

The Common Struggle of the British and Colonial Peoples

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NO one could deny the impact that the sweeping advances of the African liberation movement are making in this country today. It has become a commonplace to call 1960 "Africa Year", and the first few months of the year have certainly lived up to the title, with the announcement of independence for the Belgian Congo in June, the Kenya Constitutional Conference, the controversy over the South African boycott and the tightrope walking of Mr. Macmillan during his African tour—to mention only a few of the new developments which have hit the headlines.

In this country, support for the struggles of the African people is growing, but not as rapidly as the situation requires. It is therefore opportune for us to examine the relation between our struggles here and the struggles of the colonial peoples.

How do these struggles affect the British Labour movement? The tradition of international working class solidarity is deep-rooted in Britain and as old as the Labour movement itself. It is based on the idea that the workers and oppressed peoples of all countries are fighting against the same enemy as we are.

The Common Enemy

Today one only has to look at a list of firms operating in the colonies to see that this is true. For instance the name of Taylor Woodrow is only too well known to building workers in this country, but it can also be seen on the construction jobs in Ghana, where Taylor Woodrow (Ghana) Ltd. have just got a contract worth £423,000 for road reconstruction, and in Nigeria, where Taylor Woodrow (Nigeria) Ltd. are to reconstruct Kano airport for £250,000. Glaxo Laboratories have just opened a factory for groundnut flour in Lagos, Nigeria, and are hoping to develop a "large and diversified business in food and pharmaceuticals in West Africa". In Bulawayo, Rhodesia, the Metal Box Company has bought 13 acres close to the Dunlop factory and is investing £400,000 to open and equip a new factory.

"The Oxo Cube continued to flourish", states the Liebig's Extract of Meat Company, declaring themselves very satisfied with their operations in East and Central Africa and announcing a profit of £2,106,000 before tax. Other large concerns active in Africa as well as here are: I.C.I., Imperial Tobacco, British Motor Corporation, General Electric, Unilevers, Royal Dutch Shell, to mention only a few.

A survey of 130 large companies carried out by the Institute of Economic Affairs noted that in 1958 these companies, who employed 1,413,000 workers in this country, also employed 308,000 workers overseas, and many of these will have been in the colonies.

A full examination of the interests of Tory M.P.s would show how many of them have interests in the colonies, but here are a few outstanding examples. Before he took office, Julian Amery was a Director of the British South Africa Company, which draws royalties from Rhodesian copper. Duncan Sandys was formerly a director of two West African gold mining companies, the Ashanti Goldfields and Bibiani. C. J. Holland-Martin is on the Standard Bank of South Africa, the Uganda Co., Nyasaland Railways, and many other companies. Sir. H. D'Avigdor-Goldsmid is on the East African Estates Company, and F. W. Harris on the East African subsidiaries of Marshall's Universal, which operates in Kenya.

Although many more facts could be given, I think these are sufficient to indicate that the same monopolists, and the Tory politicians who represent their interests, exploit both the colonial and the British people.

Now let us look at the stage reached both in Britain and in the colonial countries in the fight against the common enemy. In Britain, monopoly capitalism, drawing a great deal of its strength from the colonies is still strong, and although the wages and tenants' struggles and the fight for peace are developing, imperialist and reformist ideas are deeply rooted even among the workers, and the grip of the right wing on the Labour, trade union and Co-operative machine is still strong. On the other hand, especially in Africa, the peoples of the colonial and underdeveloped coun-

tries are sweeping forward to new victories and are in the forefront of the struggle against imperialism. Their struggles are being fought against tremendous odds and the development is uneven but, nevertheless, the speed of advance is tremendous.

Today, therefore, it is more important than ever for the British people to aid the struggle of the colonial peoples, because it is they who represent the sharpest threat to the huge monopolies who hold both Britain and the colonies in their grip. We are also in a favourable position to do this because we have many democratic rights, the right to strike, to free speech, to demonstrate and to march, which are denied the colonial peoples.

Solidarity

Our solidarity can take two main forms, on the one hand the mobilising of opinion against the colonial policy of the Government, and on the other various forms of practical aid. The working class and the Labour movement must naturally be the main force in this solidarity movement, but many other sections of the people can be drawn into the struggle as well.

