

INTRODUCING "THE AFRICAN COMMUNIST"

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Africa needs Communist thought, as dry and thirsty soil needs rain.

With these words written eleven years ago, a small journal made its first appearance. Challengingly entitled *The African Communist*, it set out "to defend and spread the liberating ideas of Communism in our great continent, and to apply the brilliant scientific method of Marxism to the solution of its problems".

The journal was produced under conditions of great danger and difficulty. The South African Communist Party, whose organ it was and remains, had been illegal and forced to operate underground for nine years, since 1950. Under the racist police state of the Republic of South Africa it is a serious criminal offence even to "advocate or defend" Marxist-Leninist ideas.

The first issue was duplicated secretly in Johannesburg and distributed clandestinely inside the country. At the same time a number of copies made their way beyond the borders of South Africa, in the rest of the continent and many other parts of the world. They met with a remarkably warm and enthusiastic reception; the journal was hailed with joy especially by workers and revolutionary intellectuals in Africa. One reader—characteristic of many others—wrote to say that *The African Communist* was "like a ray of sunlight piercing through the dark".

It was this eager response which encouraged the Party to plan a substantial increase in the size of *The African Communist*, its frequency of publication and the number of copies distributed. Arrangements were made to have it printed abroad, in order to overcome the formidable and obvious difficulties of producing large numbers of copies under increasingly terroristic fascist conditions in South Africa. An international distribution centre was established in London. During 1960 two issues were produced, but since then the journal has appeared regularly each quarter,

some issues running to 100 or even more pages. Thus the end of the first decade of its publication was marked by the appearance of its 39th issue.

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Naturally, as its name implies, the problems and struggles of the African continent, with its forty-odd states in various stages of development, are the main focus of attention in *The African Communist*, which consistently strives to chronicle and elucidate events in the light of Marxist-Leninist science and accurate factual information. Looking back through its pages, the reader is presented with a fascinating chronicle of events in one of the most stormy and portentous decades in the history of what an Editorial note (No. 16, First Quarter 1964) calls "turbulent Africa". In these ten years two score of African countries have emerged from long and bitter years of colonialism to the status of formal political independence.

Our journal views these momentous and exhilarating events, inspiring though they are, not as an end in themselves but as major landmarks in the incomplete, but still continuing and unfolding "African Revolution".

"Our vast continent", declares the Editorial Note, "its development thwarted for so many long years, is in the throes of a tremendous anti-colonialist revolution.... We have won and are winning splendid victories for the cause of African freedom, independence and unity. We have also suffered and in the future will suffer more setbacks. *Only against the background of our struggle as a whole, its essential oneness of purpose and direction*, can we understand the interrelation and significance of the momentous calendar of African events".

To this theme the journal and its contributors have tirelessly returned, with detailed illustrations drawn from every corner of the continent. African unity springs not merely out of a geographical coincidence, or from some mystical concept of "the African personality". It arises from the common experience of all African peoples—conquest, enslavement, robbery and imperialist exploitation of the people and their natural wealth and resources. It has a contemporary meaning and progressive content because the population of the whole continent has a common aim and purpose—the eradication of colonialism in all its forms; the overcoming of the frightful consequences of colonialism, crippling poverty, the wreckage of national, social and economic development which was the havoc wreaked by the despoilers and looters of the continent.

The freedom and independence of every African country, its advance to real equality of living standards and status among the nations of the world, must remain in doubt, hazardous, unstable

and to some extent illusory, so long as the great African revolution remains uncompleted. Its fulfilment depends on the accomplishment of two great main, and interrelated, tasks still facing the African peoples:

Firstly, for those countries which have already attained political or constitutional independence, the reinforcement of formal independence with liberation from the economic shackles of imperialism, and their rapid social-economic development, only to be achieved by bypassing capitalism and building the foundations of socialism;

Secondly, the liberation of those crucial areas of Africa which still suffer the direct domination of colonialism—the Portuguese colonies and the slave states of the South, where fascist South Africa and the white settler regime in Zimbabwe, backed by NATO and international imperialism, subject millions of Africans to intolerable oppression and exploitation in the most economically developed part of the continent, and constitute a springboard for imperialist aggression which threatens the security and independence of every African state.

