

A MARXIST NEWSLETTER

# Forward Motion Forward Motion

DEC.-JAN. 1985

▶ ▶ ▶ DEMOCRACY & SOCIALISM IN AFRICA TODAY ▶ ▶

▶ ▶ ▶ SOUTH AFRICAN LABOR AGAINST APARTHEID ▶ ▶

\$2.00



## Contents

<b>Interview: The Front Line in Africa Today . . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Editorial: Anzania Must Be Free . . . . .</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Interview: African Labor and Apartheid . . . . .</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Independent Unions in South Africa . . . . .</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Sudan: A Visitor's Perspective . . . . .</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Cabral and Guinean Independence . . . . .</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Review: African Socialism or Socialist Africa? . . . . .</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Review: A Guest of Honour . . . . .</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Update on Mila Aguilar . . . . .</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Letter and Replies on Central America . . . . .</b>	<b>60</b>

### Dear friends,

The next decade promises to be a decisive one in Africa. The dramatic closing of the books on Portugese colonial rule ten years ago sharply intensified pressure on the remaining white settler regimes in Southern Africa, followed by victory in Zimbabwe.

Now attention focuses even more on Azania. The economic strength and political reserves still held by the South African regime make it the single most powerful bastion of neocolonialism in Africa. But the apartheid regime's strength in southern Africa also highlights the larger dimensions of the problem of Western neocolonialism in Africa today. How quickly Azanian liberation will come is not clear. But already it is hastening the emergence of a new phase in the struggle for national liberation in Africa, one bound to include new patterns of class and national struggle in individual countries and at a continental level.

The Nobel Prize to Bishop Desmond Tutu draws the whole world's attention to the intensification of struggle in South Africa. Most significant is the forceful entry of a new factor into the liberation struggle: the growing labor and trade union movement. Looking outward from there, we see the Frontline States of Southern Africa forced to back off from confrontation with South Africa. In addition to the impact on the

liberation struggle, this imposed moderation may be taken as a symbol of the wider difficulties the former Portugese colonies and other more radical African governments face in facilitating their peoples' democratic and socialist transformations.

The interviews and articles in this issue of *Forward Motion* present background and perspective on some aspects of these challenges and coming changes. We offer them more as a beginning point for further discussion than as a final word or overall assessment. But on the U.S. left, outside of the significant — and increasingly successful — South African solidarity movement, too often discussion of African politics in the 1970's was reduced to issues of superpower rivalry and global contention. This one-sided approach to African liberation struggles stood in the way of learning as much as we could about the conditions of struggle in Africa — experiences which might as well have a bearing on the dynamics of Black liberation and the struggle for socialism in the United States. With support for the struggle in Africa very much a practical matter for US activists these days — from the struggle for survival against drought in Ethiopia and Eritrea in the North to the struggle against apartheid in the far South — we have a good opportunity to make corrections and learn more from African liberation today.

We're happy this issue turned out as full as it did. Perhaps this will help make up for our missing an issue in 1984. We're back on schedule now for six issues in 1985, and we have extended subscriptions one issue for those shorted. The size of the current issue also forced us to hold off from printing some other materials: in particular, we are sorry to again postpone printing part 3 of the "Party Up" series, which will now appear in our next issue. ●

---

*Forward Motion* is a magazine of socialist opinion and advocacy. Editorial responsibility for *Forward Motion* is exercised by the FM collective.

*Forward Motion* welcomes letters and articles. All items submitted for publication must be typed, double-spaced, and signed as you want your name to appear. At this time, all correspondence should be addressed: *Forward Motion*, c/o PUL, P.O. Box 2394, Boston, MA 02107.

The editors will read all materials sent to us and, to the extent possible, acknowledge them and let you know their disposition. We cannot, however, be responsible for the return of manuscripts unless you also send us a self-addressed stamped envelope. Letters may be edited for space.

---



# The Front Line In Africa Today

## Interview with Wamba-dia-Wamba

**Note:** Professor Wamba-dia-Wamba is a Zairian Marxist with a long history of opposition to imperialism. Currently, he teaches at the University of Dar-Es-Salaam. Just two years ago, he sought to return home for a visit and was immediately arrested and detained without charges as a political prisoner for a year. He is now back living in Tanzania. A number of his articles on historical and theoretical topics have appeared in the journal *Ikwezi*. We were fortunate enough to have the chance to talk again with Prof. Wamba last August during a trip to the United States.

**FM:** The US press gives at best sketchy information on contemporary Africa. The news that is received is often of governments moving away from Western forms of democracy to more repressive and centralized governments. To what extent is this description accurate? If it is accurate, to what social discontent are the governments responding and what does the future look like?

## The Spread of One-Party Rule

**W:** First, let me say that Africa is a continent with about 50 different countries. There are a lot of different circumstances and different realities. It's always hard to talk about Africa in general. It's much better to pick out a few countries which have some resemblances and talk about those. Now, the question is centered around whether or not governments in Africa are moving away from bourgeois democracy or Western-style democracy. Well, I would argue that most of the countries of Africa are really well described as simply neocolonies, and as neocolonies in the epoch of imperialism they share some characteristics. One of those would be this description: a tendency toward a centralized state and an increasingly repressive one meaning essentially that they are not open to forms of autonomous political organizations which are independent from the state. For instance, if you take the case of the so-called socialist states, the tendency has been for those states to adopt what is known as the one party state system.

**FM:** When you say the socialist states, which are you referring to?

**W:** I mean by this states which think of themselves as socialist, for instance, the People's Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Tanzania, Benin, Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia.

Now, one party state systems often, almost without an exception, refuse any form of political organization which is independent from the state. This means that politics is considered the business of the state and mass organizations inevitably are really state organizations, whether we're dealing with trade unions, youth organizations, or even women's organizations, they tend to be chapters of the one party.

**FM:** What happens when an independent group of individuals decide they want to form their own organization? Does the government not allow that? Or do people prefer to organize through the state?

**W:** If it does happen, the state simply opposes it. Which means that, say, in Tanzania one wants to organize a mass political organization independent from the state. First of all to do that you have to have a permit from the state and it is likely that you will be told that whatever organization you want to create already exists within the party. If you want to have a woman's organization, for instance, unless it is something like a study group, then it has to be tied up to the party women's chapter. No independent trade union is allowed for the workers. All workers have to be organized through the one state trade union.

**FM:** Is that generally true of most of the countries you described? They all have their state trade unions?

**W:** Yes. As far as autonomous organization, if you may call it that, it is as difficult in Tanzania as in Zaire. In Zaire there is a one party state system and one trade union. Every Zairean is supposed to be a member of that party. In Tanzania however not all people are members of the party, although in principle each Tanzanian could join the party. There the party is much more formalized compared to the Zairean party, but those who are not members of the party are not given, so to speak, the freedom to organize themselves politically. The matter of a second party in both countries has been treated as basically unacceptable.

**FM:** Where has that discussion taken place? Formally in the governments or would a person who even brought the subject up be subject to harassment?

**W:** Well: in Tanzania it has not been discussed formally by the masses of people per se but it has been referred to. In other words, the one-party system is said to be based on the fact that more parties will divide the people and as such, more than one party would create a crisis or something of that sort of thing. In Zaire, there has been a real opposition trying to create a second party. Some members of the parliament wrote to the president [Mobutu - editor] to ask for permission to create a second party, but the response which they received was to the effect that that sort of thing was unconstitutional. They were subsequently arrested and as far as I know most of them have been banished to their villages. In other words, that kind of practice is seen as a subversive activity. In Zaire people have been arrested for it. In Tanzania there has not been such activity, although it is understood that the theory of the one party system is based on the notion that two parties would create division within the community and which would lead to a crisis.

**FM:** What is the future in this?

**W:** Increasingly, whether we are talking of socialist-oriented governments or countries like Zaire, certain desires or aspirations for democracy are being expressed. In Tanzania, discussions now are arising especially in the university, but also elsewhere, where people are talking about the need for some sort of democracy. In the ruling circles, this concern is understood as democracy within the one party system. In Zaire the opposition is increasing and the bourgeois opposition at least makes the right to create



a second party as the basis for criticizing and fighting against the present regime. So it is very possible that there will be either more repression because of many people trying to voice their concerns, or governments will be granting the possibilities of people to organize themselves independently of the state. I guess one could say that the future may be a movement away from certain forms of repression and toward more forms of mass organization as well as understanding of the fact that these states don't defend the interest of the large masses of people.

**FM:** One last question on this topic; you started out by saying that countries in Africa are essentially neocolonies and so far as we've talked about the situation of governments in Africa, we've looked at it internally, i.e., the relationship of African leaders to African masses. What role does the U.S. and other Western nations play in maintaining the kind of status quo, maintaining the sort of anti-democratic forms of government which you mentioned?

**W:** Well, neocolony means that the country is basically under or is functioning in relationships of production which include finance imperialism. Which means essentially that the way the imperialist countries are functioning make it very difficult for these African neocolonies to be on their own; politically to have large sectors of initiative; and culturally they remain dependent on imperialism. So that we can say that imperialist countries exercise conditions or circumstances of repression. But at the same time they do so through internal relationships in these countries. In the main, most of these countries are economically producing or organizing their countries in favor of the imperialist countries' interest.

**FM:** Can you be more specific. On the one level, I assume there are things like military training, sending in State Department personnel who bolster certain governments; at the same time that the U.S. criticizes the lack of democracy or lack of U.S. style democracy.

**W:** Well, let's take the case of Zaire because that's mostly directly related to the U.S. Economically Zaire produces basic mineral resources very much needed in the West. Geopolitically Zaire is at the center of the continent and in the thinking of the imperialists, to control the continent one must have at least some control in Zaire. Militarily, you have direct military control through military missions. For instance we have France, Belgium, West Germany, Italy, China and recently Israel having military missions in Zaire. And then you have the U.S....

**FM:** Is a military mission a base?

**W:** No, it means you have a large number of military personnel educating or at least having some control over some sections of the army. Then you have military aid from the U.S. and other countries in the West. What this does is that one's basically dependent on both the aid and the type of organization through the military missions. Now, politically the Western powers supposedly conduct missions due to the need to keep the continent out of the control of the "communists." This reflects the U.S. and Western European understanding of Africa as a field of operations opposing West to East, so that to control Zaire at the political level is to favor forces which are anti-

communist, making sure no forces favorable to the "communist camp" emerge. So that, for a long time anyway, the political forces heavily backed by the West have been forces that perpetrate this anti-communistic kind of tendency.

It is in that sense that leaders who only think — claim to be — very anti-communist, have tended to lead the regime in Zaire. So I guess I don't know whether Zaire is a typical case or a neocolony, but here at least the economy, the politics, the military is organized in such a way that the Western interests are served as first priority and these interests are served usually against what we may describe as interests of the large masses of the people. And at the same time the U.S. would like to have some form of democracy as a way of containing possibilities for the masses revolting, but in the main the talk doesn't go a long way. In other words, yes, the U.S. insists that Zaire practice respect for human rights, and insists that a form of democracy take place, but at the same time they strongly back the same forces that make democracy impossible.

**FM:** In the 1950's and 60's much was heard about African socialism. What was meant by that term? What did governments do that was or wasn't socialist under that banner? What did it add to our understanding of the fight against imperialism and class oppression? Tanzania calls itself a socialist state in Africa, how does this apply there?

### Dilemmas of African Socialism

**W:** Well, first of all, African socialism came out in the ideological struggle against communism. So socialism here was understood as a recourse to the so-called traditional communalistic society. The notion that somehow Africa had known socialism before colonization and that this kind of socialism was essentially collective sharing in a community which was described as free of class divisions. It was at the same time, I would say, backed by the forces that feared the possibility of scientific socialism attracting Africa's independent countries.

So, most of the theorists of African Socialism have tended to tie it to precolonial traditional society described as being free of classes. But again this socialism had a lot of variety. For instance, Kenya claimed to have African socialism while the very organization and functioning of its economy was and is fundamentally capitalist. So that the claim that there were African socialists should be understood simply as an ideological expression of a certain class rule which requires it as a way of identifying or organizing the class rule over the masses of people. In the case of Tanzania it took the form of Ujamaa socialism sometimes described as self-reliance socialism. But here too there is the notion of traditional society whose main unit was the village and Ujamaa socialism is a socialism through collectivization of the villages. The villages that would through state aid collectively share the resources they have. Now, here too the notion was that there were not classes and that in fact Ujamaa socialism was going to prevent the formation of classes. Economy was fundamentally understood in terms of distribution and not so much in terms of production.

Again, in terms of how this kind of socialism helped or didn't help the fight against imperialism depends on which concrete case we are dealing with. Tanzania is fundamentally an anti-imperialist state or at least on many crucial issues the state has taken



progressive or favorable anti-imperialist stands. For example, in relation to South Africa. Up until now they maintain the position of anti-apartheid. They maintain that the struggle against imperialism is a just struggle. In terms of economic independence, Tanzania has taken a strong stand in favor of the so-called new economic order: in favor of changes in international economic relationships that should benefit the developing countries. Tanzania has been a member of the non-aligned countries struggling for economic independence. But then you get countries like Senegal which also claims to have or claimed African Socialism, or Kenya. We can't really say that these countries have been fighting imperialism of any kind. In fact, these regimes seem to be pro-imperialist regimes. For Senegal, pro-French imperialist and for Kenya, increasingly pro-U.S. even though in the past it was much more openly pro-British imperialism.

Well, Tanzania is currently facing at least three major problems. First, the problem of economics. Tanzania is not a really rich country and fundamentally the economy is still geared toward producing cash crops, toward exporting commodities and needs to strengthen the industrial base to be in a position to re-organize the economy. With the economic worldwide crisis having impact on Tanzania economy, with the difficulties of dealing with geographical physical problems such as drought, the economic problems have become very difficult with food shortage. Some areas are experiencing famines but also have difficulties getting spare parts which means that the transportation system becomes slowed down and food distribution becomes a basic problem, you know, difficulty of getting food where ever it is available, to other places. The government is trying to deal with that but due to the economic difficulty they've been more or less forced to accept the IMF (International Monetary Fund) proposals which have economic consequences which could, instead of resolving the problem, aggravate the situation. The currency has been devaluated last June by 20% and the price controls have been in the main relaxed which means that the inflation may in some cases get out of hand. Wages have been increased, at least the minimum wage. The government is trying to do what it can to deal with the economic situation but it's not an easy situation.

The second problem is what I will describe as a political problem. First of all, as far as the so-called problem of succession is concerned, President Nyerere has said that he is going to quit as President of the Republic and continue as chairman of the party. The political forces are in some sort of a polarization, Left and Right, and it is not quite clear how the succession will be resolved. You know, the Prime Minister who was clearly seen as the successor died in an accident. So the problem remains as a political problem in the sense that people are worried about what will happen, what sort of formal succession will develop. The second element of the political problem is the problem of the Union: Zanzibar and mainland Tanganyika. [These 2 countries merged to form Tanzania—editor] It was a big problem a few months ago. Zanzibar openly questioning the Union and some people asking for their own government. It was resolved, in a way, in that the Vice President resigned, a new vice president was elected, but recently

the problem came out again in connection with the functioning of the state, especially around the question of the formulation of the budget and the devaluation of the currency. The Zanzibarian people claim that they were not consulted before the devaluation of the currency. I have no way of knowing whether they were consulted or not, but it was formulated as a concern. So it would seem that the resolution of the problem wasn't, so to speak, definitive, if the functioning of the government is still creating problems which are showing that the Union is not really functioning as a Union should function. So these two elements at least concern the political site.

The third problem is the problem regarding southern Africa and the so-called South African stabilization in the area. Especially with some southern regimes tending toward basically giving in, which increasingly makes Tanzania more or less isolated as the only country trying to sustain, to persist in the open struggle against apartheid. For instance, with Mozambique signing agreements with South Africa and making it clear that liberation movements are not accepted to operate in Mozambique and with other states following suit without necessarily publicizing it, this creates a situation in Tanzania in which the state in pursuit of the struggle against apartheid becomes a little bit worried, to say the least.

So those are some of the current problems. From the point of view of the masses, the economic situation creates a considerable problem. We can't for the moment call them uprising; but there are cases of resistance revealing the crisis in legitimacy of the state, especially in the rural area. For instance, you have the SumguSumgu movement, it's a peasant resistance movement.

### **FRELIMO: Entering the Colonial Apparatus**

**FM:** You mentioned Mozambique, which is (or has been) a country generally recognized as socialist and has witnessed some reversals of its political stand. What can you say about the organization of the socialist party in Mozambique and is the party weaker several years after the fight against the Portuguese? Does that account for their falling back from their previously held positions?

**W:** Well, this issue is very controversial, and I do have certain positions on this. Fundamentally, the struggles for national independence, especially the radical armed struggles, have tended to confuse socialism with the seizure of colonial state power via armed struggle. And very little, if anything, is done in terms of class analysis, class politics. So you get liberation movements, the fronts that lead the national liberation movements, regardless of the rhetoric, socially being essentially based on what you may describe as the petit bourgeoisie and the peasant classes. The character of the leadership and the social character of the membership of those movements have tended to be a problem after independence in trying to reorganize the new society.

In the case of FRELIMO [the Mozambique Liberation Front, which led the anti-Portuguese struggle—editor], first, the armed struggle did not need to go to its ultimate end. In other words, with the coup d'état in Portugal [1974—editor], independence was, so to speak, given to FRELIMO, before FRELIMO was capable of controlling or



dealing or seizing the whole state. As a consequence, instead of transforming the colonial state, we have the feeling that what has happened was that FRELIMO entered the colonial state apparatus. And due to the confrontation that it had to face with South Africa, due to the economy being basically dependent on the South African economy, it made it difficult for FRELIMO to concentrate on social transformation because right away it needed a strong state and with insufficient numbers of cadre in FRELIMO, this led to dependence on former colonial cadres. So that very soon the party became cut off from the masses of people and became essentially a state structure. This is also recognized by some cadre in FRELIMO itself; to a point it became a major issue of discussion for the last congress of FRELIMO. It was seen that many cadre from the armed struggle were left out because of the fact that the state organization took the form of basically a colonial state, favoring people with some education, people who knew Portuguese, and those who didn't know Portuguese had basically no role to play in the society. But the class character of the movement, I think explains why the state can proclaim a front, a party of labor, without any clear political autonomy of the working class. In fact, a demand was made that the working class be organized independently of the state and Machel [Mozambiquan leader Samora Machel—editor] was said to have responded, that after all the revolution was accomplished by the peasants and he still maintained that the working class could not be given any kind of special rights of self-organization.

**FM:** What about the right of self-organizing for the peasants?

**W:** That too. In other words, FRELIMO as a proclaimed party of labor is a party leading I guess all of the people, peasants and the workers, per se. The character of why a party is a vanguard party has tended to be looked at not in terms of what concrete tasks it accomplished but mostly in terms of form, that is, a party which practices democratic centralism; a party which follows Marxism-Leninism as its ideology; a party which organizes through the state socialist-economic planning. And no real concern about the class base of the party and the concrete tasks in relation to the various social forces in society. A tendency for the party to be basically if not identical with the state, at least, a structure of the state.

**FM:** Do you feel that the position that Mozambique is taking with respect to South Africa is one they are forced into because of economics or did they have other political choices?

**W:** Well, first of all the social economic conditions were difficult and the FRELIMO government has said that for many things that they needed, they had no where to turn. For instance, just to give an example, they came out with a plan or a program of heavy industrialization and they presented it to the Soviet Union to secure some sort of financial help and such help didn't come. In fact, the SU told them they couldn't finance it. They wanted to join COMECON [the economic community of the pro-Soviet socialist countries in Eastern Europe—editor] and one of the states, now I'm not sure, either Bulgaria or Hungary, vetoed their candidacy. I don't know what reasons they gave, but it was vetoed which means that they were refused to be part of the

COMECON. It is true that other countries have been helping, like Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The military help, especially of the SU, has tended to be more like heavy military equipment, tying the military to the barracks and of not much use in terms of fighting guerrilla opposition.

This is just to say that in terms of difficulties which they have, they've seen some help from socialist or so-called progressive countries and the help is not enough. In part, that explains the changes. For instance, they have now sought to be an associated member of the European Economic Community and some people claim that this may also explain why they've more or less opened up economically to Western countries. Nevertheless, the social character of the FRELIMO regime itself made it difficult for a real popular mobilization of the masses to take place and this also FRELIMO itself recognizes, that the cadre of the party have tended to act more like functionaries of the state, if not police. Hence, alienating the large masses of people that could have been the social base for struggling on both fronts, meaning economically inside, but also resisting the South African destabilization program and practices. And be in a position to fight against the opposition, this M.N.R. [Mozambique Nation Resistance—editor] which is supported by Portugal and South Africa. So, it is true that the agreement was more or less forced by the conditions they were facing, as the only way for the FRELIMO regime to continue existing. But also, why that was the only solution can be explained in terms of the social character of the party and the regime.

**FM:** Aside from the social factors, do you think economically countries like Mozambique and Zimbabwe and other countries struggling for socialism, are all going to be caught in the same bind, i.e., no possibilities of developing either economic independence or breaking some of the dependencies they've had?

**W:** Well, the southern states have been trying to deal with the problem by organizing the so-called Southern Development Corporation among the southern states called SODEC. Basically the front line states are involved, plus Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana and Swaziland.

### **Zimbabwe: New Timeline for Socialism?**

**FM:** Do you see another way out for Zimbabwe, for example? Do you see it repeating some of the same mistakes, or is it learning from the lessons of Mozambique?

**W:** First of all, there is a difference between Zimbabwe and Mozambique economically speaking. A difference in the sense that there is a more solid industrial base in Zimbabwe which is not the case in Mozambique, but that base is also more closely tied to South Africa. Politically one sees that they are moving practically the same way. In other words, in Zimbabwe the ruling group in power would like to have a one party state system and is basically doing what it can to destroy the remaining opposition party. There have been intense struggles even with military intervention, repression, which at the same time is presented as reasons why a one party system is needed. So that the democratic tendency, if by this we mean the possibility of having different political organizations, oppositions, which is already what we would describe as a very



good element in Zimbabwe, may ultimately come to an end. Because the ruling group thinks of socialism as a one party state system and is basically working for it by denigrating or destroying or repressing existing organizations. In that sense they are moving toward basically the same kind of anti-democratic tendency like in Mozambique, although in Mozambique now, when I left there were in the party some people calling for negotiation with the opposition MNR, but I don't know whether that means some opening, but at least that is taking place. While in Zimbabwe, it is the opposite which seems to be taking place. Increasingly, there is a refusal now to talk to ZAPU and denigrating ZAPU in favor of the need to have a one party system.

**FM:** What about the other members of the united front who had fought with or supported the fighting against the Ian Smith regime in Zimbabwe, are they still included, are they still supportive?

**W:** Well, the way I understand the situation in Zimbabwe, the takeover of the settler state and the reorganization of that state, its strengthening, has essentially meant recruiting some of the forces which were part of the settler state giving more priorities to the former settler army and in fact removing some of the fighter, the guerrilla fighters by demilitarizing without necessarily giving them any benefits. And it is said that some of those resisting are former guerrilla fighters. And now, before coming to power, the whole question of land was the key question, agrarian reform, as they called it. And so far nothing has been done: the claim being that Britain has given enough money to buy up the plantations from the settler and then sell them to whatever African wants them. So, some members in power have been becoming basically wealthy by acquiring either plantations or other property. So what is happening is that the ruling group is becoming increasingly a bureaucratic wealthy group and very hostile to the social reforms that they were advocating as the struggle was going on. Mugabe came to Dar-es-Salaam and was asked about this question of whether or not he was still for socialism and he said he was for socialism but it takes time and on the precise question of agrarian reform he said he still stands for it but now the ball is in the British camp. Britain has to give more funds so that they can buy land which ultimately they may distribute.

So, basically there is a rising African who is opposed to the settler element in Zimbabwe and basically controlling the state machinery but at the same time this group is opening up to the multinational firms. Some people say well they are opening more so than the Ian Smith government did. A fellow I know presented a paper in which he almost concluded that basically Ian Smith was more nationalist than the present regime, economically speaking.

**FM:** So where do you see the front line in Africa right now; where's the most progressive struggle taking place? Where are the contradictions the most clearly played out in terms of what represents progress for the masses?

### The Front Line Against Neo-Colonialism

**W:** Generally, the front line of battle is now basically the so-called national question.

The struggles against neocolonial states insofar as the neocolonial state tends to organize itself by either dividing along ethnic lines or by organizing the state in a very centralized way, denying specificities to the varieties of members of society. As such, I would say the entire struggle for national liberation in Eritrea is probably one of the main front line concrete questions regarding the struggle against a neocolonial state, but also carrying out the struggle for democratic forms of organization while the struggle against the state is taking place. In other countries, like Zaire, the opposition, the whole movement of what the government describes as a rebellion, and what I will describe as an insurrection movement, is a movement struggling against a neocolonial state, but is at the same time struggling for some forms of democratic politics. This





could also be the case in Uganda and so we have intense struggle going on.

Another case is the Sudan where so clearly the north is basically dominating the south. And here in the Sudan, again questions are raised of how any revolutionary politics could organize society by recognizing the specific differences. For instance, the communist party of the Sudan has to deal with the issue of whether or not they stand for real autonomy, real political independence or real political transformation in Sudan which will allow the south to fulfill the aspirations of the people there. Either they accept that or they are also revealed as non-progressive. Some cadre from the south have been arguing with the members of the communist party basically on that point.

So, I would argue that the front line really now is much less struggles against apartheid. Now every state claims to fight against apartheid. Now they have changed tactics, at least that is the way they are putting it, i.e., less military struggle, more and more supposedly negotiations are being called for. It is true that unless South Africa is completely in the hands of the revolutionary forces, many countries economically will have to deal with South Africa.

Some people think that probably it is going to be a lot faster isolating South Africa by winning internally. In other words, that the revolutionary forces organizing in Zaire to win over the colonial state is exercising a stronger and faster impact on the struggle in South Africa than concentrating on a state to state kind of struggle. In that sense, the loss of the strong support of the Mozambique state as state may not necessarily be a bad idea to the extent that it forces ANC to think differently. That the struggle is not a struggle for a state per se. It is not a struggle in which progressive states so to speak put you in power. But it is a struggle in which revolutionary politics in Africa should be defined as a politics of the large masses of people led by a self-organized working class and not a struggle in which front line states lead the struggle.

The other countries faced the equivalent of what is happening to ANC a long time ago; there was this notion of having a base, a country base, where you can come from and then come into the country and do stuff and retreat. But the OAU has always made it difficult for any movement fighting an independent government to operate in another country. So that ultimately those movements have to be fighting inside their own countries which is basically what ANC is being asked to do. This doesn't mean that whatever the state does is of no value, I am simply saying that that should be a complementary kind of thing, not the main thing.

**FM:** Does the same thing you've said for ANC apply for the PAC [Pan Africanist Congress — one of the principal liberation groupings fighting the settler regime of South Africa—editor]?

**W:** Yes. If PAC is organizing itself for armed struggle, it applies for PAC of course.

**FM:** It seemed like you described Mozambique and the leadership really losing touch with the mass base and the masses not really being organized. You imply that the same thing might be true in Zimbabwe, although it's not really clear where the break between the sort of mass base united front and the current sort of state of affairs is. What has happened to the Zimbabwean people in their organization? Are there prospects for that kind of organization redeveloping?

**W:** What I mean basically when I say the social character of the front — these were fronts not led by any kind of working class organization, but basically by petit bourgeois radicals who had organized some kind of guerilla group and recruited its main elements from the peasantry. Once the independence is won, once they take over the colonial state, the front proclaims itself a party of labor. A front in which the working class as an organized class has not had any kind of leadership role, now proclaims itself a party of labor. What this means is that this party is really a structure of the state and as such is not receiving, if you may say, its politics are not politics based on what the demands, aims, aspirations of workers, masses and the poor peasantry are, but mostly it derives its legitimacy from the so-called scientific socialist theory, from theory. Same with ZANU [Zimbabwe African National Union, the leading party in Zimbabwe -ed.]. ZANU was a front. ZAPU [Zimbabwe African People's Union — the other main group -ed.] formed a Patriotic Front. In other words, it's almost like a front of mass organizations. Organizations not necessarily led by working class elements. After independence, the very organization of the state — nothing shows that there is a concern about the working class as leading the movement. The demands which we would describe as the demands of the working class are not taken seriously. A few days after independence, the working class of Zimbabwe had a strike. What the state gave as some sort of gains for the working class were very minimal to say the least. Essentially economic kinds of gains. So my argument is that in Africa for the moment, the working class is not yet emerging on the political-historical scene as leading the movements, because it doesn't have any political autonomy anywhere. So the politics which we are describing as progressive often are not necessarily politics favorable to the working class per se. Although in some instances these states do take certain positions which defend the national independence as a whole. To that extent it's still a very good thing, but to the extent that they are not allowing the working class to self-organize *politically*, means that we really don't even have any bourgeois democracy.

**FM:** If Mugabe and some elements of the ruling party of Zimbabwe now claim to be Marxist, what is that based on? Is it based on what you describe as the sort of formalistic approach to state rule. If they've abandoned so many concepts that we really consider critical to a Marxist revolution, what is their claim to Marxism?

**W:** In the main, Marxism fundamentally has been functioning in Africa in almost the same way as any other science transferred from wherever it originated. There are cases in which we can talk about a Marxism tied up into concrete political struggles. But in the main this is a Marxism you learn at the university, or at the study group and the tendency is to view Marxism as almost a technology: a technology that could be transferred. So you get people calling themselves Marxists and basically knowing a substantive knowledge of "Marxism," but who practically, politically, can't even recognize the necessity for the political autonomy of the working class. I don't mean simply to say, the working class must organize. No, what I mean is this: you are now in the state, you a Marxist, are this so-called Marxist minister of information, or secretary of the operating group. How do you recognize the political autonomy of the working class? The

tendency has been to deny that. This is just talking about people who are in the party. There are numerous Marxists who are just independent persons and who are trying to produce theory. Theory which has some sort of relation to working class movements, which in the main, has yet to be born on the continent. I guess that's all I can say. Yes, these people are Marxists in the sense that they know what Marxism is. But at the same time they always claim that conditions for a real Marxist movement do not exist and yet do nothing to make them exist, if they can do anything. There is a social base, or social obligation. The very status of the working class within the social body in Africa is at issue. Now, it's not just a matter of numbers per se. The working class in Africa has to win the political space to be in the position to have its own Marxist theory. We can't have Marxists without any working class politically organized. Otherwise, all we have is people who are still transferring theory and I'm not saying this is bad: it can still be a starting point. However, unless the working class emerges politically which means that it's now capable of *trying to lead the masses of people*, we can't really have practical Marxists. That's why I tend to believe that the communist parties in Africa have not made much of an impact, whether in dealing with South Africa, or Sudan or Tunisia, or Senegal. There are about 22 organizations which claim to be either communist or Marxist-Leninist on the continent. Rarely, though, do we see any real working class movement, politically organized, making some sort of impact.

**FM:** Thank you. Do you want to say something?

**W:** Thank you for giving me the opportunity of telling you some of my jokes. ●

### Subscribe to FORWARD MOTION

Stay in touch! Subscribe to Forward Motion, Issued six times a year.

**\$12 for 1-yr sub**

**\$25 sustaining subscription**

**Make checks payable to:  
United Labor Press**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City/St/Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FORWARD MOTION  
c/o PUL  
P.O. Box 2394  
Boston, Ma. 02107**

### Editorial:

## Azania Must Be Free: Support All Fighters For Liberation

Events in southern Africa over the last couple of years have taken an interesting turn. In the struggle against apartheid, the African National Congress, one of the principal liberation forces, stepped up commando raids against government targets. These actions have been the source of a lot of controversy among progressives in South Africa since they tend to bring down repression against activists, appear to be isolated actions, while at the same time representing direct responses to continued South African oppression.

Another national liberation organization, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa), has recently reorganized after a long period of internal struggle. The PAC faces this difficult task while being ignored by many people in the North American and European Left. It does not get the publicity which the ANC receives nor does it receive support from the Soviet Union: the PAC does not align itself with either super-power in its fight for Black majority rule.

The liberation struggle was dealt a serious blow when non-aggression pacts were signed between the governments of South Africa and Angola, and South Africa and Mozambique. These treaties called on their respective signers to refuse to support military opposition groups in each other's countries. South Africa, which has actively promoted the destabilization of the Angolan and Mozambican governments, clearly gained by these treaties. The pro-liberation forces fighting South Africa will have to re-adjust their operations due to the loss of these critical base areas. Progressive people in the USA and elsewhere can only hope that these treaties are a temporary set-back, and an unfortunate retreat forced on Angola and Mozambique by South African aggression.

Over the last couple of years a new and significant force has risen inside South Africa which may prove to be decisive in the liberation struggle: the independent Black trade union movement (principally represented by the Federation of South African Trade Unions; the Council of Unions of South Africa; and the South African Allied Workers Union). These unions, which often refer to themselves as non-racial in order to distinguish themselves from the racial or in fact *racist* white South African Confederation of Labour, have risen as a national and independent force. These unions have carried out struggle for basic trade union and democratic rights. In this sense, i.e., in their combination of the struggle for economic rights and for political rights, they are similar to the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland. They have also been at the forefront of the struggle with and against the puppet Bantustan states, such as Ciskei, which were formed and granted a phoney independence by South Africa as a way to pacify world



outrage with apartheid. These illegitimate states, run by Black stooges of South Africa, have carried out persecution against the unions, as well as against other progressive forces.

Regardless of the schemes of the South African government aimed at dividing the Black and so-called "Colored" populations, the struggle progresses, international support continues to hold great importance. We in the USA can do several things to aid our Azanian comrades, sisters and brothers in their fight for national liberation and majority rule:

(1) *Join the struggle for the complete isolation of the racist South African regime.* Years of persistent work by the Congressional Black Caucus and activist lobbies like TransAfrica are giving the movement for divestiture new momentum. The state governments of Massachusetts (and in a weaker fashion, Michigan, Connecticut and one or two others) voted to end investment in companies doing business in South Africa. Victories are close in other government bodies and universities. At the same time, the Reagan administration has been chomping at the bit to increase assistance to the apartheid regime, a step that can and ought to be prevented.

Progressive work around South Africa is not only possible, but is very necessary. South Africa's place in the Western world's economy as a source of gold, diamonds and other metals and its wider role throughout southern Africa will make this struggle central to the future of Western imperialism.

(2) *We must encourage financial, material and political support for all those forces in South Africa fighting for liberation.* One trick of the Soviet Union and many of its international supporters has been to portray the African National Congress as the only true liberation group, thereby completely ignoring, or sometimes slandering, other legitimate groups, such as the Pan-Africanist Congress, the Black Consciousness Movement, and the Azanian Peoples Organization.

(2) *We should encourage AFL-CIO financial support for the independent Black trade union movement.* At the same time we should demand that the AFL-CIO keep out of the internal affairs of these unions. History has shown that AFL-CIO direct assistance and technical training can be means of subverting independent, existing leaderships and replacing them with pro-US labor bureaucrats. The Azanian workers must lead and direct their own union movement.

—R. T. Simms (Executive Committee, PUL)  
October, 1984

## African Labor and Apartheid in South Africa Today

### Interview With FOSATU Leader

#### Introduction:

South Africa's system of apartheid has earned it the title of the world's most racist society. It is one of the world's most brutal police states, and it has so far managed to frustrate the long and heroic movement of Azanian liberation.

Today there is a new dimension to the challenge to apartheid. I speak of a growing independence movement of African, Colored, and Indian workers building their own unions, making their voices heard, challenging the status quo. And they are doing it with growing effectiveness.

This is a movement not just for union recognition, decent wages and working conditions, but it has also moved into the broader fight for political rights and equality. The new unions have organized crippling strikes, exacted major concessions from many of the huge multinational corporations which form the backbone of the South African economy, have forced the defeat of government legislation, and have provoked significant divisions within the ruling circles.

The Pretoria government has not been paralyzed: it pursues a policy of limited accommodation plus continuing repression. Still the government has grown a bit disoriented, and at times is not fully in control or unified on the apartheid "solution." Some government figures talk of refining the apartheid system in order to ensure the continued survival of white minority rule while others still want no accommodation with the Black majority at all. But the handwriting is on the wall. The more pragmatic white rulers may be able to delay the inevitable, but that is all that is possible for them. Apartheid's days are numbered, and the new Black labor revolt is a crucial part of the changing equation of power.

By the year 2000, it is estimated that only seven percent of the workforce will be white. This increasing importance of African labor for South Africa's economy, plus its growing organization and consciousness strongly suggests that white minority rule cannot continue indefinitely.

What is less well known is that African labor has always been a critical part of the South African economy, and that Azanian workers have an equally long history of organizing for basic workers' rights and a decent standard of living. As far back as 1854, dockworkers in Capetown, South Africa struck for decent wages. After two generations of organizing experience, the 1920's Industrial and Commercial Workers Union grew to number over 100,000 members. State repression and internal problems prevented its survival, but the Second World War produced another wave of organizing among African workers.

White enlistment for the war effort opened up access to many jobs for Africans. A decade later, the South African Congress of Trade Unions formed, combining nineteen unions and 20,000 members into the country's first non-racial union movement. SACTU steadily grew to 53,000 members, but its close connections with the African National Congress (ANC) brought the brutality of the South African state down on it. By 1969 only 16,000 African workers remained unionized.

Today's African trade union movement was launched in the Durban strike wave of 1973 throughout the past decade.



South Africa's Independent Black trade unions are organized into two national federations, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), and there are also a number of unaffiliated Black unions, such as the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), and the General Workers Union.

Before the rise of the independent unions, the only unions open to African, Coloured, or Indian workers were the "parallel" unions of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUSCA).

Modeled similarly to the early AFL segregated chapters in the U.S., TUSCA allows Black workers to affiliate but only into separate chapters, which are "sponsored" by white unions.

Needless to say, TUSCA isn't seen as being staunch in its defense of Black workers' interests, particularly when, by contrast, the independent unions have gained a reputation for their militant defense of workers' rights. As a result, TUSCA has lost members.

And then there are the "Whites only" unions organized into the South African Confederation of Labor (SACOL) and in addition, a number of unaffiliated white only unions.

FOSATU is the largest of the two Black labor federations. It was founded in 1979 and presently has about 100,000 members, representing roughly 400 factories. FOSATU is known for its strong democratic shop floor organization and, although the union has an explicit non-racial policy, its membership is overwhelmingly Black.

Although sympathetic to the liberation movements, FOSATU is independent of any political organizations or movements. FOSATU's General Secretary Joe Foster has said "workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organization even whilst they are part of a wider popular struggle."

Others in the Independent Black union movement feel FOSATU does not emphasize enough the issue of race.

CUSA, the other Black union federation, was created in September of 1980 upon the failure of its member unions to resolve differences with FOSATU over the question of race. Both share the long term goal of a non-racial policy from the start, and while CUSA is in fact open to all races, CUSA embraces a "Black Consciousness" philosophy. In other words, CUSA's position is unions must have a more explicit national liberation component to their politics.

CUSA has roughly 50,000 members and has a looser organizational structure than does FOSATU.

Still, regardless of the differences between the two federations, and among the unaffiliated unions, there is in the main a commitment to continuing dialogue and to promote cooperation and unity.

I had the privilege to speak with Thembi Mkalipi, a representative of FOSATU, who was a guest of Britain's Trades Union Congress (T.U.C. — the TUC is Britain's equivalent of the AFL-CIO) at their 116th Annual Congress, which was held in Brighton, England, Sept. 3 to 7, 1984.

Thembi is the Chairman of FOSATU in the Eastern province of South Africa, and is also a Chairman of the Chemical Workers Industrial Branch in the eastern Cape region, in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

We hope the reader will be further enlightened about the situation Black workers in South Africa face from this first-hand information.

— Seamus Flaherty

**FM:** About how many people in your union?

**TM:** In 1979 when the union was formed there was maybe about 30,000 membership. Now we have about 100,000. Well you can judge from the number of workers we have gained during that space of time. And during the death of Neil Aggett in detention — one of the trade unionists who was killed during detention — FOSATU was the only major grouping which managed to call out the major forces of workers to voice their objection to the government in the killing of the trade unionists in detention.



Dr. Aggett was not a member of the Federation, but because he was a worker, workers in FOSATU think FOSATU should take up the initiative to go out and voice their objection. He was a white trade unionist in one of the unions of South Africa and he was detained and he was killed in detention. The government claimed that he killed himself but the people know what's happening, the way people are being handled in detention.

As far as apartheid is concerned . . . apartheid in South Africa was introduced by the British colonial rulers during the time of Cecil Rhodes. They were mine owners, and apartheid was introduced mainly for the benefit of the mine owners. People in South Africa by that time were not workers. They were owning lands in the places they were staying. And then the British government introduced what they called poll tax where people were forced to pay taxes. They know people haven't got money to pay taxes. Now people have got to sell what they've got so that they can have money to pay taxes. In that way they forced people indirectly to go to the mines. It was the British colonizers who initiated apartheid but when the National Party came into power they made apartheid worse by introducing the Land Act which took all of the land from the Black people and gave it to the white community. About 90% of the land was given to the white community which formed only about 10% of the population. And about 10% of the land was given to the people forming 72% of the population.

Then the National Party introduced the Pass Laws and the migrant labor system. And they even took the voting power of the colored community. They stripped them of their voting role which they had up until then. And it was during that time that they introduced what they called the Immorality Act that we cannot have any relationships across color lines and all those things.

### The New Unions and Apartheid

We think that the development of the trade union movement from 1977 up until now has brought great changes in South Africa. They are not great changes to the extent of scrapping apartheid but changes in the labor field, changes in the attitude of management. All those pressures and changes were brought by the pressure of the workers on the shop floor. And the changes of getting the Coloreds back now into the voters role — this new Constitution. We, as workers, don't see it as a new deal. We see it just as a means by the government to divide the workers because the government saw that the independent trade union movement which is developing — and threatening their base — apartheid and capital.

Therefore they thought of a way of dividing the workers. That was the only way that they came up with in giving the Coloreds and the Indians a vote in the New Constitution. But the trade union movement was deeply involved with campaigning against it: issuing pamphlets, house-to-house visits, trying to explain to the people what kind of a deal this is that the government is offering. All of the people, the organizations of South Africa have been against this constitution. But people have been against it for different reasons.

The far right party was against it for bringing Black people in. The liberal people were against it because they said the majority was not represented. But we, as the workers, were not saying that we want another box for the people. We were saying that we were against the Constitution because it was anti-worker; because it was dividing workers according to color lines; because it's saying that the coloreds have got to have their own House of Assembly and discuss their own problems. The Indians have got to have their own House of Assembly to discuss their own problems. And the whites have got to have their own House to discuss their own problems. And the boxes are divided according to color. The whites have got the majority; the Coloreds follow; and then the Indians. Now even if you combine the Indians and the Coloreds there is no way that they can outvote the whites. The whites are far in excess in number compared to the Indians. That had been set up especially so that they cannot combine their vote and try to change things. Therefore there is no way that the Constitution can change anything. The National Party is still ruling.

And one of the most important things is that now that the Parliament is going to sit there will be this confrontation because the people who are getting in are saying that they are going to represent the workers; they are going to represent the people. But we, as workers, want to see, next year when the Parliament sits and when the pension laws are coming in where will these people be? And what kind of argument will they put. Because the pension issue in South Africa is still a boiling issue.

**FM:** How much power does the South African government plan — or pretend — to give to the Coloreds and the Indians?

**TM:** There is no power that they are going to give the Coloreds and the Indians. In Parliament you have to put the motion on and vote on it. Now the problem is that even if they want to improve their own condition, they've got to get budget from the federal government. The government has got to give them money. Now there is no way they can spend in excess of what they've got. They claim that they are going to fight for the majority. There is no way. Because they have got to put the motion on the table and at the end of the day they've got to vote for it. And the Parliament is structured in such a way that the majority of the people that are in Parliament are white. And the majority of the white people that are in Parliament are not the liberal whites. It's the National Party. We shall state it time and again that there's no difference in this new Constitution. All of the laws that apartheid stands on — the Pass Laws, the Immorality Act, the labor laws, the homeland laws and all those laws: the government has stated time and again that they are not going to be reviewed.

**FM:** So any laws that the Indians or Coloreds may want to propose could always be voted down by the white majority?

**TM:** Definitely.

**FM:** I noticed in the London papers that some Indian activists say they weren't going to support the new Constitution because it really wasn't equality yet. Would you say that most Indians and Coloreds have not been fooled by this scheme of the South African government?

**TM:** Definitely. The trade union movement, the community organizations are working during the election to explain to the people what kind of Constitution the government is introducing. And because of that explanation, then the people are not fooled. If you look at the percentage of voters that have come in to vote — 17% of the Colored community — it's not what a government should rest on — 17%. They want to say it's 30%, 25%. But it's 25% based on the number of people that have registered. Sixty-five percent of Colored people have registered as voters. And of that 65%, only 25% have voted. So it's a very, very small minority.

**FM:** So people who oppose the new Constitution have been very successful?

**TM:** Yes; although we accept that the government is not going to say, "Well, we've got a low percentage." And they are not going to say, "Well we've got no mandate from the people. The people don't want to go in. Let's back out and withdraw." No. The government is going to go on. The people that have opted to go into the Constitution, they are going to go on. To them, you see, there is money involved. Four thousand rand a month is too much; for a guy who used to get maybe 800, 900. Now all of a sudden he is going to get 4,000 for just sitting in Parliament. He is going to have a free car, with petrol allowances and all this stuff. He's going to be provided a house and all those things. He's going to have free services.

**FM:** That could be hard to turn down.

**TM:** It's very hard.

### Labor Organizing in South Africa Today

**FM:** Could you describe some of the industries and professions that FOSATU represents and the kinds of conditions that exist in those places?

**TM:** In the eastern cape where I'm coming from one of the major industries that we represent as FOSATU is the motor industry; the American Ford company (which is owned actually by Canadian Ford, but it's an American company) and GM owned by GM in America. Port Elizabeth is based on those two industries. If those two industries go then all industry is affected because all the other industries are either components or are related in such a way with them.

Although the conditions in those motor industries have changed — not that much — due to the pressure of the workers, the conditions are still quite bad, compared to the conditions in the motor industry in the United States and other places. And the rate of pay and the attitude of management . . .

**FM:** Speaking as an American who is very concerned about the role of U.S. companies in South Africa, could you describe GM's and Ford's attitude toward the apartheid system? Do they go along with it?

**TM:** One thing you have got to understand is that Ford, GM and the other industries came into South Africa to exploit the cheap labor. That is the thing in South Africa that you cannot deny. Their main reason for coming in is to exploit. Not to benefit us and provide us with all this stuff that we need. And they do exploit it. Now because of the workers fighting, there are limited services that they are providing. They are involved

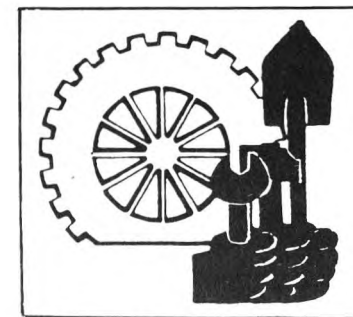
in housing, but the housing they are building is so expensive that even workers in Ford cannot afford it. The houses cost about 20,000 - 30,000 rand. We cannot afford those houses. They are building such expensive houses in their housing scheme that only the people that are in the top categories can afford them. The guy who is on the lower scale working in Ford or working anywhere cannot afford those houses. Or if he does go into those houses while he is working in Ford, when he leaves Ford he won't be able to stay in that house.

**FM:** Do the people at the top tend to be white?

**TM:** Although there are a limited number of Black people who are in the skilled and semi-skilled categories in the motor industry — especially Ford and GM — the majority of the people who are in the skilled positions are white. And the majority of the people who are on the managerial and middle management positions, line managers, and general foremen are all white.

**FM:** So in other words the people who can buy those houses . . .

**TM:** The houses are built in the Black areas due to apartheid. There are those people who even though they are Black can buy the houses because they are in the skilled positions. But if you look on the top of the industry in South Africa most of the workers — the majority of them — fill the unskilled categories of which those people are the people that we are concerned about. Those are the people that cannot afford to buy those expensive houses. And we expect that Ford should direct all its resources — and the other companies — towards those people. Those are the people that need assistance. Not the people who are in the skilled categories. Not the people who are managers. Those people do get the money to buy their own houses.



**FM:** Has FOSATU been able to make some substantial improvements in wages and working conditions?

**TM:** Definitely. If you look at the rate of pay in all the industries from 1979 . . . It was less than a rand an hour; maybe half that. It's only when Volkswagen went out on strike in 1980 for 2 rand an hour. And the whole Uitenhage area — it's a small area but it's been an industrial area with lots of foreign companies — was declared an operation area by the soldiers and the army. The South African army brought its army in to crush the workers there. From that time through now at least there has been an in-



crease in wages of the workers. But that doesn't mean anything because the cost of living has increased more than the wage increase.

**FM:** But certainly union members have benefitted in many ways as compared with those who haven't gotten union membership.

**TM:** Yes, definitely. It's worse in the industries that haven't got any union. I don't want to talk about industries like farmworkers, where they are not even allowed by the government to belong to a union. It's unbelievable the conditions they are working under.

**FM:** Are there plans to organize some of these new areas?

**TM:** Well in what is called the mining industry there is a union now organizing the miners. In the farming industry it is so difficult to organize because they are so far out from the urban areas and most of the activities of the union are concentrated in urban areas — the towns. The farming industry is outside and maybe one big farm can be employing about 10 people; and another one about 20. A lot of workers are involved but they are scattered around.

We haven't yet got the resources to go into the farming industry although we see the difficulties that they are facing. We feel that if we can build a strong base in the industry and be able to organize at least about 50% of the industrial areas then with those resources — with the power that we have got — maybe we will be able to influence changes in the farming industry also.

**FM:** Could you tell me what American workers can do . . . especially given that U.S. companies do exist there under that regime . . . what kinds of support can we give to you?

**TM:** The UAW has been involved in solidarity action with the workers in South Africa. When there was a problem in Ford and GM the unions in America — the workers in America — were involved in trying to put pressure on the American companies to solve problems. We appreciate that sort of work of assistance that, on request, American workers put on that sort of pressure. But we accept that we must fight our own battle.

**FM:** In many ways the American government, as well as the British government and several other western industrial countries are responsible in some way for keeping things so terrible because they make the South African economy and political system strong.

**TM:** If you look at the recent visit to Britain by the Prime Minister of South Africa — you know, the way he was handled the reception he got — it made the workers in South Africa — the white workers who are really anti-Black workers — see themselves as part of the international community; see themselves as doing nothing wrong. If the international community can accept their Prime Minister the way they accepted him, then why change anything. It made them be more anti-Black workers.

**FM:** Right. It gains legitimacy for that system down there. In your talk, it sounds like you haven't been too successful getting white members of your union federation . . .

**TM:** Although, we are a multi-racial federation, we're having problems. If you look at apartheid . . . Apartheid has been promoted by the employers and the government to divide the white workers from the Black workers. Now white workers see themselves in

a privileged position because they are favored by apartheid, see themselves as not part of the working class of South Africa. They identify themselves with the apartheid system. And they are prepared to defend the apartheid system at all costs. Now it is so difficult to get them over to us. That's a problem we're facing.

When we say we are multi-racial, we don't mean that we can accept everyone who is white. We put conditions that if a white man comes in and wants to join he must come in on condition that he is going to accept the authority of the guy who is going to be put in power. The man or woman who is going to be put in power is going to be put in by the majority. If the majority of people decide to put a Black man in, then he must accept that authority. If the majority decide to put in a white man, then the Black man has got to accept that authority. The majority must decide. We don't give just a blank check and say that we are non-racial and that everyone can come in. Those are the reasons that make white workers hesitate to come in.

**FM:** What do you think it will take to get the white workers of South Africa to realize that racial privileges aren't worth keeping?

**TM:** The only way to make them see that is when apartheid ends there's no more job preservation. When there's no more whites-only jobs, they will see us as workers just like them. That's the only way that they can change. Look, the majority of white workers are working in the mines. And the mines are the hardest place to get through. That's the place that job preservation — the major apartheid laws are still kept; where in certain jobs it's stated down that Blacks cannot do those jobs. Those are whites-only jobs. And most of the white workers are working in the mines. Now there is no way we can get through to the whites if there are still those laws within the mining industry.

**FM:** Are there progressive-thinking white people trying to convince their fellow white workers that the whole system of apartheid . . .

**TM:** There are progressive white workers — white people — who are working with the unions. But it's so difficult also for them to go in and convince the white workers. That's why they've decided to come in and join the Black workers struggle and try to give any assistance they can give.

**FM:** In many ways it sounds so much like the United States. Many white people — although it's not as severe as in South Africa — we have certainly had our system of apartheid as well with separated toilets and water fountains and supermarkets and all that. We've gotten rid of the laws but white privilege still remains.

**TM:** We're hoping that we'll be able in the near future to stand up and see that we've been able to correct all of apartheid. A society that you can be proud of and stand up . . . you know, I want to be proud and say that South Africa is me. I'm South Africa. I mean, as it is now, there is no way that I can say that.

**FM:** Well I just hope that we can continue to build up support for your fight over there and maybe some day I'll get to come to a free South Africa and be able to visit and go to integrated beaches. I understand you have beautiful beaches and beautiful country.

**TM:** In Africa we have some of the best beaches. But the problem is that we are not allowed to use the beaches because we are Black. ●

# Independent Unions in South Africa

*The following are excerpts from an interview with an American activist who recently went to South Africa to meet with members of the South African independent trade union movement.*

*In this report, Africans refers to Black Africans and black refers to Africans, coloreds, and Asians collectively, which is the terminology used by the multiracial South African Institute of Race Relations.*

One thing that becomes very clear as soon as you get to South Africa is how important politically the trade union movement is there. Unlike most countries in Africa, the South African working class is very large. This is so because the economy is so developed and diversified. Extraction minerals have always been their forte. In fact the country ranks number 5 of the top 6 countries in the world for mineral deposits (and South Africa is only .5% of the earth's surface area). Diamonds, gold, coal and semi-precious metals are the major mining industries. But they have other industries as well: food export, textile, chemicals, metal, alloy, auto and the containerization industry. The country also has a huge infrastructure, 35,000 kilometers of paved roads and one quarter of one million kilometers of rail. That's the most developed infrastructure on the African continent.

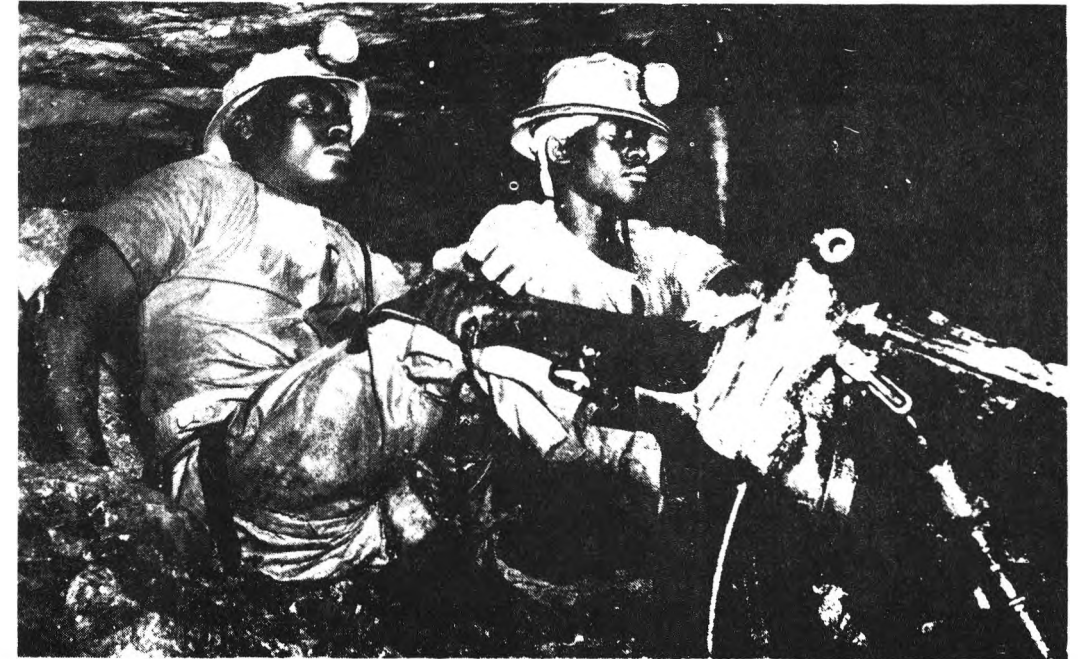
The overwhelming majority of the independent trade union movement is African and secondarily colored (people of mixed races). In South Africa, virtually all manual labor is done by Africans and coloreds. There are some white semi-skilled and skilled laborers and working foremen, but most of the labor in society is done by non-whites. The overwhelming majority of domestic work is done by blacks so that even in the whitest of white neighborhoods, for example, you see more Africans walking around than whites. Often there are several domestic workers to every white resident in upper class neighborhoods. We met white graduate students who could afford domestic labor.

The explosion of organizing that has taken place in the independent unions (the unions that have sprung up outside the government-sanctioned white-dominated unions) has all happened in the past decade. It has been concentrated in key industries — extraction, longshore, transportation, auto, steel, textiles, food and canning. Even though the percentage of the workers unionized in the independent trade unions (4%) seems low, the rate of growth is very healthy. The goal is to get those sectors organized, if possible under one union per sector, and to unify them into one federation. At this point, service and rural workers are not being organized. That is a very difficult thing to tackle.

## Working Conditions

The unions have been dealing a lot with basic working conditions because working

conditions for blacks tend to be abysmal. The deepest gold mines go down 10,400 feet, for example, deeper than any other mines in the world. Temperatures at the rock face reach 160 degrees. Young men migrate from the rural areas or from out of the country to work in the mines, and they have a tradition of recruiting other young people from their villages. They live in dormitories. Mineworkers get a nine month long contract that is renewed every year. It's incredibly hot and very hard labor. You get incentive pay if you go down and produce, but you are at tremendous risk of heat stress, even after you are acclimated which is difficult in itself.



Gold miners, the key to South Africa's wealth, until recently were totally barred from organizing unions.

Also, the silica content in the gold mines is very high. There are about 4 grams of gold per ton that is mined. So that most of what is mined is a lot of rock which contains silica which causes silicosis. TB is also a big problem among people who get silicosis. It's a massive problem, one that the unions and the professionals working with them have a hard time estimating. When people get sick, they don't get their contract renewed and they get sent back to their country or their homeland, often times to die. (There are now many homelands which are not considered part of South Africa, but which are considered separate countries.) There is a constant selection of younger, able-bodied kids to work in the mines. So, looking at any group of mine workers, they will look younger and healthier because of this constant selection out of the sick. Still, even the young ones get sick.



The mineworkers' president told us that heat stress and heat exhaustion are big problems. Miners will carry fellow workers out of the mines unconscious fairly regularly and they'll take them to the mine hospital. There they are given fluids. If they recover, the mine health officials will diagnose "dehydration" which is not compensable on their schedule of workers compensation diseases. If the miner dies, of course, they will have to compensate the family under the workers' compensation laws. But if they just put down dehydration, they just get sick pay, if that, and then it's back to the mines.

On top of all this, the wages blacks get compared to whites are lousy. They might make one fourth to one eighth of what a white shaft manager makes. There are no stores, no sports fields, recreation centers or bars. But liquor flows into these black townships and the alcoholism rate is very high. It's really a crowded ghetto which may be surrounded by barbed wire fence. Dirt roads, sort of like alleys, connect all these places. It is very easy to tie up the whole township in case of any disturbance.

### **The Unions and Political Struggle**

One very tricky issue the unions have to deal with is how to relate to political or community struggles, because in South Africa, community struggles are seen as a challenge to the state and by definition conspiratorial. There is a whole set of laws to deal with conspiracy and national security. Whether it's a homeland struggle against the state's policy of citizenship and displacement or a boycott against bus prices on the state-owned bus company, the government sees it as conspiratorial.

There are different levels of punishment. For example, if union leaders are specifically mentioned they can be put under house arrest or prohibited from being in the presence of more than one other person. At that point, if they continue their union work, they can be put in jail. It could get to the point where the government could use a union's political involvement to ban the union. And once you are banned, you are out of commission. You can't organize, you can't distribute literature, you can't have an office. Unions can't just go underground and organize.

So, right now and I suspect for quite a while, it will be very dangerous for trade unions to become involved as an organization in community struggles or anything that is vaguely linked to military or paramilitary activity. Even something like the school boycott could be very dangerous. And the independent unions in general, with some notable exceptions, have been very careful not to become directly involved, and certainly not to lead, political struggles.

As long as they stay with shop floor trade union issues, they are confronting an employer, not the state and they are able to go quite a long ways. Especially in the private sector, there have been a number of successful strikes. (The unions organizing state-owned companies understandably have had the hardest time.) Most of the unions intend to continue dealing primarily with workers' issues until they are better consolidated. Given current working conditions, this is no small order.

Some progressives and students have criticized some of the independent unions for paying too much attention to workers' instead of community struggles, for being

"workerist." But I don't think it's quite accurate to say that the unions haven't been involved in the political struggles. A number of individuals in the unions, even stewards and union leaders, do get involved, but they don't do it as a union. Virtually all independent trade unions and trade union leaders sympathize with the political issues at hand, whether it be the schools, the constitution, or the disenfranchisement that they have faced all their lives. I think their position is, though, that they are not consolidated enough now as organizations to lead the political struggle nor are they prepared for the state repression that would come down.

In addition, the unions are working towards a unified federation which I think is the most significant political event in South Africa in the last half decade. When the federation is fully formed it is going to be thrust into a much more political arena. Once the unions have enough unity to progress, it seems that there is going to be a new level of tension and not just among individual unions and their relationship to specific community struggles but a national formation in relationship to community-wide issues. And who knows how that's going to turn out. It's going to be very interesting because you have the actors inside who have really different opinions and you have the state's response to their ever-growing unity, forcing them to be at least defensively political all along the way.

For now, I don't think the government will ban the unions. It would obviously be a big problem. It's easier to ban an organization like the United Democratic Front (an organization of black and white students, community organizations, and nominally some unions) than it is to ban an organization whose members work in an integral industry which can be disrupted and would immediately bring things to a face-off that would also immediately disrupt the economy.

Still, as I said, the unions are feeling their way very carefully. There are some unions which have been very involved in community struggles and have suffered devastating consequences. The South Africa Allied Workers Union of East London and Durban, for example was banned in one of the homelands. They can't do any organizing in Ciskei as a union. They are under constant state harassment outside of Ciskei and their structure is apparently very damaged at this point. What is left is two local structures in two cities which are loosely federated with each other. They are really being smashed pretty heavily by the state, and they are not ready apparently to enter into the federation talks at this point.

### **The Homelands Policy**

Migrant workers are a big factor. There are homeland migrants and there are migrants from other countries. The majority of the mine workers are migrant. Urban unions also have to deal with problems of migrant workers. During layoffs, workers assigned to homelands but who don't have permanent resident status in South Africa can be sent home as soon as they're laid off. Some of the unions are now trying to negotiate with management to have those workers who are South African citizens get laid off first and those from the homelands have super seniority so that they don't get sent

back. Some unions are experimenting with this because it's a bad problem and potentially a bad situation of inequality.

The government homelands policy affects labor very directly. The government aim is for those Africans holding South African citizenship to be a minority. That is why the conservative Afrikaaners, not the reactionary Afrikaaners, probably eventually see having a parliament with Africans. But by the time they do it, Africans will be a minority of the South African population.

Most Africans, if they are not living in the homelands, will be assigned to homelands. Most of the labor in South Africa would still be done by Africans, but they will be considered like guest workers in Europe or workers with a card which denies them South African rights as citizens. Enfranchisement is probably inevitable and in that sense, apartheid will undergo big changes. Africans may even have a parliament with voting rights. But Africans will always be a numerical minority. And there will be a large bloc of migrant workers worse off than the numerical minority. According to the government's hopes, the interests of the African minority will be more identified with the South African state.

The government is not just a disorganized group of fascist businessmen. This plan has been in the works since the 1940's and it is steadily progressing. About 77-78% of the African people are now assigned to the homelands — assigned to areas where eventually they will no longer be considered South African citizens.

The homeland may not be very far from where the worker works. It may be only a short train ride away, like from Brooklyn to Manhattan. But this close-by "city" is supposedly going to become a country some day. You still have your job. But you have been processed and assigned to that homeland. During layoffs, you can just be sent back, even though it's only 30 minutes away. You won't have the right to vote and you won't have anything to do with the operation of the city and you won't have the same rights as the township people.

The unions are going to have to begin to deal with this scenario. Union people are obviously not happy with the homeland policy. Homelands are cropping up all over the place and people are being assigned to them. You may be assigned to a homeland you have never seen, maybe a distant ancestor came from there. A lot of it is arbitrary. The country looks like a Rorschach test, with ink spots all over the country. Not surprisingly, some of the most fertile land is not included in the homeland townships. When you fly in a plane, you can see it very clearly, the irrigated areas using the new irrigation techniques. And then you'll see a barren area and then an African village.

Runaway shops are also a big issue in the homelands. The homeland may be more legally oppressive than the South African government. A certain union organized a chemical company mine in the South African country proper. When the same chemical company opened up in Bophuthatswana, the union was going to approach management to say that they were going to sign up people. The company said "Sorry. It's not our fault. The homeland government has outlawed unions and we can't talk to you."

The homelands can be very oppressive to the point where some of the African organizers will say that they would much rather be arrested by the South African police than the homeland police. Under the South African government there is at least a facade of due process, a court system and international public opinion. In the homelands, forget it. So runaways are becoming a big deal and one could probably argue that as the union movement gets bigger, the homelands will become much more of a big deal.

There are a couple of things that unions are going to do to try to deal with that. One is that the workers in South Africa proper will begin to boycott handling of certain parts from homeland factories. This has not happened yet, but the unions are talking about it. Eventually, the unions feel they have to organize the homelands.

Textiles are moving to the homelands, and international capital is moving there with big breaks. Israeli capital especially is moving to the homelands. There are a lot of ads and a lot of cooperation with the Israeli government and businesses. (Throughout South Africa Israeli investments are quite pronounced.) The problem for the unions is to keep up with each of the homeland's governments and their policies toward unions. In general, internal runaways are becoming a significant problem.

### Divestiture

We asked about the divestiture movement and what the trade unions thought about it. The divestiture movement to this point has not really hurt the South African government or the economy. On the other hand, anyone who was saying that was also quick to say that organizing in the U.S. around divestiture raises issues and raises consciousness. They felt that it is a really good organizing tool and we should not hesitate to do it. But they don't expect it to crumble the South African economy from the outside. It is a much more diversified and independent economy than that. South Africa is not dependent on the U.S. and English economies. In some ways, the mentality of having withdrawn from the Commonwealth and having been appropriately iced by a lot of the world also has meant that there is not only a fiercely conservative but also a fiercely independent approach to economics. Their economy has suffered but it also has developed pretty independently. So you would not expect the divestiture movement to crumble the whole situation.

They also mentioned that since Reagan has been in office, the amount of American influence in the media has greatly increased, more in the last few years than in the past 15 to 20 years. For example, the presence of the United States' role in the region is growing, ostensibly diplomatically, but obviously more than that. No one is saying it, but it would not be out of the question to see agreements and treaties for defense. It isn't happening yet, but it is very clear that American involvement in southwest Africa is greater than it was under Carter. The feeling of the South African government and the country's ruling elite towards the U.S. is much better than it was under Carter because the Americans are playing a much more conciliatory role towards the South African government. They are giving the U.S. much better press. There is also more



American music around and greater American presence in media policy, in regional politics and possibly business (although that was not mentioned first off). There is certainly a lot of interest by American business.

It might be speculation, but many U.S. businesses might recognize unions in South Africa as they recognize unions here. As the union movement consolidates and becomes stronger, certain American business interests would not be unhappy with that. They would say that the black workers in South Africa are getting a better break; they are in the unions, we are going to recognize them and sit down and sign a contract the way we would with the UAW here, have a grievance and arbitration procedure, the whole works. A lot of multinationals have done that. I am sure they see diffusing tensions with unions by instituting the labor relations system that we have here instead of what they have now, which is that in a lot of cases instead of going to arbitration, you have to strike. And either you strike or you don't, but things reach a tension level that is disruptive to industry. American multinationals have not been as adverse to recognizing unions as South African internal companies have been. Generally, it seems that multinationals are the most liberal in dealing with recognition of unions, then would come South African private interests and last would be South African state-owned companies. So the issue of divestiture may be a little complicated by that.

However, we talked with a president of a union who said that he felt strongly about divestiture. He felt that it did definitely make a difference, internally and externally. I think his position was a little bit of a minority position. On the issue raised by some workers in unions or by individuals in South Africa about losing jobs by pushing divestiture, his feeling was that investment by foreign capital helps only a few workers anyway, maybe about 5000 at Ford versus millions who can't get work at this point. So he feels, and his friends in the political movement feel, that divestiture does put increased pressure on the government. He said that some argued that the South African government would become more independent with divestiture not less so, and more bitter and repressive. Twenty years ago, they were prepared to go the road alone, and they may do it again. But in his view he thinks that the struggle against an independent South African government is actually better than one that might become increasingly integrated and interdependent in the world market. But they also realize that if they push the South African government to the brink that many western powers might be quite willing to come to the support of South Africa's government, which is a very heavy thing. Then he said why should anyone want to invest in South Africa? He asks, **what is bringing them here? If we approach it from that angle, what are they getting?** They are getting the super exploitation of black workers. They are not coming because the weather is nice or that the plant can exist in only certain parts of the world. The reason is exactly why they would want to fight. So he is weighing the relative advantage of a small number of workers actually benefitting and in this case unionized workers versus the greater whole. Ford claims it does not make any money in South Africa. "Why the hell else would Ford be here?" he asked. Ford wouldn't be in Detroit if it were not making money there. Ford would go to Brazil if that's what it took to make

money.

This union leader was also concerned about the influence of massive U.S. corporate investments on future U.S. foreign policy if a revolutionary situation developed. If there was, for example, a so-called "communist threat" to South Africa from within or without, the U.S. would not necessarily get militarily involved but it would have to protect its interests. The interests would be defined as U.S. companies. And even though the U.S. Congress may not vote for an invasion, there would be an increase in covert activity as we see in El Salvador. He said that they can certainly live without that. And finally, he said that there was a billion dollar U.S. investment in Port Elizabeth as of 1984. They certainly are not going to walk away from Port Elizabeth if it is under any kind of siege or potential threat, whether real or imagined. So he was quite concerned about the relationship between U.S. foreign policy and continuing investment.

There is also a feeling among some of the unions in dealing with the current situation not just to carte blanche ask all U.S. money to leave. These unions would want to tie increases in productivity to increases in working and living standards, something they cannot do with a lot of South African companies. So there are no simple answers to the issue of divestiture.

### **South African Unions and the AFL-CIO**

The AFL-CIO could be a big help, but as far as the independent unions are concerned, the AFL-CIO has blown it. It has a very bad name in the South African trade union movement after several big blunders. It's not surprising given the AFL's position on foreign policy which is pretty much to go along with the U.S. government's position. South African trade unions are very suspicious of the AFL. Everywhere we went, we were asked if we worked with the AFL or were sent by them. A number of unions said right off that if we were, they would not meet with us. As an example of their mistrust, we were told that the AFL has come and met with one of the larger federations, the FOSATU group, and offered them a great deal of money, more money than the AFL would probably have at its disposal, in the millions, to set up a free labor center. The AFL would provide all the educational material and would control the educational process. The unions turned them down. One labor leader said it's very hard to turn down that kind of money when you are as poor as we are, but that the union had to do it on principle. They also knew from reliable sources that the AFL could not get their hands on that kind of money and they know enough about the CIA and their position over the years to be suspicious.

We were also told about the Neil Agget situation (the radical doctor who became an organizer for the African Food and Canning Workers and who died in detention). There are a couple of things about that case that are interesting. We were told by sources who are very different politically that the AFL was not particularly sympathetic to Neil Agget during his detention and trial, but that after he was dead, they came and gave a posthumous award to his parents. It was found out that the AFL had printed some transcripts of Neil Agget's interrogation where he supposedly made some re-

marks about some progressive left wing movements and groups. The AFL publicized that, and apparently did so before the statements were read in court. There was virtually no way they could get that information unless they had some kind of tie to internal security of South Africa. There were plenty of things that they had on the AFL to want to keep them at big arm's length in terms of their policies past and present toward their free labor center in Central America and Vietnam. People were educated about things like that.

The independent unions have also made overtures to some U.S. unions. Some of the responses have been very disappointing. For example, they approached the United Mine Workers of America to help with technical assistance. But the UMWA had been uniformly unhelpful. There has been very positive contact between ACTWU and the National Union of Textile Workers around issues of health and safety. In general, the independent South African trade unions are very interested in American unions and the history of the AFL-CIO, how it got to be what it is and why would a working class organization do things like carry out the government's work for them. But even with these misgivings, they remain very positive and are interested in furthering direct union ties.

### **Democratic Unionism**

One thing that is very important about the independent unions in South Africa is how they operate internally. The general approach for most of the unions is to really educate the stewards. And although it was not universally true, independent unions tended to educate the steward committees to be the strongest unit in the union. They train to negotiate the contract, enforce it and to do education among the workers. The unions generally have not hired education staff in the central offices. There are exceptions to this. One of the largest federations has a well developed education staff of white professionals who work in labor education. But even there, education that has been put out has generally been aimed at the rank and file and at making the stewards pivotal people in control of the situation.

The general sentiment for democratic trade unionism is very strong. They really want to make it work. It is basically the only democratic formation people can join, since the government has totally excluded Africans from being part of the political process. This may help explain the flocking of membership to the independent unions, to the point that several unions barely keep up with servicing their membership. The church is another possible institution to join in, but Africans can't belong to political parties, and community organizations are very limited in what they can do, certainly around work place conditions. So a number of good organizing drives resulted in fairly universal membership. You are dealing with open shops in most of these places. By law, you cannot have a closed shop. A lot of the unions would not even tell management that they were going to represent the membership until they had an 85% sign-up. That's a lot of people to get signed up, but they were doing it. So looking at it from that angle, they are obviously getting a lot of support.

There is a very lively political interest in labor history among a lot of the independent unions. Many of them are doing spreads on their own labor history (they really had been wiped out after several repressive periods). Illiteracy is a big problem, so the printed materials are often aimed at union members who can read. They will also use theater, group discussions or literacy classes to take up history or basic trade unionism. Because many languages are spoken, not just Afrikaans and English, there are literacy classes in the national dialects. A literacy class might study the principles of trade unionism, what is a union, what does a union do for me, what is a steward. Classes are taught by people in the union or people the union would hire, like students. Often white progressive students who go to the university come to teach English or whatever. But this isn't a situation where they just integrate students into the work very easily.

There are a number of organizers and even leaders of the black unions who are white. They generally don't come up through the ranks from the shop floor, but they are elected and all of them have a long track record, years under their belt working in and around the trade unions and are therefore trusted by the black trade unionists who are in control of the black unions. And as a small number of whites, they are not in positions where they could go off half-cocked into their own thing. They are very well controlled by the unions, in a good sense.

There are several universities with large groups of left-wing students, some of whom very much want to work with the labor movement because they see it playing such a big role. But the unions have decided that they just can't absorb large numbers of student and be able to guide them and control them in this work. Some of the students are bitter about this, turning on the unions and calling them workerist or economist.

This doesn't mean that trade unionists are against left-wing involvement in general. At one point, I asked our host if there is much anti-communism in the labor movement. He laughed and said that he hears that question only from Americans. It was only in the United States that he had encountered such hostility towards Marxism. There really is not much anti-communism among the workers and intellectuals you meet. ●



# Sudan: A Visitor's Perspective

The word Sudan comes from the Arabic phrase "El Sudd", Land of the Blacks. Sudan has the largest land mass in Africa. It is bordered by Egypt and Libya to the north, Ethiopia and the Red Sea to the east, Kenya and Uganda to the south, and Chad and Central African Republic to the west. Geographically it has vast deserts in the North, a fertile valley along the Nile River which runs through the center of the country, and lush tropical forests in the far south. It is populated by over 18 million people, with Moslems predominating in the north and Christians/traditionalists in the south. The country gained its independence from Britain and Egypt in 1952 and since 1971 has been under military rule, headed by President Gaafar Nimieri. Sudan is at a crossroad. A recent visit to Sudan in August 1984 gave initial insights into three critical areas of Sudanese life: religion, the status of women, and politics.

## Religion and Society

Since all Sudanese resemble African-Americans in complexion, hairtype and facial features it is somewhat difficult for a visiting American Black person to understand the seriousness with which Sudanese approach religious differences among themselves. The vast majority of Northern Sudanese are descendants of Moslem herdsmen or Moslems from West Africa (mostly Nigeria) who settled in Sudan en route to the Moslem Holy City of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Still other West African Moslems came in the early part of the twentieth century to join in the anti-colonialist fight against the British led by a Black Islamic leader called the Mahdi. Today, many Sudanese are proud of this period of national resistance.

In contrast to the progressive nature of the struggle led by the Mahdi, there is a growing conservative tendency in contemporary Islamic Sudan. The fundamentalists are organized into religious associations called Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods. On the social level they aim to apply pressure on Moslems to observe the religious morals of no drinking, dancing, thievery, gambling, adultery, prostitution, etc. and to stop the further penetration of Western values. These codes were until recently enforced solely by fear of social ostracism and occasional beatings carried out by the zealots. In 1983 President Nimieri proclaimed that the government of Sudan would henceforth be ruled by Islamic Law, a.k.a. Sharia Law. As President, Nimieri would be both the religious and political leader. He immediately had all alcoholic beverages in the country seized and dumped into the Nile River. The moral values of Islam (as determined by the Moslem Brothers) were made into state laws and made punishable by public whippings and limb amputation. Many Sudanese saw President Nimieri's proclamation as an attempt to stem dissatisfaction with his military regime by draping himself in religious authority. Others feel Nimieri's new found religious zealotness is based on his desire to gain favor and economic backing from oil rich and fundamentalist Arab states.

Under Islamic law tolerance towards other faiths has gone from bad to worse. Blacks in the Southern region (both Christians and those who believe in traditional African religions) waged a national liberation struggle for over 15 years in opposition to Arab domination and for their own state (Anyanya). The fighting stopped in 1972 when the Southerners were granted autonomous political status and promised economic development. However in recent years the fighting has recommenced in response to continued social and religious discrimination against Southerners and the failure of the government to fairly distribute economic resources to the South. The new Sharia Law threatens them with further religious restrictions and disempowerment. Here are two illustrative examples of Sharia law: (1) A Catholic priest was publicly whipped for possession of a small quantity of wine (since alcohol is prohibited for both personal and religious purposes), and (2) the proposed administrative changes to accompany Sharia's moral code state that the political leaders of all states must also be leading examples of Islam, thus only Moslems would be eligible to head states where the vast majority is not Moslem.

## Status of Women

Discussions with Moslem women pointed out the many contradictory pressures exerted on them in Islamic Sudan. (The author was unable to visit the non-Moslem area of the country due to a severe gasoline shortage in the country as well as government imposed restrictions on travel to Southern Sudan.) Women in large numbers are taking advantage of the opening up of higher education to females which began in the last twenty years. Female students in the faculty of medicine in the two major universities of the country account for approximately half of all students. On the other hand, other historically male fields like engineering have few if any women. (The case of sex bias in engineering is also true in the United States.)

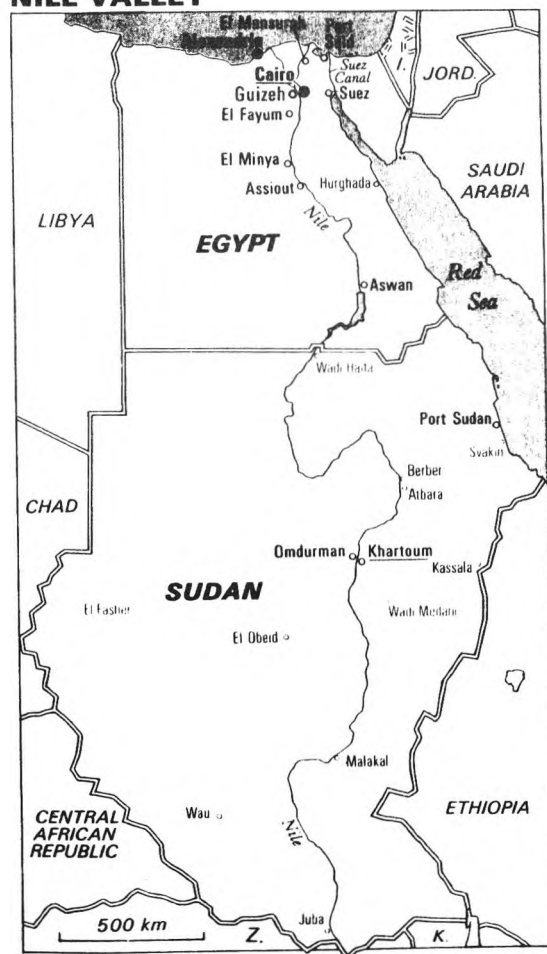
While advances are being made by women in education, women are losing many of the few social gains won in the 1970s. Under the pretext of opposing prostitution, freedom of movement by women is being curtailed. Women traveling alone or with men other than their husbands run the risk of harassment by the police or Moslem Brotherhood. While certain restrictions effect middle class women more than working class women, the implications for all women are clear. In a recent legal case, a widow petitioned to be allowed to apply for a taxi driver's license in order to support herself and her family by utilizing one of the few marketable skills at her disposal. She was denied her petition solely on the basis of her sex. Female students at one Sudanese University requested permission to play volleyball. They were told they could play only if they played in an area where no male could see them and if they wore the traditional floor length dress.

While men are allowed to gather for sports and socialization in playing fields and clubs, women can only meet in the market and in each other's homes. Despite these restrictions women's lives are filled with much liveliness and friendship. It is their ability to effectively express their views politically on the direction of the country that is hampered.

## Politics and National Unity

The most significant internal opposition to the Sudanese military government is the armed struggle being waged by Southerners against domination by the Northern Moslem elites. However, it is difficult to assess the progress of this struggle because of the isolation of the South from the population centers in the North and strict government censorship of all news concerning the South. There is no land transportation between the major cities of the North and Juba, the largest city in the South. Foreign correspondents reporting on military activities by Southerners were deported by the Nimiery government.

**NILE VALLEY**



There is also widespread discontent in the North with President Nimiery's military rule and mismanagement of the economy. However, very few Northerners we met were sensitive or sympathetic to the plight of the Southerners. An alliance between Southerners and the Northerners opposed to the military regime is essential to create a democratic government which speaks to the needs of all Sudanese.

National unity — based on the recognition of the special oppression of minorities and full respect for their rights — is also necessary to solve the serious economic crisis faced by Sudan and to gain greater independence from foreign domination. The primary source of revenue in Sudan is exported cotton. During the 50-year joint colonial rule of Sudan by Britain and Egypt an irrigation system was set up along the Nile to allow cotton cultivation for export to British textile mills. The financial return on cotton production has been low due to the inability of cotton producers in third world countries to wrest control of cotton prices from European manufacturers.

To strengthen the Sudanese economy local cloth manufacturing is being encouraged and a new source of foreign exchange is being sought. The wealthy Arab nations (principally Saudi Arabia) are financing the expansion of food crop production for export to oil rich Arab countries. This export of food crops is developing while malnutrition in Sudan is increasing. The present agricultural development and that planned for the future relies exclusively on intensifying Nile-based irrigation rather than utilizing the rainfall irrigated region of the South. The South lacks only roads, electricity and other infrastructure to increase agricultural productivity.

Egypt plays a large role in politically and economically supporting the Nimiery regime. Certain eastern regions of Sudan are jointly administered by the two countries, Sudanese students study at no charge at Egyptian universities, and Sudan and Egypt share economic and military ventures. As Egypt has moved closer to becoming a client state of the United States so has Sudan. Sudanese military personnel are trained in U.S. bases and Sudan has requested greater military and economic aid from the United States. The attempted bombing in April of 1984 of the Sudanese government radio station in Khartoum (capital of Sudan) was blamed without confirmable evidence on the Libyan government. It was then used to exploit the Libya phobia in the United States and as a pretext to request more military aid from Washington. Egypt played the role of go-between in these negotiations.

## Conclusion

It has been said that if Sudan can heal its internal wounds, unite its people, and move away from economic stagnation there is hope for the whole of Africa. This is a country rich in people and natural resources with positive periods in its political history to draw inspiration from. Those of us who live far away have much to learn from its struggles and should be prepared to lend a hand where we can, for the future of the Land of the Blacks is our future too.

—Vivien Morris



## Amilcar Cabral and Two Problems of the Guinean Revolution

*Although little known in the U.S., Amilcar Cabral deserves to be remembered as one of the towering figures in African history, in the history of Third World struggles for liberation, and in the history of an epoch that has been largely defined by that struggle. Born in 1924 in the obscure Portuguese colony of Guinea-Bissau, educated in Lisbon as an agronomist, Cabral was the principal founder, theoretician and leader of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde).*

*Starting with a group of six people, PAIGC mobilized an armed struggle for national liberation that ultimately won independence for Guinea and Cape Verde and at the same time helped precipitate the overthrow of the fascist regime in Portugal itself. Cabral, who had accurately predicted both the inevitability of Guinean independence and its inextricable connection to the overthrow of Portuguese fascism, did not live to see either of his predictions fulfilled. He was murdered by Portuguese agents on January 20, 1973, a little over a year before the progressive coup in Portugal that led to recognition of Guinea's and Cape Verde's independence in September 1974.*

*The following discussion of Cabral's theoretical perspectives is based on a talk given at the Marxist School in New York as part of a lecture series on 20th century Marxism. The author is a journalist and activist who travelled in liberated Guinea-Bissau with PAIGC forces in 1970 as a reporter for Liberation News Service.*

I want to start tonight with the question of national liberation in a place that by traditional Marxist dogma would not be recognized as a nation at all. Consider for a moment Stalin's classic definition of a nation, which has perhaps undeservedly survived the general tarnishing of his reputation as a theoretician. According to Stalin, "A nation is a historically constituted stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in the common culture."

On the face of it, this kind of checklist approach to defining a dynamic social entity has very little to do with dialectics and even less to do with the reality of an entire continent known as Africa. As dialectics, it ignores the fact that nations are defined in opposition to something else, an outside world. In addition, it totally leaves out something that seems truly essential to nationalism—namely what people think, their consciousness, the subjective element. But the real proof of the inadequacy of this definition can be demonstrated by trying to apply it almost anywhere in Africa.

Let's try it out on Guinea-Bissau. First off, Stalin says, we need a common language. Well, Guinea-Bissau is a tiny place. It has a population of less than a million, a land area

of about a quarter the size of New York State. Nevertheless, it has over a dozen languages. At the point when the struggle started a common language had begun to emerge, as many people learned a type of Creole as a second language. But that was something that had emerged only in response to the Portuguese presence. And it had by no means spread universally. There were times when I needed a team of two or three translators just to understand what someone was saying—one to translate Fula into Balante, one to translate Balante into Creole, and a third to translate Creole into French, which was the closest they could come to a language I could comprehend. So much for a common language.

What about common territory? Well, in Guinea-Bissau and just about everywhere else in Africa the national boundaries that we now see on the map were drawn almost completely arbitrarily by total strangers. The Portuguese came, they were able to go so far, they drew a line on a map and said, "This is ours." That is now a common territory. But it's hard to see any logic to it other than the fact that the people within the line had to fight against the Portuguese for their independence while the people on the other side had to fight the French.



Keystone

**Toppled Portuguese statue in Nova Lisboa: The end of colonialism and the start of civil war**

As for a common economic life, Cabral wrote and I saw that within 10 miles of each other in Guinea-Bissau you can find indigenous cultures whose economic structures are remarkably different. You might find one village where a hereditary chief and his family owned a great deal of land and had people working it for them. And in the next village you'd find that the concept of private ownership of land was completely alien, with families working different plots from one year to the next. Furthermore, there was very little trade between villages to propel formation of a national economy. Again, the only semblance of a common *national* economic life came with the arrival of the Portuguese and their imposition of economic hardships that were shared by all—forced labor, taxes, and the need to plant cash crops to earn money to pay them.

Finally, what about a common psychological make-up manifested in the common culture? Cabral devoted a great deal of his writing to discussions of culture, to understanding its dual role as both “an inexhaustible source of courage, of material and moral support . . .” and as “a source of obstacles and difficulties, of erroneous conceptions of reality, . . . and of limitations on the tempo and efficiency of a struggle.” And he emphasized that one of the principal obstacles lay in the fact that historically Guineans had not one culture but many separate cultures. Again shared oppression by the Portuguese and a shared struggle to bring it to an end helped people “lose the complexes which constrained them in their relationships with other ethnic and social groups.”

In sum, Cabral clearly and repeatedly stated that Guinea-Bissau was forged as a nation in the process of struggling against the shared oppression inflicted by Portuguese colonialism. “We did have trouble creating in our people a national awareness,” he said, “and it is the struggle itself that is cementing that national awareness.” But without that struggle, and without the common experience of Portuguese colonialism, the people of Guinea-Bissau had as much or more in common culturally, linguistically and economically with people in neighboring countries as they did with each other.

### **National Liberation and the Peasantry**

Now I would like to turn to a second problem—the question of the development of a revolutionary movement based necessarily on a class—the peasantry—that Cabral himself said was not a revolutionary force.

One of the things that is enormously refreshing in reading Cabral's works is that he seems to absolutely relish describing his own mistakes. He talks about how he and the small group who founded PAIGC went about analyzing Guinean society and how they arrived at trying to build a revolutionary movement there.

He describes how when they first started they went out looking for the working class. They soon discovered that about the only people in the country who worked for wages were the dockworkers in the capital city. So they decided to start there. They soon found that there was a lot of truth in what their theories had told them. The dockworkers were very responsive. They picked up on the idea of trying to fight to liberate themselves from the Portuguese. They were very courageous. And they got slaughtered. In 1959 they went on strike and the Portuguese opened fire on them with machine-guns.

When you have a class that consists of maybe a few hundred people and the Portuguese wipe out 50 of them in one day, you realize that that class alone is not going to be able to make the revolution. So Cabral and his comrades looked around for other classes that might have an interest in taking up the struggle against the Portuguese. “We looked for the working class in Guinea and we didn't find it,” he recalled. “We obviously did not have a proletariat. We quite clearly lacked revolutionary intellectuals [with the exception of himself and perhaps five other people]. So we had to start searching given that we, rightly, did not believe in the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry.”

Now I first read that statement a couple of months before I went to Guinea. And my first reaction was to think, “What in the hell is he talking about?” Here I was going to learn from and report about a peasant revolution and he's telling me peasants aren't revolutionary. It seemed not only incongruous but downright perverse. But Cabral was very precise in the way he wrote about things. When he said that Guinean peasants were not a revolutionary force, he was not talking about their capacity to fight for national liberation. He makes a very clear distinction between the struggle for national liberation and the revolution, which he sees as a process that will have to continue long after liberation, culminating in a society in which there will be no peasantry because there will be no classes.

In saying that the peasantry is not a revolutionary force, he also is distinctly *not* saying that they can't become revolutionary fighters. He is saying, rather, that a concept of revolution does not emerge out of their daily lives. They can be very heroic in the ways that they resist the Portuguese, but they are not going to develop the ideological and organizational tools that will enable them to defeat Portuguese colonialism. They are “the group with the greatest interest in the struggle,” he said, “but the question is not simply one of objective interest.”

In addition to objective interest, a revolution requires subjective awareness. This focus on consciousness is one of the distinctive features of Cabral's approach to Marxism. He constantly emphasizes not only the material conditions that will create certain things but the power that thinking human beings have to change the reality that produced them. He makes the point sharply in describing how PAIGC organized a revolution led by members of Guinea's small petty bourgeoisie and by *declassé* young people with one foot in the peasant villages and one foot in the emerging street life of Bissau. None of these people could be categorized as a revolutionary class, but in conjunction with the peasantry they transformed the Guinean people as a whole into a powerful force for national liberation.

Cabral identified “comparison” as “the key stimulant required for the awakening of consciousness.” Comparison is something that the peasants didn't have. Most of them had probably never been more than a few miles from their villages. They hadn't seen what the cities were like or what the lives of the Portuguese were like.

Cabral points out that the Guinean peasantry was not to be confused with the peasantry that had fought in China or in Algeria. It wasn't a peasantry that had ever fought back against foreign invaders in a united way. If they did it now, it was going to be for the



first time. It wasn't a peasantry that you could even mobilize around the question of land. Because in Guinea-Bissau there is plenty of land to go around. One of the early PAIGC militants described to me how he had arrived in the countryside fresh from reading about peasants and "the land question" and had tried urging peasants to help "drive out the Portuguese and get our land back." He quickly discovered that the peasants would just say, "There's some land over there if you want it."

So in assessing the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, Cabral came back once again to the question of culture and to the realization that in the tribal villages cultural resistance had never stopped. People had ways of doing things that they refused to relinquish, ways that simultaneously prevented them from developing a revolutionary perspective and allowed them to carry on a tradition of resistance. Their ways of looking at things were limited and certainly didn't include an analysis of imperialism, since they had very little contact with it. So you couldn't say that this culture made them a revolutionary force. But it made them a force of resistance, and in conjunction with people who had that basis of comparison it made them potentially what Cabral referred to as an overwhelming *physical* force that could be applied to fighting a revolution.

Recognizing the dual nature of traditional culture, Cabral and the PAIGC succeeded to a remarkable degree in fusing this long tradition of resistance that was embedded in the village culture with the consciousness that he and this tiny minority of the Guinean population had acquired through living in the cities, through being educated, through seeing how they were mistreated and oppressed by the Portuguese, and understanding that the Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau were just an extension of a system that they called imperialism. By fusing these two forces together, they created a movement that proved truly invincible.

Although he did not live to see the triumph of PAIGC's struggle for national liberation, Cabral's thinking helped immeasurably in shaping that triumph.

Cabral had the insight to see that two classes that were not revolutionary could combine to fight a war of national liberation in a territory that had never before united as a nation. He also had the foresight to realize that these alliances were inherently unstable. The difficulties that have befallen PAIGC and the Guinean revolution since independence don't in the least invalidate either Cabral's work or the enormous step forward marked by national liberation. Cabral fully anticipated that victory over the Portuguese would bring to the surface internal contradictions that had been submerged in the common struggle. I suspect that he would have been bitterly disappointed but only mildly surprised by the split between Guinea and the Cape Verde islands, by the coup that toppled his brother Luis from the presidency of a unified republic and split the PAIGC into two feuding parties.

He recognized full well that the national unity forged in the struggle against the Portuguese might not hold together once the common enemy was defeated. And he knew that the dawning of independence would shed new light on the contradictory nature of the petty bourgeois leadership of the revolution. As he had stated, after liberation, the petty bourgeoisie can either "give free rein to its natural tendencies to become more

bourgeois . . . [or] strengthen its revolutionary consciousness [and] commit suicide as a class to be reborn as revolutionary workers."

For better or for worse, the course of the struggle hinges on that fateful choice. "You know," he wrote, "who is capable of taking control of the state apparatus after independence. The peasants cannot read or write. They have little contact with the colonial forces. The working class hardly exists. We have no economically viable bourgeoisie. Therefore the African petty bourgeoisie has to be the inheritor of state power, although I wish I could be wrong. The moment national liberation comes and the petty bourgeoisie takes power we enter, or rather return, to history and the internal contradictions break out again."

The internal contradictions have indeed broken out again, not only in Guinea-Bissau but in many of the other independent African states. But whatever twists and turns they take, Cabral would also insist that the struggle has reached a new and higher stage. For Africa has, at least to a degree, returned to its own history, propelled by its own internal contradictions toward its own destiny. As he stated long before independence in 1965, "We are African peoples. We have not invented many things. We do not possess today the special weapons which others possess. We have no big factories. We don't even have for our children the toys which other children have. But we do have our own hearts, our own heads, our own history. It is this history which the colonialists have taken from us. The colonialists usually say that it was they who brought us into history. Today we show that this is not so. They made us leave history, our history, to follow them, right at the back, to follow the progress of their history. Today, in taking up arms to liberate ourselves, . . . we want to return to our own history, on our own feet, by our own means and through our own sacrifices."

Cabral himself paid the ultimate sacrifice. But his thinking continues to illuminate the history that he so profoundly marked, the history that he helped the people of Guinea-Bissau and Africa reclaim as their own.

—Andrew Marx

# Book Review / Analysis

## African Socialism or Socialist Africa?

written by A.M. Babu

Zed Press, 57 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DN, 1981. 174pp. (U.S. Distributor: Lawrence Hill and Co., 520 Riverside Ave., Westport, Conn. 06880)

For over 20 years, the modern Black Liberation Movement has been directly influenced by political developments on the African continent. These influences run the spectrum from the philosophy of Senegal's Leopold Senghor, "Negritude," which found expression in some trends of Afro-American cultural nationalism; to the nationalist and capitalist development schemes of various African states and "Black capitalism" in the U.S.A.; to the revolutionary Marxism in the anti-Portuguese national liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola (most notably, the Marxism of Guinea-Bissau's Amilcar Cabral) which inspired a generation of Afro-American Marxists-Leninists in the mid-1970s.

In the early 1970's as many progressive Afro-American activists were moving increasingly to the Left in their thinking and work, a new division surfaced within the Black Liberation Movement. While a growing consensus among these activists favored some form of socialism, the question arose as to what kind of socialism: "African socialism" or "scientific socialism." This struggle reflected not only the issues confronting the Afro-American movement, but also a much larger and complicated struggle which had been taking place on the African continent itself.

A. M. Babu's *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* addresses the continued relevance and immediacy of this debate. Babu, a leader in the successful 1964 uprising on Zanzibar (the large island off the coast of what was Tanganyika) which overthrew a puppet regime left behind by the British colonialists, presents a passionate argument in favor of a revolutionary Marxist approach to the question of African liberation and development. *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* (AS/SA?) is divided into three main themes: (1) that Marxism as a theory best helps one to understand the history of Africa's development and under-development, (2) that various capitalist notions and proposals for Africa's future have fundamental limitations, and (3) that only a consistent scientific socialist approach, i.e., based on Marxism-Leninism, will provide the answers to the hard questions facing the underdeveloped and largely neo-colonized African continent. Each of these themes are explored carefully and through the use of concrete examples and proposals. In that regard AS/SA? offers a wealth of information, and a source of future questions for the reader.

What is wrong with what is known as African Socialism? Babu demonstrates that what is known as African Socialism tends not to be socialism at all, but rather a mish-mosh of nationalizations of parts of the economy, the introduction of some cooperative

economic institutions, and the retention of a basically capitalist economic structure. The call for African Socialism tends to be a response by nationalist petty bourgeois and bourgeois leaders (and sometimes not-so-nationalist members of those respective classes) of the African liberation movements to mass demands for sweeping changes. The importance which Babu places on de-mystifying Africa's history relates directly to this point. The slogan of African Socialism has often been used as a means of down-playing class differences among African peoples (so that bourgeois forces can gain control) and for ignoring contradictions which existed prior to the arrival of European slavers and colonialists. Thus, for Babu, African Socialism is not really socialism at all, but is rather one or another variety of state-run capitalism, and often with personal dictatorships at that. In addition, African Socialism has proved incapable as a theory of leading to genuine independence for African nation-states. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the African Socialism question is the harm which has been done to the cause of genuine socialism and total liberation by regimes and parties which call themselves socialists, but in fact offer no concrete alternative to capitalism and political tyranny.

What does Babu advocate? Essentially a development direction along the lines of Mao Ze Dong's "new democracy", i.e., the building up of the economy and production process based on the alliance of the workers and farmers. Babu points out that the basis does not exist in most of Africa to begin an immediate transition to socialism, and therefore compromises will have to be made with pro-capitalist forces, including some foreign owned enterprises (such as large farms). Yet through an alliance between the workers and farmers, the total society can be moved in a conscious, pro-people — eventually socialist — direction. National development, according to Babu, will have to be based upon the nation-state's self-determined priorities rather than the needs of external corporations and countries. Too often, countries in the Third World have had their economic development controlled by the investment choices of Western corporations. So, for example, loans may not be available for heavy industrial development, but are available for the tourist industry (an international variety of "red-lining"). For Babu, the national priorities will have to be established by a new government based on the workers and farmers.

One of the most interesting sections for me was a small part of chapter 6 entitled "The Dilemma of African Marxists" (pp. 95-100). Here Babu discusses the actual contributions made by African Marxists to the struggles against colonialism and neo-colonialism. Many of the individuals mentioned in these pages are relatively unknown fighters to most US leftists. Yet their collective experience is the sort needed to add to a Marxist understanding of the specifics in the fight against neo-colonialism (as well as other questions).

Babu points out that by and large, African Marxists did not form independent Marxist parties, but chose instead to work within the various national fronts. For this decision, there was a definite price:

*Having no organization of their own African Marxists had very little opportunity*



*to get together to exchange experiences or summarize and synthesize the wealth of new knowledge at their disposal, gained as a result of their participation in the creation of the new states. Because of this they have never been able effectively to influence the world-wide revolutionary scene.*  
(p.100)

I think that this section is especially relevant to many of us today. The ultra-leftism which ravaged the communist movement of the USA during the 1970s and the related sectarianism and idiocy of many groups has now led many Marxists to submerge themselves into various mass organizations, (e.g., unions or community groups), in part with the aim of developing real roots among the people. While this aim is critical to the success of any revolutionary socialist movement, the submerging which has taken place is often done at the expense of an independent Marxist identity and organization. Thus, many activists assume the role of foot soldiers of mass struggles, and sometimes as the strategists, but they play little role in moving the leading individuals of these struggles and movements toward Marxism. This submerging and loss of ideological, political and organizational identity makes it virtually impossible for these individuals to contribute to Marxist theory (and the work of other activists) beyond their own movements.

Although I strongly recommend AS/SA?, there are two points with which I must take issue, and one point that I feel could have been developed some more. The first of the disagreements centers on the question of the USSR. Babu is not very clear as to what he thinks of the USSR, other than that it was able to accomplish massive industrial development in a fairly short period of time. He mentions that he considers the USSR to be socialist, yet at the same time he raises questions or reservations which cast some doubt as to whether he sees the Soviet experience as a model. Babu states;

*The first socialist countries, in particular the USSR, went through the phase of capital accumulation under exceptional historical conditions. At the time this entailed ruthless measures which negated the very principles of socialism as taught by Marx and Engels . . . the question of the sacrifice necessary for capital accumulation is a very serious issue for neo-colonies.* (p.154)

If the Soviets cast away the basic principles of Marx and Engels, what does that mean? Was this a temporary measure which had no effect on the development of socialism in the USSR, or did it have more profound implications for the development of the Soviet Union?

This is far from an academic point. The USSR portrays itself as a friend of the Third World, yet many Marxists and other progressives have been critical of Soviet foreign policy and its domination and hegemonism in particular. The Soviets have carried out military interventions (e.g., Afghanistan); directed military aid to client states to be used against progressive national movements (e.g., Soviet aid to Ethiopia to be used against the Eritrean movement); and generally encouraging economic, political and military dependence (e.g., the notion of the Soviet or Russian "elder brother" as seen in E. Europe and Cuba).

Any program of independence and development must confront the Soviet question. This is additionally important since the Soviets also have an approach to development which downplays the necessity for political democracy and popular power for the masses of people. This orientation contradicts that which Babu puts forward, especially on pp. 163-4 where he talks about the issue of democracy in connection with economic development.

A second point of disagreement revolves around Babu's discussion in chapter 4 of the "Third Way" (i.e., a path of development which is neither socialist nor capitalist) and the conception of the "Third World." Babu seems to connect the conception of the Third World with the idea of a Third Way. I believe that this connection is incorrect.

Since the 1950s, there have been variations on the definition of the Third World. Generally it referred to the collection of nation-states which were former colonies or semi-colonies of the USA and W. Europe. The importance of the concept was the idea that there was (is) a certain commonality of interests and concerns among the nations and people of the former colonial world. This idea found expression in *attempts at unity* ranging from the 1955 Bandung Conference of non-aligned nations, to the Organization of Solidarity for the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL) formed with the aid of Cuba in the mid-1960s, to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). This idea of commonality of interests meant commonality of interests against those of the imperialist powers.

In the 1970s, the Communist Party of China put a twist on the conception of the Third World by noting that the countries and peoples of the former colonial world had common interests against those of the USSR as well as the Western imperialist powers. They noted that the practice of the USSR was to carve out a sphere of influence in the world which it would dominate. The position of the Chinese, and those who agreed with them, was that the Soviet sphere of influence mentality was fundamentally no better than that of the West, and therefore should be opposed.

Babu, as noted above, has a somewhat ambiguous attitude toward the USSR, and at the same time appears to discount the common interests of the former colonial world vis-a-vis imperialism and Soviet hegemonism. While I agree with Babu that the long-term solution for the former colonial world lies in socialism, (and in that sense there is no Third Path other than capitalism or socialism), the idea of a Third World or the unity of the non-aligned can be a helpful intermediate step. In other words, in situations where the masses are not prepared for a national democratic or socialist revolution (in the former colonial world), yet there is a sufficient power-base among the people to influence the nation's foreign policy (including rules on foreign investment, fishing rights, exports), a movement against the imperialists and Soviet hegemonists and for national self-determination is a very progressive step. Support, for instance, by the nations and peoples of the former colonial world for Afghanistan's mass resistance to Soviet occupation or support for the Nicaraguan resistance to U.S. aggression will not be the main source of victory in either case. This support, however, does contribute to isolation and credibility loss for the particular aggressors.

One point which I believe Babu could have developed somewhat more concerns a trend which began developing during the mid 1970s. Over the last 10 years, national liberation fronts which led the struggles for independence in several African states have proclaimed themselves to be Marxist-Leninist parties or Workers' parties. Many of these liberation fronts were originally formed as alliances between various political parties representing various class forces and interests (including those of the pro-nationalist bourgeoisie). What are the implications of these developments? Is there really a transformation of these Fronts into parties which struggle for all-around leadership of the workers or farmers, or are these moves to party formation more a diplomatic scheme to achieve some sort of international aid and credibility? This too is not an academic question since the practice of some of these parties is nothing less than tyrannical. (Witness, for example, the Ethiopian military regime's brutal elimination of popular opposition and its criminal war against the Eritrean movement, all in the name of socialism — all with Soviet and Cuban assistance). Is the adoption of "Marxism-Leninism" by these groups comparable to the adoption of "African socialism" which took place after the first round of independence struggles?

Despite the points of disagreement which I have with Babu mentioned above, I firmly believe *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* to be an important and well-written book and a must for left-wing activists to read. *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* also happens to have been written by someone who directly participated in a national liberation struggle, who served as a Minister in the Tanzanian government, and has remained a staunch and active part of the African struggle for socialism and independence. In that sense, *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* is much more than a critique of current African problems; it is a proposal by a very important African Marxist for progressive action.

—Bill Fletcher, Jr.



## Review: A Guest of Honour

Just in the last year or two Nadine Gordimer, a novelist and short story writer from South Africa, has been discovered by an admiring audience in this country. The lead review of the August '84 *New York Review of Books*, for instance, heralded the title story in her new book, *Something Out There*, as a piece of "fictional mastery," and termed Gordimer herself as an "Unsurpassed talent." Whole issues of literary magazines have now been devoted to her work in something akin to the way Doris Lessing was treated in the '70s.

Such sudden prominence is not because Gordimer only recently began to publish. In fact she has been writing skillfully and prolifically for decades, and her writing has dealt all along with many of the same issues that she is still addressing today. As she put it in the introduction to her *Selected Stories* (which is, by the way, an excellent place to begin reading Gordimer) her fiction is a kind of ongoing inquiry into issues that continue to preoccupy her, issues that she has been returning to in different contexts and from different angles, over her entire life as a writer. What emerges as her most constant and distinctive themes are the racial conflict that so much defines South African life and the related tension between the commitment to political struggle and the lure of a more private life. Her most popular novel, *Burger's Daughter*, deals directly and powerfully with these themes as they shape the life of the daughter of a white South African communist.

Overall Gordimer's growing popularity in this country seems to me a hopeful sign. In many ways it parallels the career of Athol Fugard, another white South African, whose plays, *Master Harold and the Boys* and *A Lesson From Aloes*, have also received glowing critical acclaim these last few years. Their popularity here signals that a sizable number of people in this country remain interested in creative work that grapples with the most serious political issues of our day, and who are willing to look abroad to find something more satisfying than the politically indifferent attitude of much of contemporary US fiction. Since the themes of South African politics are certainly not isolated ones, these South African writers can serve to stimulate our own political consciousness even over wide distances.

Still, it is probably also worth thinking about the fact that these two South Africans who have achieved such notoriety here are both white. Their whiteness clearly informs their vantage point and the themes they take up, and undoubtedly makes them more accessible, "easier" for white liberals and progressives to relate to than Black African writers. I know some people who are pretty critical of at least some of Fugard's work for its white slant on things, the way he focuses on white guilt and a white version of racism. Probably similar things could be said about some of Gordimer's work. In general, her white characters appear more intimately known than her Black or Colored



ones, perhaps more complexly drawn. Yet this is probably inevitable, a reflection of the distorted relationships among people that apartheid imposes. If white people are to write at all, they will have to write as people limited in this particular way. This is something Gordimer herself struggles with. Her book, *July's People*, is an investigation of this very distortion, how white South Africans (even those who pride themselves on their liberalism) live essentially ignorant of the African culture they exploit. It takes a revolutionary situation, when the whites are suddenly stripped of their privileged position and must go hide out with their African servant, for their eyes to finally be opened.

Of all Gordimer's novels, *A Guest of Honour* most directly addresses the internal problems of Black Africa. Although the central character is white, the two characters who create the political tension are Black. And here she is not dealing with the general issues of race and class and political commitment as much as the specific "topical" conflict between two visions of nationalist development for an African nation as represented by Ademson Mweta and Edward Shinza.

Ademson Mweta is president of a newly independent central African country and, now, also chairman of PIP (People's Independent Party) which organized for independence. He and his entourage represent a rightist view on the road forward for their country, one of developing free enterprise and a conciliatory attitude toward the ex-colonialists, a pragmatic approach. Edward Shinza is the founder of PIP and ex-leader of the trade unions, an uncompromising Marxist who wants immediate measures to empower the peasants and workers through the trade unions, who encourages struggle against the European capitalists and who is suspicious of an anti-democratic bureaucracy perpetrating continued inequality and class divisions.

Evelyn James Bray is the guest of honour of the book's title, an ex-colonial official who had worked with the revolutionaries, and is now returning at Mweta's invitation to celebrate independence and to stay to help investigate the educational needs in the countryside. As Bray travels the country, he must come to terms with the growing evidence of political unrest, of the mounting conflict between Mweta's government and the Shinza-inspired opposition. He must eventually decide where his allegiances should lie. This is the moving force of the novel.

Perhaps one reason Gordimer can create effective fiction that deals so immediately with advanced political questions is a matter of time and place. In contemporary Africa, where the struggle for independence from imperialism has been so intense and fast-paced, revolutionary politics means mass uprisings and military suppression, not tedious political debate among small groups of people. When two line struggle emerges as it does in the composite African nation Gordimer has created; it is not polemics on paper. Trade unionists are taken into custody and beaten, Preventive Detention Acts are imposed, and there is always the possibility of resistance leading to mass uprisings, clandestine networks throughout the country, and arms smuggled across the border. This makes for good dramatic tension.

Still, I don't mean to suggest that Gordimer writes action-packed thriller type novels.

Not by any means. This is a novel which makes no apologies about being a novel of ideas, of political ideas. In this way, Gordimer takes after the Russians who wrote in the ferment of pre-revolutionary Czarist Russia, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, who break all the conventions that novels ought not to indulge in abstract discourse. Like them, Gordimer is so obviously engaged with the political questions that absorb her characters (in this case, the problems of post-independence political development for third world nations) that the long political discourses hold her reader's attention, at least those readers already disposed to consider such topics interesting. Her depiction of the first political conference after independence, the unfolding of the political two-line struggle through one after another minor resolution, is in my opinion masterful. It is almost reminiscent of the deliberation and care of Lenin's analysis in "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," except that here Gordimer does not confine herself to the explicit politics of the affair, but deals with the sights and smells, all the palpable, sweaty, sensual feeling of the convention.

But although Gordimer writes novels about abstractions, about politics, and although her characters are largely defined by their place in the political landscape, she is mainly successful in avoiding caricatures. Instead, she draws her characters carefully through detail of physical appearance, mannerism and speech until they become known to us as neither entirely strong nor entirely weak, unevenly shaped (as people actually are) by their historical time and place. Most people assume that left-wing political writers are most comfortable working in stereotypes, that they like to use characters to stand for absolute moral categories ala socialist realism. On the contrary, as Gordimer shows, a good materialist makes her characters specific, not symbols of metaphysical abstractions. A good dialectician, like Gordimer, sees moral choices and decisions as an evolution, not as something static or predetermined. Even on minor characters like Roly Dando, the sole white in Mweta's cabinet, she lavishes such attention of detail that we can appreciate what is sad and cynical about him, what is resilient and courageous.

Gordimer's ability to create characters who make us grapple with politics in a serious way is especially evident in her depiction of the two African independence fighters, Mweta and Shinza. The evolution of these old allies into antagonists would seem to demand a choice, a judgement about who is right and who is wrong. And it does. At first Bray obstinately resists making such a judgement. And the reader too feels torn. Finally, though, Bray is forced to choose . . . And, at least in my case, what convinces Bray also convinces the reader. Still, Gordimer does not impose a verdict of complete condemnation or complete endorsement; she has Bray reach an understanding that, in a particular time and place, one direction and one leader — with all his weaknesses, passions, and vision — is more likely to lead forward than another direction and another leader. It is the kind of real, specific, impure decision that actual politics calls for. Only someone who has thought through and participated in real political struggles could get it quite as right as Gordimer does.

Mweta is handsome, young, and dynamic. He is a brilliant agitator and spontaneous

leader, not schooled in the Marxist classics but educated in a missionary school, a tee-totaler. Dressed in togas, a symbol of African independence, he is now emblazoned on posters and ushered in cavalcades through the streets. Though he has risen to be charismatic leader of the party and the state, there is still some residual part of him caught in the old relationship with Bray, in which he seeks Bray's approval and sees Bray as a mentor. And, in turn, Bray is drawn to him with an almost physical attraction. Mweta is flexible, a realist, atune to the subtle phrasing of compromise in human affairs. He articulates things in human, personal terms. When Bray finally musters the courage to press Mweta for Shinza's inclusion in the government with the argument that it is better to have him with you than against you, this is how Mweta reacts:

*'He's the one who's always made (the trouble)' Mweta said. Then suddenly, like an actor going out after his audience, he turned shining eyes and eager-hunched body, all gathered up in a stalking intensity and burst out, beguiling, gesturing — 'Shinza! From the day of self-rule he began to turn his criticism on us. From that day. Always we were discussing. No trust anymore for anybody. He made up his mind he had to watch the rest of us the way he used to watch them. Yes! . . . All right. I said to myself, he's your father, your brother. All right. But let him come out in the open. Let him speak what he thinks at the time for these things, like anybody else. This is a government, not a secret society . . . We're not in the bush in Gala anymore, with nothing but each other. Eight million people are in this country. I can't be tied by the hind leg like a cow.'*

So for Mweta, Shinza is too conspiratorial, too purist, a man so caught in the past that all he can do is criticize from the sidelines and find fault. It seems believable enough.

But Gordimer does not let it go at that. We must hear Shinza's side of the story. Shinza is out in the countryside, newly married to the young daughter of a tribal chief. A more uncompromising revolutionary than Mweta, it is a part of his character (not just circumstance), Bray knows, to remain something of a shadowy figure, unwilling or unable to play for popular effect. He is too cerebral, too absorbed in the intensity of his political concerns to get involved with the hand-shaking and ceremony of public leadership. He is polemical and a little cranky, an eccentric with a penchant for good cigars.

Bray procrastinates about going to see Shinza, disturbed by his own awkward position, the white guest of a Black nation, torn in his allegiances and loyalties, unsure whether or not it is his place to get involved in the political controversies of a country where he believes white men don't belong meddling. Finally, he drives out to Shinza's tribal home. And, so, he hears Shinza's side of the story. Characteristically, where Mweta focused on Shinza and his personal foibles, Shinza speaks hardly at all of Mweta, but only of the programs and policies, the politics of Mweta's regime:

*His voice mastered the question rhetorically. The half-insulting, preoccupied reserve that had discounted Bray's presence when they talked in the Bashi might never have existed . . . He accused, demanded, derided — speaking for them both. 'Kayira sits in the House of Chiefs — that old criminal who raped a child a*

*few years ago and told the judge it was his right as a chief. Those ignorant men were going to be stripped of their "rights," all of their forms of parasitism, and made to stand on merit — but have you heard a mention of abolishing the House of Chiefs? No, you've only heard that the House is going to be enlarged so that those fat men in blue suits can spread themselves comfortably . . .'*

There is a certain irony in Shinza's condemnation of the privileges of the chiefs, since it is through his own father-in-law's tribal privileges that he gains much of the backing for his own opposition. But this is the kind of contradiction that revolutionaries often live with, from all the way back when Marx was writing *Capital*, supported by the profits of Engel's factory.

Shinza goes on to lambast the continued domination of European capital in the mines:

*'Oh yes, I know, within two years all work up to the level of mine captain will be Africanized. So what? What sort of window dressing is that if new jobs are not being created at the same time. We move up into the seats of the expatriate whites, and go on earning dividends for them when they go back "home" to retire? Was that the idea? Christ, James, what were we talking about all those years, if it was for this? . . .'*

He quotes Fanon:

*'coming to power was not going to be a matter of multiplying the emancipated, while the rest of the people remained a class of enfranchised slaves . . . The people must be taught to cry "Stop Thief!"'*

Of course there are pitfalls with presenting a complex political world without being heavy-handed and dogmatic. Gordimer runs the risk of being greatly misunderstood by those Westerners prepared by chauvinism to distrust and condemn the revolutionary politics of Black Africa. In a prescient moment in the novel, Gordimer has Roly Dando, the hard-drinking, hard-bitten white member of the African cabinet, say about a sympathetic ex-colonialist caught in the cross-fire of the political upheaval after independence:

*'They'll say "his blacks" murdered him. They'll go one further: they'll come up with their guilts to be expiated and say, yes, he certainly died with Christian forgiveness for the people who killed him, into the bargain. Christ Almighty. We'll never get it straight. They'll paw over everything with their sticky misconceptions.'*

And sure enough, even with this warning, this is precisely what happened in a number of reviews of *A Guest of Honour* when the novel first came out in 1970. Listen to how the reviewer for *Time* described Bray:

*He is an old-fashioned man of private conscience and good will who is doomed in a world of arrogant passions and ruthless compromise.*

The poor white man, toting his white man's burden into the heart of Africa, brought down by the ruthless forces of the dark continent — how far, I am sure, from anything Gordimer had in mind when she wrote this novel!

A sense of doom in the face of uncontrolled events certainly is a dominant aspect of



the vision of much contemporary Western literature. Many prominent American writers do concentrate on a kind of deadpan description of the surface veneer of things, as if nothing more committed or deeper were trustworthy. Our writers do often depict a humanity absorbed in despair, a world dying out with nothing else to follow it.

But Gordimer's vision is very different. She imagines our historical moment as one of transition, the dying out of one era and the emergence of another. And she seems to be looking forward with interest and affirmation to the world that is coming. As she put it in the title of one of her novels, we are living in the "late bourgeois world." And what is the era that she and so many of her characters are straining to see ahead? The era of socialism. ▲

Near the end of *A Guest of Honour*, Gordimer has Bray say:

*'... would you agree we've always accepted what Sartre once wrote, that socialism is the movement of man in the process of re-creating himself? Whatever the paroxysms of experiment along the way — whether it's Robespierre or Stalin or Mao Tse-tung or Castro — it's the only way there is to go, in the sense that every other way is a way back. What do you want to see here? Another China? Another America? If we have to admit that the pattern is likely to be based on one or the other, which should we choose?'*

"You're saying socialism is the absolute?" Bray is asked. "The standard of reference by which any political undertaking is to be judged?"

"Yes," Bray answers.

But Gordimer's vision is a complicated one. She writes as a privileged member of the old world, who recognizes the justice of the new. She has the kind of self-conscious monitoring eye of someone who acknowledges that good impulse alone is not enough. It seems that living in South Africa has been for Gordimer a painful gift. At the juncture where these two worlds are in sharpest contrast and conflict it has given her the eyes to see with such clarity and the will to understand. For Gordimer, dialectics is not a faddish phrase, it is the way she makes sense of the world. Even in her descriptions of nature, we can see a dialectical vision at work. About a tree under which Bray sits in his little bachelor cottage in the African countryside, Gordimer writes:

*"It was the smell of growth . . . the process of decay and regeneration so accelerated, brought so close together that it produced the reek of death in life all at once."*

It is this dialectical vision of the world in general and of Africa in particular that is at the heart of her vast political novel, *A Guest of Honour*. ●

## Update on Mila Aguilar

Mila D. Aguilar, the Philippina woman journalist, writer and teacher who was arrested last August 6, has been placed in "solitary confinement at Camp Crame," according to the findings of the U.S. State Department Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.

Mr. Thomas Murphy of the Bureau has informed us that Mila's "cell is without windows . . . and has artificial lighting. Visits are more restricted in this setting than they were when she was sharing quarters with fellow detainee Cynthia Nolasco . . ." Nolasco and the student arrested with them, Willy Tolentino, have been transferred to a regular detention center in the same camp.

On August 15, Quezon City Metropolitan Trial Court Judge Nestor Batungbacal ordered the Philippine Constabulary to release the two women teachers originally detained for "subversion and conspiracy to commit rebellion." That charge was dismissed on Aug. 13 by Assistant Fiscal Rosemarie Legasto who, based on the evidence shown by the military, charged them with "illegal possession of subversive materials" and recommended bail of P600 for each one (*Bulletin Today*, Aug. 16). This charge carries a maximum penalty of six months, while subversion carries a penalty of death or life imprisonment.

On August 17, *Malaya* reported that to circumvent the judgement of the civilian court, the Philippine Constabulary obtained a Preventive Detention Action, a xeroxed copy of which was shown to FLAG lawyer Rene Sarmiento. The PDA was dated August 7, a day after Mila's arrest. Earlier, according to the same newspaper, the military assured the lawyers that there was no need for a PDA because "there is enough evidence against the three."

The Preventive Detention Action (Presidential Decree No. 877) allows the military to detain for as long as President Marcos wants, anyone suspected of conspiring to commit rebellion or subversion, as defined by those in power.

According to *Business Day* (Aug. 9), Mila is being implicated by the military in cases against 92 other respondents for gun smuggling in 1972 and 1974. Mr. Murphy reports that the State Department has found these charges to be completely unfounded. "Earlier reports of her arrest in connection with alleged gun smuggling have proven to be false." Other prisoners charged with gun smuggling (like Sison, Fidel Agcaoili, Satur Ocampo) still languish in jail, denied due process and justice.

"Solitary confinement" of political prisoners is a punishment strictly prohibited by United Nations International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, and also by Article 4 of the Philippine Constitution. (On preventive detention action, see the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, *The Philippines: A Country in Crisis*, Dec. 1983, New York City, pp. 50-62).

The above press statement was issued by the Committee to Free Mila Aguilar last month. The Committee informs us that cables urging the military to heed the order of a civilian court to release Mila Aguilar would be of the greatest assistance. Address cables to President Ferdinand Marcos, Malacanang Palace, Manila or to Ambassador Stephen W. Bosworth, U.S. Embassy, Roxas Blvd., Manila. Individual or organizational cables can help, and please send copies to your Senator or Representative in Congress. Here is a sample cable: JUST LEARNED MILA AGUILAR SOLITARY CONFINEMENT SINCE 13 AUG FOR GOOD NAME OF PHILIPPINES IMPERATIVE SHE BE IMMEDIATELY RELEASED.

For further information, you can contact the Committee at 5A Durham St., Somerville MA 02143 or call Karin Aguilar-San Juan at 617-625-0281. ●



Mila D. Aguilar

*The twinkling of these thousand fireflies  
Are as the pounding resentment in my heart  
Over our parting,  
In the midst of this silence.  
But then also how like an eye-filling picture  
they are  
Of the shining light of victory,  
Of the thousand promised victories  
Within this seemingly endless darkness.*

Mila D. Aguilar

## Letters

### Dear FM:

We were glad to see *FM* devote attention to Central America in the Aug.-Sept. issue. We especially appreciated the article on Nicaraguan agriculture, the SEIU convention report, and E. Hall's letter. Hopefully this will be the start of an ongoing discussion about the politics of the region, the anti-interventionist movement and our responsibilities in solidarity work.

In that spirit, we would like to comment on two of the articles — "Central America — The War Is On" and "New Work, Old Debates." Both articles were thought-provoking and make some good points. But as Central America solidarity activists, we would not like to see Marxists go overboard along the lines suggested in these pieces. In both cases, in fact, we think there was some one-sidedness.

The main theme of "The War Is On" is that, having learned the appropriate lessons in Vietnam, the U.S. ruling class will not conduct a massive invasion of Central America with troops. Instead, it will carry out a "capital-intensive" war, which it is likely to win. Therefore progressives shouldn't harp on the analogy between Vietnam and Central America. After all, "to a vast section of the US people, Vietnam symbolizes above all an 'unwinnable war'." And, so the analysis goes, El Salvador at least is probably winnable. "Small countries usually don't defeat large ones." In addition, "using the Vietnam analogy encourages people to think about the signal for the advent of the war in Central America will be the introduction of large numbers of combat troops. It implies that the war is not here yet."

There's some truth here. The US will use its technology in an attempt to minimize the loss of US lives. Some in the anti-intervention movement do under emphasize this. And we should certainly be aware of differences between Central America today and Vietnam in the '60s. (For instance, El Salvador's lack of friendly borders, as the article points out.) But overall, the scenario sketched in "The War Is On" does not seem to us to be necessarily the most likely one, nor does it seem realistic in all of its features.

First of all, the article underestimates the strength and staying power of national liberation movements and overestimates the strength of US military technology. Things may turn out just as "The War Is On" proposes. It's something to think about. But to say that "small countries usually don't defeat large ones," and leave it at that, is to distort the recent history of struggle against imperialism in the Third World. This is substantially the history of overcoming great odds, as is the case so far in Central America. The idea that in the face of US technology Central Americans will be relatively easily defeated by specialists and technicians, and if they "get very lucky" will kill an air force pilot once in a while seems to us to be both inaccurate and a kind of slap at the revolutionaries and people there.

Yes the US tried a program of massive bombing and "changing the color of the corpses" in Southeast Asia. But it was far from being an unqualified success. It was *defeated* in Vietnam. It quickly became clear that for all the bombing and strafing, the US could not control the military situation on the ground or establish working political control without massive US troop



presence. So while the US military is wary about committing ground troops in Central America, one of the reasons is that "guerrilla uprisings . . . spring largely from genuine economic and political grievances that can't be swept away by US troops." According to General Edward C. Meyer, who recently retired from a career as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Having been involved in guerrilla warfare, in Vietnam, I realize that, unless you have the commitment of the people, or the indigenous forces . . . you're not going to solve guerrilla warfare. I think that's one of the great lessons that comes out of Vietnam." (Quotes from the *Wall Street Journal*, 6/24/83). Meyer also says that even if you're successful on the battlefield, "the biggest risk is, after you've done it, that you've created this void there into which there's no one to step." The Soviet Union is also learning some of the lessons of the limits of imperialist military power in the Third World, even in a neighboring country like Afghanistan.

It should be pointed out that even high-tech war, especially when it is well-publicized, is hardly immune to diplomatic or domestic political consequences. Despite the fact that the US public often seemed to care exclusively about US deaths in Vietnam, the saturation bombing actually caused a huge outcry here as well as abroad. The US people didn't like the bombing — and they didn't like the recent mining of Nicaraguan harbors, either.

None of it will necessarily deter Reagan from launching a major war in Central America. Certainly it won't assure victory for the revolutions there. But we're not sure that the war will turn out to be an overwhelmingly technological affair, or that the US military will have things pretty much their way. And, of course, we're looking at a *regional* struggle. It would be foolish to write off Nicaragua, and the Guatemalan revolution too, in the face of the US's "overwhelming" power. Is the movement really wrong, then, as the article implies, to say that the US is getting into a quagmire in Central America? We'd need to be convinced.

Second of all, "The War Is On" seems somewhat out of synch with the actual nature of current US war preparations in Central America. There is indeed talk about helicopter gunships and attack planes. There is US-assisted bombing of civilians in El Salvador today. But there are also contingency plans approved by the National Security Council for an *invasion* of Central America. US maneuvers in the region have involved over 30,000 US troops at a time (not including the Southern Command based in Panama). Continuous military exercises have been held on Nicaragua's borders since July 1983.

And who are these US soliders? The *FM* article would have us believe that we're talking about technicians and dedicated anti-communist warriors with tatoos and mirror sunglasses, not "guys down the block" or "conscripts by the score." Hasn't anybody heard of the poverty draft? The percentage of oppressed nationalities in the armed forces is higher than it was during the Vietnam war and rising. Draft or no draft (and we'll see about that), the dirty work in US wars is going to be done mainly by workers and people of color, not by gung-ho survivalist types. Some of these will even have families who *do* criticize, as some did after their sons died in Lebanon.

More could be said about why we disagree with basing our work primarily on the scenario in "The War Is On." But perhaps enough has been said to indicate why, along with most other solidarity activists, we think that it makes sense to use the Vietnam analogy, in balance. The similarities — in terms of the dynamics of national liberation, in terms of our solidarity tasks, in

terms of *broad* sorts of military options faced by the US ruling class, in terms of how all-out war would hurt the US people, etc. — outweigh the differences. The Salvadoran and Nicaraguan revolutionaries think so, too, and have said so on numerous occasions. So have various US ruling class figures, including, by the way, Richard Nixon. (See *Wall Street Journal*, 5/2/83.)

There's another point in "The War Is On" which we would like to respond to briefly. This is the question of what we call ourselves:

*If we keep raising the spectre of Vietnam [large numbers of combat troops, etc.] and Vietnam never quite comes, people will be falsely reassured and demobilized until it's too late. For this reason, we have to stop thinking about the movement we are building as an anti-intervention movement. If the war is on, then the movement we are building is the anti-war movement.*

There's merit to this argument. Actually, we think a lot of anti-intervention activists agree to a large extent. For instance, one of the more moderate coalitions, the Central America Peace Campaign, recently issued a national brochure headlined, "The US is at War in Central America." But we should remember that the crisis in Central America is a complex regional struggle, which assumes many forms. Acts of war are certainly intervention, but so is the rigging of Duarte's election, US-designed phony land reform plans, financing for Nicaraguan opposition groups (non-military as well as military) interference in the region's trade unions, etc. It seems to us that we need to encourage people to take a broad view of US involvement, seeing more than direct military activity ("war") as significant. The term anti-interventionism gives us room to do education about neo-colonialism and imperialism in all its aspects in Central America. So we don't think it's without value.

"New Work, Old Debates" raises some additional questions for us. These focus on two points in the article:

1. A "plunge into activism" around things like electoral work can be harmful to the anti-intervention movement because it means giving patient educational work short shrift. Besides, activists may be "in such a rush that [they] fall back into rhetoric."

2. It's chauvinist and narrow to try to "best appeal to working class people by focussing on their personal self-interest." The issues of military spending and US combat deaths should not be made the central ones because they don't promote internationalism and an understanding of imperialism. (And, there may not be a lot of US casualties because there may not be a lot of US troops involved.)

We are a little concerned with how the first point was framed, because in our opinion the anti-Reagan campaign, which is electoral work, offers one of the best ways to have an impact on the outcome of the current emergency in Central America. Unfortunately, some people don't think it matters who's elected. (Anyone with doubts on this score should ask us for materials from the FMLN and the CISPES Northwest Region on this question). With people struggling to get the anti-Reagan work off the ground, is this really the time to put down high-energy electoral work around Central America? Is it "precipitous"? Will it automatically lead to over-extension? (The main electoral work will be over in early November.) Does it cause a rhetorical style? (We've

experienced some pretty rhetorical educationals.) For our part, we think the presidential elections are *critical* parts of Central America solidarity work right now, and are potentially one of the best ways to "present the issues in a popular way."

We're not sure Nadine Myers is not against anti-Reagan organizing. And she probably meant to address the contradiction between organizing and education at a more general level. But she used a somewhat inappropriate illustration, in our opinion.

The topic of what our agitational line on Central America should be is an even more serious one. Many of Nadine Myers' points are good, but in the context of the present movement, they do seem one-sided.

From our perspective, there are two basic tendencies in the anti-intervention movement. One tendency says, in effect, that white students stopped the Vietnam War, and advocates working today mainly among peace activists, white churches and liberals of various stripes. That is, "opinion leaders," people with money, education and influence. This tendency agitates about how Reagan is "violating America's democratic traditions." It appeals also to sympathy, making liberal use of images of refugees, burned and hollow-eyed children, raped nuns, etc. The other tendency says that the Vietnamese won the Vietnam war, with assistance in this country, first and foremost, of rebellions by oppressed nationalities. This tendency usually emphasizes work among the Northamericans who are hurt worst by intervention and war in Central America — oppressed nationalities and poorer working class people. Often it does this by pointing out concretely who is gaining and who is suffering as a result of US aggression — both here and in Central America. To our way of thinking, the latter is unquestionably the more correct tendency — one in which revolutionaries have an obligation to promote. Yet it is within this tendency that "New Work" aims the attack.

It's not really a question of who's doing work with political refugees, at least here on the West Coast, because both tendencies are. The question is *how* do you do it? Everyone talks about why the refugees are here and why the US government wants to deport them. But beyond that, do you focus on a humanitarian, sympathy-oriented appeal? Or do you, for instance, try hard to tie the refugee question in with racist immigration policy (the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill, etc.)?

Even a good materialist argument can be perverted when emptied of its class and national content. We're glad Nadine Myers pointed this out. Yet, focussing on peoples' *class and national* interests, even their more short-term ones, isn't the same as "focussing on their personal self-interest." It's easy to make fun of somebody who just wants to save their own ass, or who says that "getting out of El Salvador, or Nicaragua, or Guatemala, or Grenada . . . will potentially put more meat and potatoes on the average citizen's table." But when, in the late '60's, Afro-Americans started saying "we want all Black men exempt from military service" (Black Panther Party), suddenly it was no joke. \$160 billion was spent on the Vietnam War. It's not a laughing matter when money for jobs and social programs is being ripped away to finance death and dictatorship in Central America, or when war-caused inflation strikes the poor.

So let's criticize patronizing agitation when it arises. But let's be clear also that showing who's paying for the US policies in Central America, insisting that all-out war will mean working people killing working people, people of color killing people of color — that's not appealing to backwardness or chauvinism. It's what lays the best foundation for internationalism, and for class struggle political agitation and propaganda. It's at the heart of a revolutionary line on Central America work. We can and must show that the aggression hurts the most oppressed sectors of the US people in the short run as well as the long run. Otherwise, we may be left with idealist moralizing and a narrow base.

— E.R.; D.S.  
September 1984

### Reply About "The War Is On"

E.R. and D.S. raise some thoughtful objections to the position of "The War Is On." The article didn't say that the Vietnam analogy is useless: it does help highlight certain features of the war in Central America and it often makes good agitational sense. There is a continual and intense struggle over the meaning and symbols of the Vietnam era in this country which the Left has to pursue aggressively. The article may have underplayed this. Second, the label intervention does cover some aspects of US activity in Central America that war does not, although intervention is a clumsy word, less accurate and less mobilizing.

But E.R. and D.S. do not address the problem the article tried to, and some of their specific criticisms still seem wrong. "The War Is On" begins with a problem: the Left is having a lot of difficulty helping translate the unpopularity of the war in Central America into effective protest against it. And it links this difficulty with the major theme in Left and liberal thinking about and agitation against the war. It says this theme — the Vietnam analogy — has a lot of wrong with it, and that what's wrong with it may be related to difficulties in building an anti-war movement with that theme. The article further makes its argument in stark terms because of a conviction of the extraordinary urgency of the situation in Central America. Time is critical. Time is especially critical because of the ways Central America is not like Vietnam.

Now the link between the Vietnam war analogy and the difficulties of building an anti-war movement may be wrong. That is something everybody trying to stop the wars in Central America should debate and decide. There are surely more important reasons for the relative weakness of the anti-war movement to date. E.R. and D.S., you should write back about that. It's interesting, though, that the letter refers mainly to the solidarity movement while the perspective of "The War Is On" is that of building an anti-war movement. This seems like a real difference in emphasis about what we should be doing these days, though in practice it probably doesn't amount to so much.

But the criticisms in E.R. and D.S.' letter essentially says that the Vietnam analogy works better than "The War Is On" perspective believes. Without going into a long reply, they are not convincing.



Whenever national liberation struggles win, they overcome great odds. But they have lost more often than they have won. It is romanticism about the Third World to think otherwise. Successful national liberation wars have always resulted from a conjunction of many particular factors, and not just the justice of the cause. Sure, in some sense, the people's will triumphs over imperialist technology. But war always pits different technologies too. It is not a slap in the Salvadoran's face to say that under present conditions, they will be lucky to shoot down an occasional US plane. Take away modified SAM missiles and relatively modern anti-aircraft batteries, and how many bombers would the Vietnamese have gotten? Now figure out how the Salvadorans are going to get comparable weapons. The terrible, awful, bloodcurdling fact is that it is possible to kill so many people and to so disrupt the patterns of a peasant society as to defeat even a fairly popular liberation war. In a very small country like El Salvador or Nicaragua, that level of destruction is within the technical and especially the moral grasp of our own country's leadership.

E.R. and D.S. are right that "high-tech war . . . is hardly immune to diplomatic or domestic consequences." But their evidence returns us to our real problem. The US people may not have liked the recent mining of Nicaraguan harbors, but they did relatively little about it. That alarming fact is what we have to analyze, more importantly, change.

#### Reply on "New Work, Old Debates"

In responding to my article, E.R. and D.S. make the valid point that political campaigns (and electoral campaigns in particular) can be excellent vehicles for carrying out education, and that education and action shouldn't be posed in contradiction. I'd agree and I'm quite sure that my friend who made the original point would too. What I was trying to convey was the idea that anti-war activists shouldn't miss the opportunity to do better this time at what was not always done so well during the last anti-war movement during the Vietnam war. We should put a lot more stock in education, progressive and socialist education, aimed at reaching working class and oppressed nationality people.

The problem that I think my friend was trying to get at was that when activists decide to launch a major organizational project, they often get so absorbed in the practical demands of the work that they don't think enough, or politically enough, about what it will take to involve people at the grass roots. This isn't just a problem in electoral work. Progressive trade union leaders seem to face the same thing. A common complaint of progressive elected officials is that they get stuck spending all their energy on maintaining the bureaucratic structure of the union and have much too little time for steward education or developing an engaged and informed rank and file.

Electoral campaigns can be a vehicle for broadening participation, but they too can be taken up in a fairly mechanical way, absorbed in logistics. If we carry them out without putting real thought and energy into political agitation and education, it won't bring more people, particularly working class and oppressed nationality people that could make a real qualitative difference in the work. It's true as E.R. and D.S. say, electoral campaigns don't "automatically lead to over-extension." But on the other hand, launching campaigns don't "automatically" get other people involved by example either.

E.R. and D.S. also take exception with the general line our work should take as I talked about it in my article. They see two basic tendencies — one (mine) as "one-sided," appealing to middle class types and white people on moral grounds, the other appealing more to the hardest hit, most oppressed people on less liberal grounds, focusing on class and national interests. They see the second position as "unquestionably more correct" and the first one as falling into "idealist moralizing."

First off, I don't think the two sides are particularly well described. I see no reason to assume that moral appeals are only appeals to the middle class. While E.R. and D.S. chide me for making fun of somebody who just wants to save their own ass (which I don't think I do), they do seem to me to make fun of people who talk about justice as wimpy, middle-class, and white, harking on "refugees, burned and hollow-eyed children, raped nuns, etc." Frankly, I don't see anything particularly middle class or incorrect about appeals to sympathy, appeals to people's sense of moral outrage at children starving, people being forced out of their homes and off their land, and women being raped, all to further the interests of foreign capital. Having had the opportunity to work and talk with a lot of Vietnam veterans who turned against the Vietnam war, my experience is that most of them were moved first and foremost out of a sense of outrage and horror at what the US was doing to the Vietnamese people. And at least for many Central American refugees, these questions of justice are quite directly matters of class and national interest.

I think I made it clear that I'm not against using the bread and butter issue (the draining of money for war-mongering that could go to making life better for people here) and the issue of working class and oppressed nationality people from this country being sent off to get killed. My concern is that stopping here is one-sided. Neither of these issues really challenge the full meaning of US Imperialism in the world, nor will they bring a genuine spirit of internationalism to an increasingly more jingoistic US people. In my view, the justice issue is crucial and winnable, not the way Mondale and the Democrats raise it, but crucial just the same. People want something more than an accountant's analysis of how much money is being spent here and there, as the conservative George Will pointed out after one of the recent presidential debates. They — and I'm not talking just about E.R. and D.S.' middle class whites — want a broad moral vision of the world. Working class and oppressed nationality people desire this as much as anyone else. And I don't think we can win people to a very consistent world view without confronting what the US is doing to all the starving babies and raped nuns and refugees of the world.

I confess to being in some sense of the word a moralist and it's hard for me to imagine a socialist, or even a consistent progressive for that matter, who isn't. I think it's crucial for people to fight back against their own oppression and exploitation, but just as important, they must be won to fight equally hard against the vicious oppression and exploitation of others whether in the US or abroad. At the very least, they must be won to recognize it where it exists. Without that I don't see the people ever being solidly united, and I do see them being pretty often defeated.

—Nadine Myers  
November 3, 1984