Ever since its formation forty years ago, the Communist Party has constantly striven, both by its own propaganda and activities and by working with other organisations, to show the British people what imperialism means, and to aid the struggles of the colonial peoples. Our efforts have been directed to bringing wider sections of the people into the struggle against imperialism.

In recent years there has been a big change in the attitude of the Labour movement. For instance, in 1958 very few annual conferences of trade unions passed resolutions on colonial questions. But in 1959 ten of the big trade union conferences passed resolutions, either on Nyasaland or on Tory colonial policy in general, and many more had resolutions on the agenda which they did not reach.

The change is shown most markedly in the growth of the Movement for Colonial Freedom and the strengthening of its policy and activity. This organisation is now backed by over 100 M.P.s, thirteen national trade unions and over 900 Labour Parties, trade union branches, Co-operative Parties and Women's Guilds. The objects of the Movement for Colonial Freedom (M.C.F.) are to work in support of the right of all peoples to independence (self-government and self-determination), and freedom from external, political, economic or military domination; the genuine application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and the replacement of

imperialism by international co-operation, including technical and economic aid, between free partners.

During 1959 the M.C.F. together with the Committee of African Organisations, carried out a great deal of activity and solidarity with the peoples of Nyasaland, the Rhodesias, Kenya and South Africa. A deep impression has been made on Labour gatherings by the speeches of Kanjama Chiume and Joshua Nkomo and other African leaders. The M.C.F. is now asking British trade unionists to sign a message of greeting to the Founding Congress of the African Federation of Trade Unions taking place in Casablanca, Morocco, in May, and the first 500 to sign this message were engineers lobbying their employers on wages in Tothill Street on January 26th.

The vicious *apartheid* policy of the South African Government has aroused great indignation in this country. Chief Luthuli and other South African leaders pay tribute to the work done by Christian Action over the last three years in raising funds for the victims of the Treason Trial. The reaction to the banishment of Mrs. Mafekeng, mother of eleven children, and president of the South African Canning Workers' Union, was so great that it brought immediate protest from the General Council of the T.U.C.

The boycott movement started by the South African National Congress last August was supported from its inception by the Communist Party, the *Daily Worker*, the Movement for Colonial Freedom, the Committee of African Organisations and a number of Labour, Liberal and other progressive people. Imports of South African tinned fruit fell by £2 million in 1959. The call of the National Council of Labour on January 19th this year for a boycott month from March 1st-31st has met with widespread support, but has also aroused considerable controversy. The call is for individual action, and the Co-operative Union has advised retail societies not to operate a ban on South African goods in their shops. This attitude has been opposed by many co-operators; the South Suburban Co-operative Society has already decided to ban South African goods, and a petition to requisition a special meeting to discuss the boycott has been signed by members of the London Co-operative Society.

The question of industrial action, although not recommended by the T.U.C., has aroused considerable discussion in Covent Garden market and other enterprises. On January 17th, 250 delegates from London organisations attended the boycott conference, and the London Boycott Campaign Committee is now encouraging the setting up of borough Boycott Committees.

Solidarity in Strikes

A great weakness in the movement at present is the lack of solidarity with African workers on strike. Ever since the magnificent solidarity of the Australian workers who in 1888 sent £30,000 to the London dockers striking for a tanner an hour there has been in all capitalist countries a deep-rooted tradition of solidarity with workers on strike. Yet this tradition does not seem to extend to solidarity with African trade unionists on strike. In December last thousands of railwaymen in Kenya and Uganda were on strike for some weeks, demanding a living wage. Yet neither the British railway unions nor any other unions to my knowledge sent messages of support, let alone gave the financial aid that British workers were so generously given in 1888 and to an even greater extent during the miners' lock-out and General Strike of 1926.

The main responsibility for this lies at the door of the right-wing leaders of the T.U.C., who not only do not give the call for solidarity, but use the money given by British workers to the colonial Solidarity Fund to back up unrepresentative trade unions in the colonies against militant trade unions.¹

The founding of the African Federation of Trade Unions will raise the question of whether this fund should not be paid direct to the Federation to ensure its control by the Africans themselves, instead of the two main forces in the I.C.F.T.U. who are at present at loggerheads over the question of Africa—the American A.F.L. and C.I.O. and the British T.U.C.