These regimes, linked together by close ties of self-interest and self-preservation, economic integration and political-military coordination, are increasingly and powerfully challenged by people's revolutions and guerrilla struggles. For many years the brave patriots of Guinea-Bissau led by the PAIGC (African Independence Party); of Angola led by the MPLA (People's Liberation Movement); and Mozambique, headed by FRELIMO (Liberation Front) have been conducting heroic wars of national liberation, inflicting heavy casualties on the Portuguese fascists and liberating and administering substantial areas of their respective homelands.

Since August 1967 the fight for African freedom entered a vital new phase with the formation of a military alliance between the ANC (African National Congress of South Africa) and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union, "Rhodesia") and the opening battles of the war for national liberation of the entire South.

In a notable editorial *Freedom Marches South* (*African Communist*, No. 31, Fourth Quarter 1967) these events were hailed as the beginning of "a new chapter in the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa".

"The war of the people for the liberation of South Africa is beginning... This war was never sought by the oppressed non-white people of the country. For all the fifty years of its legal existence, the African National Congress, like the other partners in our liberation movement, sought to win democratic changes and to change the rigid racial structure of the country by peaceful means..." (Just what that "rigid racial structure" means in terms of Marxist analysis, is spelt out very clearly in *The Road to South African Freedom, the Programme of the South African Communist Party*, which was published in full in the journal (First Quarter, 1963),

where it is described and fully analysed as “colonialism of a special type”). The editorial continues:

“The full responsibility for the revolutionary war which now faces the country, with all its suffering, bloodshed and bitterness, rests on the shoulders of the white chauvinist rulers of South Africa who have turned our country into a battlefield. They have chosen the sword and shall perish by the sword”.

“They have chosen the sword and shall perish by the sword”. This estimation was sustained and elaborated in an important statement made by the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party appearing in No. 34 (Third Quarter 1968), which declared:

“The national liberation struggle in South Africa takes place not in a backward but in a developed capitalist country.

“The enemy is not a metropolitan imperialist power thousands of miles away. It is essentially... the South African monopoly capitalist class, based within the country itself, in control of a powerful state apparatus and backed by a modern industrial economy.

“...The task and aim of the national movements in ‘normal’ colonial countries was to get the imperialists *out* of the country. It was not and could not have been the defeat and conquest of the imperial power itself... But the liberation of our country cannot be accomplished without the actual defeat and destruction of South African imperialism itself; the overthrow of the present state.”

What however gives the national liberation movement its strength and confidence in victory, the Statement goes on to point out, is that the economy itself is sustained by a predominantly African industrial and agricultural proletariat, subjected to fierce national oppression and exploitation.

“The South African ruling class is by no means invincible. It can be and will be defeated by determined and resourceful action, employing all means of struggle, political, industrial and military, resting on organisation and unity, and able to mount a sustained and rising tempo of revolutionary action. The question of armed struggle in South Africa cannot be seen purely as a military question.”

The Statement also deals with the vital question of the relationship between the Communist Party, on the one hand, and the national liberation movement which has developed historically around the African National Congress, on the other. Reiterating its full support for the ANC and its programme, the Freedom Charter, the Central Committee of the Party adds:

“South African experience has fully proved that a strong Communist Party is vital to the strength and vigour of the movement as a whole. The Central Committee is vigorously opposed to any conceptions of counterposing the Party or ‘the Communists’ to

the rest of the movement. We have never considered that the way to play a vanguard role is by ‘proclaiming’ it or by contesting for positions. In the fight against white supremacy we have no aims separate from our non-Communist comrades and colleagues in the liberation and working class movements. Leadership consists in ... our members ... setting an example of firmness and devotion in the common patriotic struggle....

“We maintain that our ideology of Marxism-Leninism enables our members to be better Congressites, better trade unionists, better fighters for the freedom of our country....

“We believe that the strengthening of our Party is vital towards the accomplishment of our immediate goal—the winning of the national liberation war, as the key and condition for the future advance to socialism.”

