

ONE PARTY SYSTEM

by
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WHAT forms of democratic government are emerging in the new Africa? And how will they evolve further in the coming period? Many commentators in the western world—and this unfortunately goes even for some well-intentioned people—look at African political structures through western eyes.

This is especially so in Britain where "the Westminster model", the two-party system, and the principle of the official Opposition are propounded as if they were synonymous with the very term "democracy".

But the people of Africa are not firmly wedded to this idea. While amongst sections of the rising African capitalist class and petty bourgeoisie there is a certain tendency to copy some of the worst features of western forms of democracy and government, especially in the realms of parliamentary procedure, the experience of trying to make use of political independence to solve the serious economic and social problems which have been left as the grim heritage of the colonial system is convincing the African people, their organisations and their most outstanding leaders that western forms of democracy do not necessarily have much relevance in Africa's present circumstances.

This was clearly brought out in the discussions in March 1959 at a seminar held at Ibadan, Nigeria, on "Representative government and National Progress" in which delegates from a number of different African territories took part.

CHANGES AND ADAPTATIONS IN NEWLY INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES

Although this was a discussion conference and no binding conclusions were reached or decisions taken, the deliberations clearly showed that "nobody wanted merely to take over institutions inherited from the colonising powers; everybody considered that there must be changes and adaptations and that newly independent countries must not be expected to govern themselves in images of the European powers" (*West Africa*, 11 April, 1959).

The inadequacy of the institutions of European capitalism for newly independent states has been sharply emphasised by President Sukarno of Indonesia in terms which have considerable relevance to the situation in Africa. Speaking at the University of Istanbul in April 1959 he said:

"We imitated the practice of Western countries in establishing a pattern of parliamentary liberal democracy which came straight from the textbooks of Western Europe and America... We swallowed it and got violent indigestion."

"... The sickness grew worse, not better, and eventually it began to menace not only the health, but even the very life of the nation... Something had to be done. We had to apply our own system of democracy, which is in harmony with the character of our nation... We had to make it possible for all sections of our society to participate in the function of government."

The essence of many of the discussions now taking place in Africa and the west regarding democracy in Africa tends to centre around the question of the two-party system and the official Opposition. Many western commentators, in recent times, have spoken in critical terms of the trend

in the new African states towards one-party systems, and in doing so have often placed indiscriminately in one basket, states where wide-spread democratic discussion and activity take place and those where extreme arbitrariness and repression reign. The government of Ghana, in particular, has come in for much criticism from such quarters, and totally misleading slogans such as "Black dictatorship" have been freely used in the British press to describe the situation in this country.

It can be argued that the one-party system is to an extent a return to or a continuation of traditional forms of African democracy in that it excludes the conception of an official opposition, of a majority and a minority. But it is not simply that. In many parts of Africa there have sprung up national parties which are the voice of the whole people and have expressed their national demands and aspirations during the struggle for political independence. Such parties embrace workers and peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeois sections, national capitalists and even sometimes chiefs; and within the ranks of such parties all patriotic and anti-colonial classes are united around the common aim of overthrowing the rule of the colonial power.

UNITY OF FORCES

Experience has taught the people that the utmost unity of their forces is essential for this task; and thus have arisen such mass parties as the Sudanese Union of Mali, the Democratic Party of Guinea, the Convention People's Party of Ghana, the United National Independence Party of Northern Rhodesia, the Zimbabwe African People's Union of Southern Rhodesia, the Malawi Congress of Nyasaland, the Tanganyika African National Union—all of them mass parties, uniting the overwhelming majority of the people for anti-imperialist and independent aims.

In a sense these mass parties are more than political parties in the normal meaning of the term; they are the national united fronts of their respective countries. In the conditions of Africa, however, where class forces are still in a process of formation, where the mobility between classes is considerable, where many workers are migrants or conscripted peasants and where many peasants are casual workers, where peasants become small traders and their sons become intellectuals, where a new bourgeoisie is even now arising from the ranks of the bigger traders and richer farmers and even from amongst those petty bourgeois forces which utilise their political positions to acquire new economic strength under such conditions, it is, perhaps, natural that mass national organisations should arise at this stage rather than specific, clearly defined class parties.

What has provoked the discussion, however, is not simply that all the healthy forces of the nation have combined in order to win

independence, but that after independence has been won and new African governments have been formed and states established, the overwhelming dominance of one-party remains. Thus in independent Guinea, Mali, Ghana and Tanganyika, for example, there is a one-party system.

DEMOCRACY

How do African leaders look at this problem? What is their view? And is it possible to equate such systems with democracy? In reply to this latter question, many western commentators would assert "No!" But African political leaders and thinkers claim that their one-party systems are in no sense a denial of democracy.

Julius Nyerere, for example, leader of the Tanganyika African National Union, states:

"We have a one-party government, to all intents and purposes a one-party state. Although our National Assembly is the same shape as the House of Commons, T.A.N.U. members sit facing as well as behind the Government benches. We make no provision for payment to the 'Leader of the Oppo-

sition' and we use Government machinery to explain the purposes of the T.A.N.U. Government to the people, and the T.A.N.U. machinery to explain Government policy... Yet I believe that Tanganyika is a thoroughly democratic country." (*East Africa and Rhodesia*: 7 December 1961)

In an interview (published in *National Guardian*, 18 September 1961) Nyerere explained that to him democracy in a poverty-stricken and recently colonial country means a united, single-minded effort for the rapid economic, social and cultural betterment of all its people. Thus presumably anything which disturbs this united effort and hampers or delays the betterment of the people cannot be regarded as working for democracy.

The same points have been stressed by Madeira Keita, Mali's Minister of the Interior.

"For us the essential thing is to mobilise all the forces of the country to move forward... Does democracy necessarily imply more than one party? We say no... At the present moment in African history there is no need to multiply parties, there is no need to give oneself

the luxury of sterile and fratricidal opposition, there is no need to give ourselves a ministerial crisis every three months, if we have decided to go for independence, to consolidate the independence of the African states and if we want to achieve unity and speedily raise from the economic and cultural point of view to the level of other countries and other peoples." (*The Voice of Africa*: October 1961)

The point has been put even more sharply by Nda-banigi Sithole who has underlined very emphatically the dangers for the new African states of an Opposition which can in reality be the pawn of imperialism and a weapon to disrupt the people's efforts to overcome the remnants of colonialism.

"The recently emancipated African countries do not place great importance on the two-party system, partly because it does not in itself guarantee democratic processes and partly because, at this particular stage of their development, and when it is realised that the former MASTER countries are only too eager to return by hook or by crook, the Opposition may only be African in appearance but European in fact. The Opposition

may have its remote controls in London, Washington, D.C., or in Paris." (*The Voice of Africa*: September 1961)

PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL UNITY

"Thus the main consideration in the minds of African national leaders is the preservation of national unity to prevent the return of colonialism, to scotch the neo-colonialist endeavours and practices of the imperialist powers, and to build up the nation; and the form which experience has tended to show to be the most suitable for these tasks, in certain African territories, is that of the single mass party.

Sithole rightly warns, however, that the new African states cannot ensure democracy solely by following a one-party system. "Neither it nor the two-party system can guarantee democracy to the peoples of Africa and to the peoples of the world. The two-party system may be European imperialism's gateway to African countries, and, equally so, the one-party system may be dictatorship's first eggs in Africa. There is no special virtue, in principle, in either the one-party system or the two-party system," argues Sithole. "It is not the form but the content that counts, and that content is the will of the majority."

Madeira Keita makes the same point. "Democracy is the management of public interests in accordance with the will of the masses, the will of the greatest number. But while we want to clean up the situation, to deprive the colonialists or the adversaries of the weapon of division... it must nevertheless be recognised that the system of a single party is not without its dangers."

These dangers, in fact, cannot be underestimated, as events in Africa in the past two years have shown only too well. Failure to recognise these dangers springs primarily from a failure to appreciate that political parties are expressions of class realities, and that in Africa, despite certain differences compared with other regions of the world, classes are in a process of formation and different class interests exist.

While accepting the mobility of classes in Africa it would be illusory to draw the conclusion that class conflicts are of no significance. Madeira Keita admits that "we obviously cannot assert that Negro African society is a classless society", but he nevertheless claims that "the differentiation of class in Africa does not imply a diversification of interests and still less an opposition of interests".

The Bourgeois Concept of "Cultural Contacts" and Colonialism

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CULTURAL CONTACTS

The "cultural contacts" concept dooms the African to poverty and ignorance.

This concept is essentially a racist one. It is an attempt to give "scientific substantiation" to a policy of segregation and racial discrimination. Malinowski said as much when he declared: "Whenever Europeans plan the settlement of a large portion of any colony, segregation and the colour bar become inevitable."

Malinowski and his associates in British social anthropology expressed the colonialist's attitude to the African peoples. He assigned to the Africans the role of a cheap labour force and denied them the right to equal development and progress.

History has rejected and smashed schemes of this sort. But such trends in anthropology are not ended, as is sometimes claimed. Malinowski has ideological heirs in one of the last bulwarks of racism, South Africa, where his ideas have found their logical embodiment in the policy of apartheid. Proof of this is a recent monograph by P. Mayer, Professor of Social Anthropology at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, called "Townsmen or Tribesmen." Here the author presents Malinowski's ideas and arguments in a somewhat modernized form. But we are certain history will disprove his concepts just as it has disproved Malinowski's.

THE social anthropology of the colonial countries, including British anthropology, developed as a discipline in answer to the needs of colonial administration. Anthropologists themselves do not deny this. They see the applied nature of their science to be one of its chief merits. In order to administer and exploit the colonies efficiently a thorough study had to be made of the colonised peoples. This applies in particular to Africa with its enormous diversity of social and economic conditions.

British anthropologists have done a vast amount of work to study the colonial peoples. Many studies are distinguished by great thoroughness and extensive factual material, and are a big help in studying the life of the African peoples.

But what we want to examine are the ends to which their work has been put, the practical use made of their scientific knowledge. To do this we shall have to look into the theoretical conclusions and practical recommendations drawn from the tremendous work done by the anthropo-

logists. Take the British "functional" school which engaged chiefly in a study of African peoples. The school is connected with a definite period in the history of African colonial oppression. It developed after the first world war when Britain embarked on the intensive development of the resources of her colonies, many of which acquired a considerable number of European colonizers. The exploited peoples were regarded purely as building material in the hands of men like Rhodes and Lugard, creators of the British colonial empire in Africa. "Functional" anthropology fulfilled a definite social purpose. An examination of it may help us better to understand some new trends in contemporary British anthropology.

THEORETICAL VIEWS

The theoretical views of "functional" school are most fully represented by Bronislaw Malinowski, creator and head of the school. Let us consider some of his theoretical principles among them his concept of "cultural contacts."

This concept is based on the proposition that there are "three cultural realities" in Africa. According to the concept, African and European societies exist separately and each develops according to its own

laws, laws that are incommensurable.

"It would be difficult," says Malinowski, "to regard the settler and his African neighbour as brethren of a large family". But as it stood the scheme did not take into account the actual state of affairs—that exploitation of the population of the African colonies by white capitalists took many different forms. Therefore, Malinowski created a "third cultural reality." This is a special world where black and white co-operate. It differs both from the European and the African worlds; and also has its own laws. It is from this triple formula that Malinowski studies the African peoples. What role does the scheme allot them?

The third, artificially-constructed world is where the process of contacts and changes takes place. Influence and initiative come from the "organisational forces of Western civilisation" and are directed against the "passive tribal forces." But even the changes allowed for in the triple scheme take place in a no-man's land and hence do not affect the life of African society. In town, in a "situation of contacts," for example, the African lives according to one set of laws. When he returns to the reserve, the village, he moves into another world, a world

of tribal culture and a tribal way of life. Such an interpretation, it is obvious, denies the African the possibility of and right to social progress, denies him the possibility of any sort of social development.

SOCIOLOGICAL ATTEMPT

This was a sociological attempt to justify a policy aimed at preserving the archaic institutions of African society. With the help of this policy the colonialists hoped to be able to maintain their rule. Great emphasis was placed on leaving the institution of tribal chiefs intact.

As the "functional" school saw it, the chiefs would help to keep the tribes backward. Consequently, says Malinowski, "the real problem of contact, which the anthropologist is bound to assess, depends then largely on how to strengthen financially, politically and legally the present-day chief under present-day conditions."

The "functional" school can see the economic advantages of this policy "for, owing to the forces of traditional generosity, the strong vitality of kinship obligations and neighbourly kindness, the unemployed can return to the reserves and share the pittance of tribal subsistence economy