In the meantime contact between individual unions here and in the colonies can be most valuable. Some time ago U.S.D.A.W. invited a representative of the Northern Rhodesian trade unions to their annual conference, and his speech made a deep impression. Opportunities of this kind are much greater now that so many African leaders are coming to this country and at a meeting in the House of Commons the other day Mr. Mayanza Chona, of the Northern Rhodesian United National Independence Party, said that he had come to this country mainly to find out the reactions of ordinary people and was most willing to speak at meetings, because that would give him a chance to test opinion in this country on Central African Federation.

At present the main emphasis in the fight of the African people is for human rights and dignity, for democratic liberties and political sovereignty, but as they gain their political independence new problems arise. This is sharply illustrated by

Ghana. Political independence was gained three years ago, but Ghana is meeting with considerable difficulty in changing its economy and only 5 per cent of the foreign trade is in the hands of Africans.

The question arises as to how such countries will succeed in throwing off the economic, financial and military shackles of imperialism, developing their own basic industry, a balanced economy, and raising the standard of living of the whole population. There is no doubt that the effect of trade and aid from the socialist countries will become an increasingly important factor in its process. Also as their industry develops the working class in these newly independent countries will grow in numbers and strength, and the question of class solidarity between them and British workers will become increasingly important.

Fight Against Imperialist Ideas

Although, as I have shown, solidarity with the colonial peoples is growing, it is held back by deep-rooted imperialist ideas among the British people and even among British workers. Therefore a sharp fight is needed against these ideas and I want to examine some of those which are most widespread.

Racial prejudice

Capitalism breeds racial prejudice and promotes racial discrimination. The idea that colonial peoples, and especially coloured people, are inferior has become deeply rooted among British people from the days of the slave trade, and has been growing through three centuries of colonialism. It is obviously of benefit to colonisers to regard their victims as inferior, and as early as 1550 a Spanish slave-trader attempted to justify slavery by asserting that American Indians were "as different from Spaniards as cruelty is from kindness, and as monkeys are from men". These ideas still persist in their most virulent form among the supporters of *apartheid* in South Africa.

It has also suited the ruling class to fan racial prejudice in order to divert the working class from the struggle against its real enemies, and the Nazis used and still use anti-Semitism for this purpose. In the same way Mosley is stirring up hatred against West Indians in this country in order to make a political comeback. These people find fertile ground for racial prejudice because many workers who suffer from bad housing or fear unemployment find it easier to blame the coloured family down the road than to understand and tackle the real cause of their grievances.

These racial prejudices have to be fought, both by fact and argument and by developing joint

¹ See Idris Cox: "Queer Concepts of Solidarity", *World News*, March 8th, 1958.

struggle. Although only a small minority of British people accept the far-fetched racialist "theories" of the fascists, probably most British people have some mistaken ideas which feed the notion of superior and inferior races.

In this connection the series of booklets published by U.N.E.S.C.O. on "The Race Question in Modern Science", and available from H.M. Stationery Office, would repay much wider study. It is impossible in this article to go into all the scientific evidence which they provide to show that there is no scientific basis for racial or colour prejudice.

However I should like to make just two quotations from them. One is from Professor Dunn, who writes:

"Biologically, then, men belong to one mating circle, and share in a common pool of genes. There is thus no biological justification for race hatred or prejudice. One should be careful to recognise this prejudice for what it is, and not try to conceal it behind a 'scientific' rationalisation."

The other is from Professor Comas who asserts that:

"All the evidence of biology, anthropology, evolution and genetics demonstrates that racial discrimination on grounds of colour is a myth without the slightest scientific warrant, and hence that the supposed 'racial inferiority of coloured peoples' is untrue. It is unfavourable environmental, political and social-economic factors which alone keep these groups at their present level."

Today, when African leaders like Mr. Tom Mboya are showing themselves more than a match for their questioners on TV and radio, one might think it unnecessary to bring forward these arguments. But unfortunately prejudice dies hard, and people only too often think with two minds. The other day an active and militant trade unionist said to me: "But of course these 'Darkies' have never contributed anything to human culture"—although he had just bought a ticket for the *Daily Worker* Anniversary Meeting at the Albert Hall largely because Paul Robeson will be there.

The idea of the inferiority of the coloured peoples is fed by the fact that imperialism has deliberately maintained their countries as sources of raw materials and primary products. In this connection Basil Davidson in his book *Old Africa Rediscovered* has done a service by showing that the disparity between the social, economic and cultural level of Africa and Europe only dates from the industrial revolution. African civilisation is, in fact, older than ours, and in the Middle Ages and even up to the eighteenth century, travellers were impressed not by the "barbarism" of

Africa but by its wealth and the diversity of its trade and culture. The trade route across Northern Africa from Nigeria to the Red Sea was in use over 2,000 years ago. It is only in the last twenty years that archaeologists and historians have really started to study the history of Africa, and much of this history still remains to be uncovered. On page 23 Basil Davidson writes:

"What this new outline suggests is something neither 'inferior' nor 'mysterious' but a story of success and failure, disaster, resurgence and fulfilment, which is no different in its essence than the story of any of the major families of man. The rediscovery of Africa goes indeed towards the recognition of the essential unity of the people of Africa with the people of the rest of the world."

It is modern capitalism—which because of special geographical and economic conditions developed first in Europe—that has enabled the ruling class of these countries to rob, plunder and dominate older civilisations.² Once capitalist exploitation has been ended such disparities are quickly overcome as is shown by the way in which the most backward areas of the old Tsarists' "prisonhouse of nations" have developed since the Russian revolution and by the way in which the Chinese—formerly dubbed by many "a nation of coolies"—have amazed the whole world by their progress. Once the African people get the chance their progress will be no less spectacular, and the more thoroughly we expose racial prejudice the more effectively we shall be able to help them.

However, racial prejudice is countered by actions as well as by words. The class solidarity and militancy shown by West Indians in the bus strike of 1958 did more than many arguments to break down racial prejudice among transport workers. Wherever Tenants' Associations include both white and coloured families it is difficult for fascists to stir up race hatred. Similarly the more British workers are won for support for the boycott of South African goods, the demand for the release of Banda and Kenyatta and the message to the Federation of African Trade Unions, the easier it will be to undermine the imperialist ideas which are holding back the common struggle.

Finally on this question of racial and colour prejudice, it is necessary to remind white people that in this modern age, the peoples of the world are more interdependent than ever before and it is certainly not in the interests of white people to

² The reasons why capitalism developed first in Western Europe are dealt with by M. H. Dobb in his book *Studies in the Development of Modern Capitalism*.

antagonise the coloured people, who form three-fifths of the world's population.

Can we do without Colonies?

Both the capitalists and the right-wing Labour leaders have always maintained that colonies are essential to Britain's prosperity. Even today, the main idea running through Labour's *Economic Policy for the Colonies* is that the British people should make a sacrifice in order to invest 1 per cent of their national income in the colonies in order to assist the colonial peoples. Even some Labour M.P.s who consider themselves "Left" tell British workers that if they want freedom for the colonies they must be prepared to face a drop in their own standard of living.

What is the real position? Is the empire a benefit or a burden to the British people? Has it ever been of benefit?

Cecil Rhodes regarded imperialism as necessary to prevent civil war in Britain, and the development of the empire certainly gave a new lease of life to the British capitalists and enabled them to delay socialist revolution. Today, when one-third of the world is socialist, the oldest working class movement has not yet achieved the socialist aims of some of the Chartist leaders of a hundred years ago. Although Marx and Engels developed their theory, wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in Britain and drew a great deal from the experience of the British working class, we have not yet achieved socialism.

By exploiting vast new areas, opening up new sources of raw materials and exploiting the colonial peoples, the British ruling class were able to buy off the more skilled, better organised and more vocal sections of the British working class. They were able to corrupt many working class leaders and maintain the domination of the right wing because super profits from the colonies gave them the power to manoeuvre. Nevertheless, *the majority* of the working class lived in appalling conditions, and in the heyday of British imperialism between 1910 and 1914, Sir Leo Chiozza Money in his book *Riches and Poverty* calculated that out of a total population of 43 million, 38 million people fell into the category of poor people and 13 million of these were on the verge of hunger.

Seeing the contrast between living standards in Britain and in the colonies today, many people assume that the British working class as a whole has benefited from imperialism. I think the truth is that both colonial and British people suffer from imperialism, although it is obvious that the colonial people suffer much more. The appallingly low standards in the colonies are due

to the way in which imperialism has kept these countries as sources of raw materials and prevented the development of modern industry, while destroying their traditional economy and using armed force to drive the peasants from the land and into the plantations, and arrest, imprisonment and police intimidation to hamper the development of their trade unions.

On the other hand capitalism in its own interests was forced to create a large skilled and educated working class in this country. Over two centuries of struggle the British working class has won the right to organise and many other valuable democratic liberties. Yet despite the fact that improvements in the social services and in the standards of living in Britain have been won through working-class struggle the exploitation of the British working class has not lessened but increased. The gap between what the workers receive and what they produce is even greater today than ever before.

The British people have also paid for the cost of empire in two world wars, in colonial wars from the Boer War to the war in Malaya, now in its twelfth year, and which has cost the British taxpayer £1,000 million to date. They have shared and still share with the colonial people the cost of maintaining British domination by armies of occupation throughout the world, and education and other social services are slashed to pay for the huge and increasing expenditure on arms.

Whatever doubts may remain about the past, it should be clear that today the whole future of the British people is threatened by the continued existence of imperialism. Because of their fear of socialism, and their determination to hang on to the colonies, the monopolists have accepted American overlordship, have leased British land for American H-bomb bases and have put the British people in deadly peril of annihilation in a nuclear war.

All this is taking place in the face of the unconquerable struggle of the colonial peoples for political, financial and economic independence. The era of imperialism is doomed, the choice before the British people is either to side with the imperialists and pay the cost of endless exhausting struggles to maintain colonial domination or to work together with the colonial peoples to bring an end to imperialism.

Yet the sceptics still ask how 50 million people can exist on this island without an empire. The answer is clearly given in our Communist programme, *The British Road to Socialism*. The only possible future for the British people lies in voluntary and mutually beneficial economic and cultural co-operation between Britain and the rest

of the world, including the former colonial countries.

Once this position is grasped and fully accepted there need be no fear about Britain's future. When the underdeveloped countries have full control of their own resources, British industry can be kept busy for generations in providing them with the machine tools and manufactured goods they will need to carry through the industrialisation of their countries. Trade between Britain and these countries will expand vastly as their standard of living rises. At the same time a socialist Britain will build up a much more balanced economy, with better use of our own resources.

Of course this means that the British people will have to deal with the small group of monopolists who dominate this country at present. But the important point to understand is that every victory of the colonial peoples undermines the strength of the British monopolists and so helps our struggle against them. Thus the struggle against imperialism is for the British people an essential part of their struggle for socialism.

Lenin and Stalin showed that imperialism, by drawing the whole world into its orbit, brought together the struggle of the workers in the metropolitan countries for socialism, and the colonial peoples' struggle for independence.

In summing up the Leninist theses on the "National Problem", Stalin gave ten points of which the following, put very briefly [*Leninism*, by J. Stalin, page 54], are the ones which concern us most in this connection:

(i) The colonies and dependent countries constitute a huge reserve and great source of strength for finance capital in the handful of imperialist countries who (up to November 1917) exploited the whole world; (ii) the colonies and dependent countries were already starting to take the path to liberation and this would inevitably lead to the crisis of world capitalism; (iii) the interests of the working class in the imperialist countries and the national liberation movement in the colonies call for the merging of their struggles into a common front against the common enemy—imperialism; (iv) this common front is impossible unless the workers in the imperialist countries aid the struggles of the colonial peoples and steadfastly work for the right of all nations to self-determination and independence.

Unfortunately, because of the strength of reformism in Britain the common interests have not been fully understood, and what is objectively a common struggle has not become a conscious struggle waged by the whole of the Labour movement, although the revolutionary section of the movement has consistently striven for this.

In the Russian Revolution, because of the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, the struggles of the workers, peasants and colonial peoples of the former Russian Empire were merged into one common struggle with a common strategy and tactics. This led to the victory of the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, and the solving of the national problem because it is a voluntary union in which every nation has autonomy and the right of secession, and each nation, large or small, has equal representation in the Council of Nationalities whose consent must be obtained to all laws.

Today, in the British Empire and Commonwealth, the position is entirely different because British imperialism, although considerably weakened, is still strong and the right-wing leadership still dominates the British Labour movement; and in most of the colonies, the liberation movement is led by the national bourgeoisie and not by the working class. Therefore, although objectively the British and colonial peoples are involved in a common struggle and every victory of one aids the other, the common consciousness and leadership is to a large extent lacking. Therefore the problem is how to strengthen and develop the understanding among British people of the common aims and interests and prove to the colonial peoples that they have allies within the imperialist countries.

Colonial Solidarity Strengthens the British Labour Movement

Solidarity with the colonial peoples strengthens the British workers' fight in more ways than one. The most important, of course, is that it helps the colonial peoples to weaken our main enemy, but it has other good effects as well.

One of the biggest weaknesses of the movement in this country is disunity and the bans and proscriptions by which the right wing seeks to isolate the Communists. It is no accident that the strongest and most consistent broad organisations which include Labour people, trade unionists, co-operators and Communists, are those concerned with the colonial struggle. The Movement for Colonial Freedom is outstanding, but there are many others, including the Committee of African Organisations, the South African Freedom Association, and the Boycott Campaign Committee.

At the boycott conference, Tories, Liberals, Labour people and Communists were all present and spoke in the discussion, although the platform included all parties except the Communist Party.

There are two reasons why it is possible to get a wider unity on colonial issues than on most other questions. One reason is that over the last

few years a policy, at least on all the immediate issues, has gradually come to be adopted by large sections of Labour people, many trade unions and co-operative societies, which is completely in line with the demands of the colonial peoples themselves. On these issues the Communist Party has no difference with other sections, although some of them would not fully support the perspective of our programme, *The British Road to Socialism*. This means that there is an agreed programme on which wide sections can co-operate.

The other reason why it is more difficult for the right wing to prevent united action on colonial issues is that the bans and proscriptions which have been imposed in the British Labour movement in varying degrees ever since 1923 have no meaning for the colonial peoples. They simply say that they are ready to work with all those who support their cause, and anyone who tries to oppose this eminently reasonable proposition cannot help appearing rather foolish.

In the course of developing solidarity with the colonial peoples, the British working class changes itself, because this struggle undermines imperialist ideas and reformist illusions. Instead of "We've never had it so good", Macmillan was met by "We've never had it so bad" when he went to South Africa, and that is true for colonial peoples everywhere. Once people here have become aware of the appalling conditions and crying injustices in the colonies and try to do something about them, they begin to see the need for really radical change, and are ready to think more deeply about the need for socialism.

Colonial solidarity helps to develop a wider unity of all those who are against the policies of the most reactionary circles of monopoly capitalism. On many issues it is possible to get the support of the Liberals, and even some Tories are critical of the Government's colonial policy. The Bow Group have opposed Central African Federation, and in the Oxford Union many young Tories supported the motion for the release of

Dr. Banda during the debate when Mr. Macmillan was present.

Many who are most fervent in their support of the colonial peoples are very suspicious of anyone whose support is based on moral grounds. They stress that it is in the interests of the British people to support the colonial peoples, and describe anyone who is actuated simply by a sense of injustice as "paternalistic". Of course colonial people correctly object to anything in the nature of charity and point out that their liberation is as much in our interests as theirs. However, the hatred of injustice and solidarity with the heroic struggles of those fighting for freedom has been an important factor throughout history.

It was just 100 years ago that because of their hatred of slavery Lancashire textile workers strongly supported the Northern States in the American Civil War and prevented the British Government from importing cotton from the South, although this meant unemployment and semi-starvation for themselves and their families.

I am convinced that today the heroic struggles of the African people against tremendous odds—like the South African women who march with their babies on their backs facing police intimidation and imprisonment, the deep conviction and sense of human dignity with which leaders like Chief Luthuli present their case—have a tremendous appeal to all those in all sections of the population who value justice and freedom.

In conclusion, then, the struggle of the colonial peoples for freedom is an inseparable part of our own struggle against the Tories and monopoly capitalism for peace and socialism. Every victory they win aids us and by helping them we are strengthening our struggle. There are many difficulties to be overcome if the British Labour movement is to use its full strength to aid this struggle, but awareness of the need to do this is growing, and we must use all our efforts to speed up the process.