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In addition to its many detailed reviews of the changing situation in the South of the Continent, *The African Communist* has devoted much space and thought to the problems of the Continent as a whole and to a number of individual countries in it. Its studies of the developments in such African countries as Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and many others have been widely quoted and reprinted in many parts of the world.

Nor are its horizons limited to the African scene. The S. A. Communist Party—which will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in July 1971—has profound internationalist traditions and roots. Articles frequently appear on developments in Europe, Asia, and North and South America, as well as questions concerning the international Communist movement. As a review in *Problems of Peace and Socialism (World Marxist Review, vol. 12, No. 1, January 1969)* points out:

“Not limiting itself to purely African problems, *The African Communist* responds to events in other countries and comments on the general theoretical and political problems of the international Communist movement. Recent issues contained the Central Committee’s statements on Czechoslovakia, the April meeting of the preparatory committee for the international conference of Communist and Workers Parties ... an article on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, and ... comments on Vietnam, the United States, France and Latin America.

“A feature of the articles on general problems is that these are examined from the standpoint of the revolutionary processes of the African continent. The peculiar feature of South Africa as a developed capitalist society and a colony provides an objective basis for the international contacts of the South African liberation movement....”

The same review pays high tribute to the quality and standard of the contents of the journal.

"The range of subjects examined, its high theoretical and journalistic level make this small journal, published by an illegal Communist Party, one of the most interesting of African periodicals. During 1968, for example, the journal kept its readers informed about events in Kenya, Malawi, Algeria, Liberia, the United Arab Republic, the two Congos, Dahomey, Swaziland, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Morocco, interpreting these events from a principled Marxist standpoint."

Many similar comments have appeared expressing admiration—and sometimes, perhaps, even surprise—at the high and authoritative level of the content of *The African Communist*. There would be no reason for such surprise however for anyone acquainted with the long history of Marxist and revolutionary journalism in South Africa.

As early as 1915 *The International* (Johannesburg) under the direction of such outstanding Marxists as D. Ivon Jones, S. P. Bunting and W. H. Andrews—all of them subsequently founders of the Communist Party—was fighting the unprincipled opportunism of the South African Labour Party and other Social-Democratic Parties, boldly opposing the country's participation in the First World War and calling for "War on War".

It was followed by a number of militant journals such as *Umsbenzi* ("The Worker"), *The Guardian* (which survived—under various changes of name as each succeeding newspaper was banned—into the sixties), *Inkululeko* ("Freedom"), *Fighting Talk* and *Liberation*. The hard school of publication of these journals, under ever-mounting conditions of repression, produced a number of fine journalists, such as Albert Nzula, Moses Kotane who subsequently became general secretary of the Communist Party in 1938, E. T. Mofutsanyana, Brian Bunting, Lionel Forman, Ruth First, Govan Mbeki, M. P. Naicker, and many others.

Despite the ferocious Suppression of Communism Act (1950) several such journals, under Marxist direction were able to survive legally, until the Nazi Minister of Justice, Vorster (now Prime Minister) abandoned all pretences at bourgeois legality, and resorted to unbridled and lawless terror. The brilliant team of Marxist and revolutionary democratic writers who had for so long sustained these and other such journals were imprisoned, placed under house arrest and other restrictions which made any sort of journalistic activity impossible, or forced into exile.

But the tradition these pioneers had established lives on today in various underground publications, in *Sechaba* ("Motherland") and other organs of the African National Congress, and in the pages of *The African Communist*, whose high reputation and influence is a source of great pride and inspiration to members and supporters of the South African liberation movement.

The publishers of this selection of articles which have appeared in the journal are greatly to be congratulated. The appearance of

this volume, commemorating the 10th anniversary of the first issue of *The African Communist* will, I am confident, serve to draw the attention of a still wider circle of readers to the breadth and quality of the journal, enlarge their knowledge of the interest in African problems. And, most important of all, I am sure it will help to mobilise still greater support for the just struggle of the African people in what is certainly destined to be one of the great battlefields of human liberation in the world of the 1970's.

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