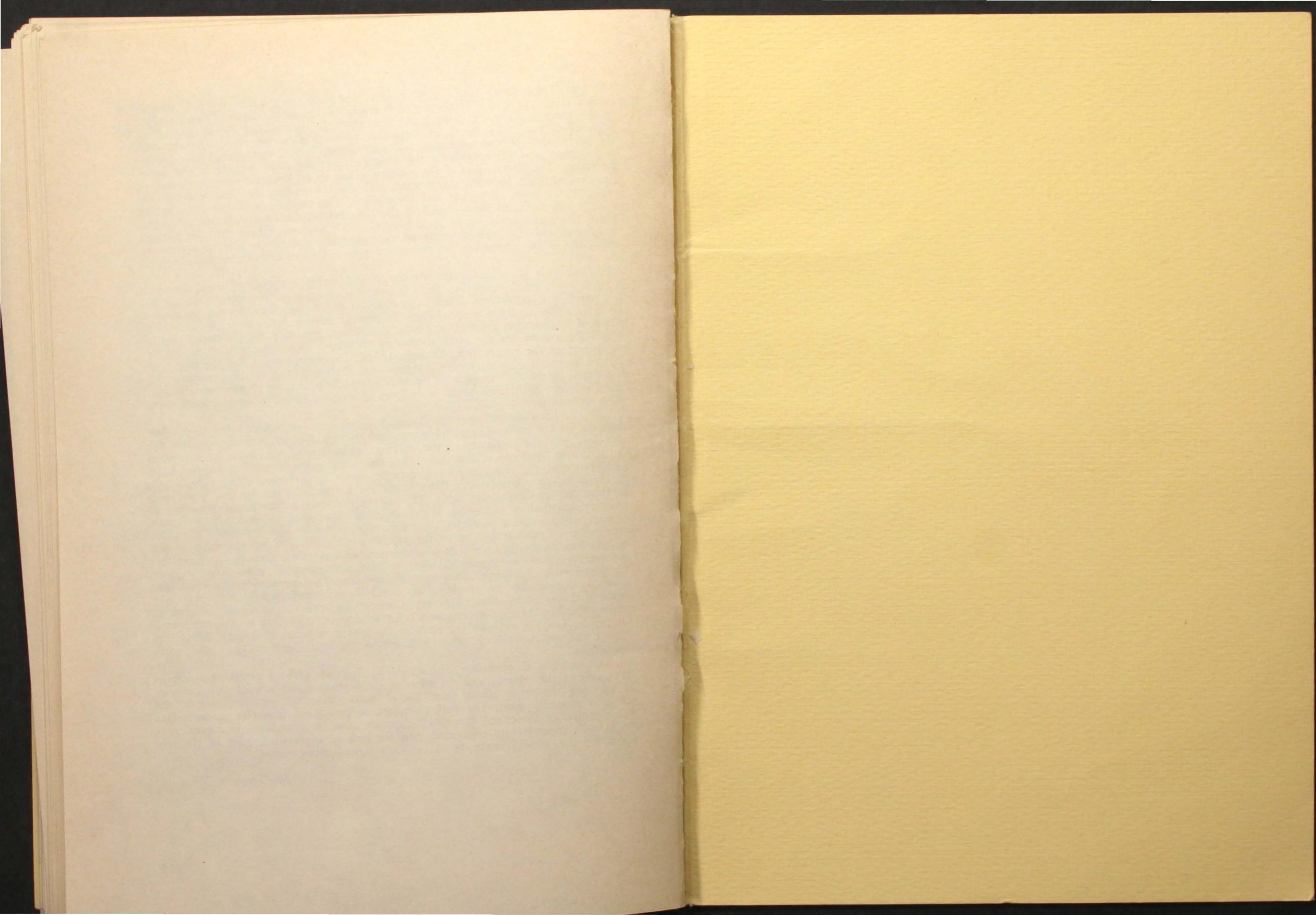
role the armed forces could play as direct administrators until the mass struggle eroded and showed the fundamental weakness of the ruling classes. The aspiration of the petty bourgeois to turn bourgeois cannot be denied. But the genesis of the takeover of power by the junta (and this takeover does not usually happen with the partnership of the technocrats — e.x. Congo, Sudan, and, though the process is different, also Ethiopia) must be sought within the class struggle in the social-formation. The intervention of the military is but an act designed to curb or reshape the class struggle between the workers and the bourgeoisie, the landlords and the peasants, the mass of people and imperialism. The class basis of the coup or the military takeover and the strength of the class behind the coup indicates the course which the junta would adopt in carrying out its objectives. Where the class struggle is intense and the masses organized autonomously, and where the bourgeoisie is weak, the junta's repressive and demagogic actions are put in evidence quite early in the process.

That such juntas resort to demagoguery and verbal adoption of « socialism » is also to be inferred from this. But, despite this, their main character is manifested by terror and repression. Their « totalitarian and corporatist » feature is marked by their drive to organize the society in their interest and to stamp out any opposition or independent political action by the masses, especially the proletariat. In the whole the masses are not mere spectators, they have more than a hand in the development of the events (e.x. Ethiopia 1974). The emergence of the juntas may be sudden in terms of a particular determination of time but it is an appearance that is dictated by the class struggle in the society, its role is dictated by this same struggle, and its future path takes as its main item of consideration this same struggle, even if to destroy it.

The nationalization measures by such juntas can be correctly traced to their drive to assume economic control/power and to turn themselves bourgeois. But this also manifests the weakness of the existing bourgeoisie or the desire to strengthen the economic functions of the state. That this act nurtures a growing national bourgeois or helps the emergence of such a bourgeois is, however, difficult to accept. Befekadu argues correctly that these juntas are not socialist but he readily concedes to them the anti-imperialist label. This shows not only a wrong understanding of what anti-imperialism means but is an indirect attribution of anti-imperialist functions to mere nationalisation measures. Nationalisation is not an anti-capitalist act, neither does it, *per se*, put an obstacle on the path of imperialism. The radical essence of this measure can be sought only if it is undertaken as a step in a conscious strategy that opposes capitalism as a system. Short of this, the measure cannot have an anti-capitalist nature. Anti-imperialism loses any meaning if subjugation by one imperialist power is substituted by another. In short, if anti-imperialism has to have any meaning, the question must be posed in connection with the nature of the class in power, whether there is a conscious drive to destroy capitalism as a system, etc... Concretely, even if we take the term in its narrowest sense, it is very difficult to discern the anti-imperialism of such juntas as the ones in the Congo and north east Africa.

Despite such shortcomings, the article by Befekadu gives a useful treatment of the nature of the reforms and the whys of the repression unleashed by such juntas. In exposing the truth about these juntas' non-socialist and capitalist nature, the article is generally good. The author's resort to broad and imprecise generalizations and adoption of ill-defined concepts (corporate state, organizational bourgeoisie) as far as such countries are concerned, and the lack of any consideration of the role played by the USSR, constitute the article's serious shortcomings.

by Gemechu Tena



ERRATUM

PAGE 8/Paragraph 2 should read as follows:

"And the mode of production is made up of the forces of production and the relations of production(which forms the structure and super-structure combining to determine the socio-economic formation),the form taken at a particular stage of social development.In the words of Marx:

