

DOUBLE ANNIVERSARY— AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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THE launching of *Labour Monthly* in July 1921 coincided with the formation of South Africa's Communist Party: the first on the continent of Africa. This double anniversary has significance beyond the coincidence of date. It was part of the post-October strivings of the various detachments of the international labour movement to create new theoretical and organisational frameworks for the struggle against imperialism, the advance towards socialism and the defence of the first workers' state.

In its very first issue *Labour Monthly* thundered against the 'appalling cruelties' and ravages of imperialism on the African continent and exposed the so-called 'sacred trust' of British colonial administration as being exercised on behalf of the economic interests of imperialism and the white settler*. But what the Establishment chooses to call the 'traditional ties' between Britain and South Africa began increasingly to express itself at the other, and more meaningful, level: at the level of a growing sector of the British labour movement which broke with big power domination and made common cause with the colonial world. *Labour Monthly's* half century of analytical evangelism in the cause of socialism and the colonial people everywhere won it and R.P.D. a special place in the affection of the South African revolutionary movement. In the early war days, when the importation of *Labour Monthly* into South Africa was banned, the South African Party evaded the prohibition by reprinting and circulating a number of issues of R.P.D.'s 'Notes of the Month'.

The face of the world, and with it Africa, has changed since the July days of 1921. The then beleaguered first workers' state proved to be the starting point for the emergence of socialist forms of government on a world scale and most of the plundered African continent has taken significant strides towards asserting its independence and sovereignty. It is no doubt true that even in politically independent Africa foreign control has not been finally eradicated. But, whilst imperialism has sought to continue its domination by other means, it has been compelled to do so from weakness rather than strength and the new conditions in which it

* 'Economic Imperialism and the "Sacred Trust"', by Leonard Woolf, *Labour Monthly*, Vol 1, No. 1, July 1921.

is forced to operate create problems for imperialism (more or less severe in different countries) which are not insignificant.

Although most of the Third World—including Africa—is still part of the capitalist economic system, it does have a degree of independent political choice which, reinforced by support from the socialist world, has in fact often asserted itself. But many complexities and weaknesses remain. They stem from a legacy of material backwardness, an imbalance in economic development and the consequent inchoate state of class stratification. The process of class formation gives a special stamp to the dynamics of struggle in many parts of Africa and the classical tendencies are sometimes reversed with control over the instruments of production often being competed for via political control of the administration.

The relationship between national and class struggle, between the continuing fight for true national independence and the question of which class is gaining hegemony internally remains a challenging theoretical and practical problem which can only be effectively dealt with by indigenous Marxist vanguard groupings. The absence of such groupings in most of politically independent Africa is an obvious source of grave weakness.

The white oligarchy in the South with its mirror image in Zimbabwe and its Portuguese allies remains dominant, if not unchallenged, in its citadels. It has become the last outpost of direct, unashamed domination in the old style and constitutes a threat and a challenge to the gains of the African revolution.

The unabated struggle to resist and destroy foreign domination has given birth to movements rich in revolutionary experience. The emergence of a modern proletariat in the most developed part of our continent understandably led to the creation of the continent's first Marxist-workers' organisation—the Communist Party of South Africa. In the course of its long history the SACP has elaborated its own theory of the South African revolution—the most concise and all-round definition of which is contained in its programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*, which was adopted in 1962 at an underground conference.

Between the first conference on July 30, 1921, and the 1962 conference, a fundamental reshaping had taken place in the Communist approach to many of the basic problems of the South African revolution: its theory and its strategy and tactics. In regard to some particulars the changes were in response to a changing situation. But in regard to others the changing situation served only to put in question some earlier assumptions about the fundamental

character of the political conflict, the main forces of change and indeed the precise character and role of the Party itself. The earlier conference posited, as an immediate task, an advance to a classless society with the industrial workers—then predominantly white—providing the 'stormtroops' of the approaching revolution. The 1962 programme set out a perspective of a national democratic revolution whose main content is the liberation of the African people.

It was, of course, exceedingly difficult for those early Communists—brave men and utterly selfless in the cause of socialism—to recognise in that incipient stage of class and national stratification, the true character of the process that was taking place. After all the white worker had not yet won for himself the almost unconditional place at the ruler's table which he has today, and he was driven, in his undoubted militancy, by a mixture of motives and aims which included a blurred rejection of capitalism. The black worker neither had effective industrial organisation nor a national consciousness or national movement which held out a promise of revolutionary upsurge.

The 1962 programme represents a synthesis of the various tendencies in the movement relating to class struggle and the struggle for national liberation. This synthesis is based on the belief that just as it is impossible to conceive of workers' power in South Africa without national liberation so it is impossible to conceive of national liberation without at least some radical socialist solutions. The broad coincidence of aims between the Communist Party and the national liberation movement is the culmination of a long historical process. The Communist Party moved away from the arid cry for soviet power which ignored the national element, and the national movement advanced from its wishy washy, cap-in-hand nationalism. The process was a two-way one and the mutual impact of the working class and national movements is in evidence today both in the programmatic sphere and in the close working relationship which has evolved between all sectors of the revolutionary movement.

The programme at one and the same time proclaims the vanguard character of the SACP and the primary national organisation—the African National Congress—as standing at the head of the liberation alliance. Have South African Communists gone so far in their embrace of the national factor that they have abrogated their traditional claim to be a vanguard Party? Only doctrinaire reasoning would lead to such a conclusion. If the main content of South Africa's revolution is the liberation of the nationally oppressed

majority, true vanguardism demands a strategy and an amalgam of political forces which reflect this reality.

The existence of an independent Marxist vanguard in South Africa has proved to be an indispensable political instrument not only for the working class but also for the broad mass of the nationally oppressed people.

The complex interplay of class and national factors which occurs in its sharpest form in the South demanded profound theoretical and practical solutions. Africa is of course a varied continent with localised conditions. Valid generalisations about specific areas can, in the last resort, only properly be made by indigenous revolutionary movements. But the experience of the South African Communist Party especially on the relationship between class and national factors and the crucial role of a Marxist Party, has a broad relevance which extends beyond the confines of South Africa's borders.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

Diplomacy of Aggression, V. Issraeljan and L. Kutakov. Progress Publishers (Central Books), 438 pp., £1.25.

The British Academics, A. H. Halsey and Martin Trow. Faber, 560 pp., £5.

Democracy, Dorothy Pickles. Methuen, 200 pp., 90p.

The English and Immigration, John A. Garrard. Oxford University Press, 244 pp., £3.25.

Intelligence, Psychology and Education, Brian Simon. Lawrence & Wishart, 280 pp., £3.

The Apparatus of the Law (Law, Class and Society, Book 2), D. N. Pritt. Lawrence & Wishart, 128 pp., £2.

The Paris Commune 1871, Stewart Edwards. Eyre & Spottiswoode, 418 pp., £4.50.

The Politics of Government Growth, William C. Lubenov. David & Charles, 238 pp., £3.50.

The History of Working Class Housing, edited by Stanley D. Chapman. David & Charles, 308 pp., £4.75.

Society of the Future, August Bebel. Progress Publishers (Central Books), 154 pp., 20p.

Soviet Union Today, N. Georgiyev. Progress Publishers (Central Books), 174 pp., 30p.

Socialist Society: Scientific Principles of Development, G. Glezerman. Progress Publishers (Central Books), 272 pp., 75p.

Lenin's Ideas Transform the World, various contributors. Novosti Press Agency, 324 pp., 50p.

Leninism and the World Revolutionary Working-Class Movement, various contributors. Progress Publishers (Central Books), 496 pp., £1.25.

A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Karl Marx. Lawrence & Wishart, 264 pp., £1.50.

The Life of Robert Owen Written by Himself, introduced by John Butt. Charles Knight, 250 pp., £3.

Through the Bridewell Gate, Tom MacIntyre. Faber, 220 pp., £2.25.