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B.R. Mann article from Marxism Today, March 1959 continued from p. 17 of File Forman .002 end ..."into a single state."

### Economic Community and Capitalist Market

In Potekhin's view the words "economic community" or "common economy" in the Marxist definition of the nation are virtually synonymous with "capitalist market". For he believes that the economic community can only come into existence when exchange relations have become regular and essential, while in the pre-capitalist period they were "sporadic and not at all essential".

According to Marx this is not the point of the distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of economy: but in the former the production and exchange of commodities are subordinate, whereas in the latter they predominate over all other relations of production. A national market therefore existed before the bourgeoisie took hold of it, although it may appear puny and insignificant as compared with the enormous development this market was given under capitalism.

There is nothing accidental in the choice of the term "economic community" and not "capitalist market" for the purpose of the definition of the nation. It indicates that the scope of the concept "nation" cannot be narrowed down to include only capitalist nations. Capitalism does not create the nations, on the contrary, it presupposes their existence.

Capitalism has, however, made a very considerable contribution to the consolidation and development of many nations, which is by no means to the advantage of the bourgeoisie alone. The erection of an independent, sovereign national state, e.g. is an objective in which all classes of the nation are equally interested. This contribution is well summed up by Lenin:

"Throughout the world, the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism was linked up with national movements. The economic basis of these movements is that in order to achieve complete victory for commodity production the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, must have politically united territories with a population speaking the same language, while all the obstacles to the development of this language and its consolidation in literature are removed. Language is the most important means of human intercourse; unity of language and unimpeded development are the most important conditions of a genuinely free and extensive commercial turnover corresponding to modern capitalism, of a free and broad grouping



of the population in all their separate classes; finally, they are a condition for the close connection between the market and each and every proprietor and petty proprietor, seller and buyer.

" The formation of national states, under which the requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied, is therefore the tendency of every national movement." (Selected Works, Vol. 4, pp. 250-251.

This balanced assessment of the importance of capitalist development in the life of many nations does not preclude the possibility that in the experience of the majority of the nations of the world, especially the nations of Asia and Africa, it may be comparatively shortlived and of relatively little consequence. Capitalist economic and political relations are more beneficial to a nation's development than feudal relations, but socialist relations even more so. The bourgeoisie seeks to establish a national state; but even that is perfectly achieved only under socialism. Something as fundamental as the nation cannot be made dependent on something as transient as capitalism.

China may serve as an outstanding example. In all the long history of this great nation one can at best define a very brief period during which capitalist relations dominated in parts of Chinese territory. Neither the Chinese capitalist class nor the capitalist class of any foreign power ever succeeded in bringing the whole of China under its undisputed sway. Today China is marching to socialism and communism with seven-league boots. It would seem pointless on such grounds to refuse to speak of a Chinese nation, when among all the other attributes of the nation it possesses a national culture not only universally admired but ante-dating the capitalist period by many centuries.

If the proposition that capitalist relations are an indispensable condition for the existence of nations cannot be sustained, it follows that the presence or absence of capitalism has no bearing on the existence or non-existence of the nations of Africa.

#### Evolution or Revolution ?

During the latter half of the nineteenth century there arose a school of thought which became known as evolutionism. In brief, it consisted of a mechanical application of Darwin's theories of biological evolution to social development and led to the conclusion that Victorian England represented the acme of all creation.

Evolutionism was grist of the mills of the empire builders. It served to justify the scramble for Africa and colonialism in general in the eyes of the mass of the ordinary people as a "civilising mission". Evolutionism did not bother about evidence: for all nations not of the "superior civilised races" were a priori classed as "primitive tribes", legally non-existent, *res nullius*.

Evidence from Africa, in so far as it was available, spoke en-



tirely against this classification of the African peoples. It therefore became necessary to drown it in a flood of highly imaginative and totally misleading literature in order to sustain the sense of mission in the increasing numbers of people required to service the empire and to still the voices of protest at home.

Occasional glimpses of the truth could not be entirely suppressed, of course; they were invariably registered with expressions of surprise and astonishment, and promptly classified as "exceptions". As time went on, however, and acquaintance with Africa and its peoples improved, European anthropologists began to find it irksome perpetually to have to register surprises, and not to the advantage of their studies to continue using concepts both liable to cause offence and unsuited to the description of African conditions.

Having observed that neither the economies nor the beliefs and social and political institutions of the African peoples correspond to nineteenth-century conceptions of primitive society as described, among others, by Morgan for certain North American Indian tribes, many anthropologists are drawing the remarkable inference that primitive society is quite different from this picture. In this way they try to convince us that they have disposed not only of nineteenth-century evolutionism but of the revolutionary theory of social development of Marx as well.

Far from challenging evolutionism, this view panders to those aspects of it which still render it of service to imperialist designs in Africa, namely the conception that Africans cannot allegedly stand on their own feet in the modern world and depend on the benevolence of their superior European "partners". It is widely exploited to fortify the crumbling barriers between the African liberation movements and the European working class, and especially to discredit Marxism in the eyes of both.

Potekhin's article is intended to counteract this propagandist use made of anthropological research, and it is precisely because one welcomes this intention that one regrets he did not make use of more effective arguments than the propositions grouped above under (3).

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in deciding such issues is that none of the source materials from which information can be derived has been written with a well defined, generally acceptable scientific system of concepts in mind, let alone from a Marxist standpoint. In regard to the study of Africa we are therefore no better placed than Marx was when he began the study of political economy, or Lenin when he examined the development of capitalism in Russia. The key to their success lay in the careful sifting of the grain of reliable fact contained in their sources from the chaff of philosophical and political misconceptions.

If we follow that method, surely the straight-forward and conclusive answer to the anthropologist's dilemma is not so difficult. The facts their African researches have brought to light are not in accordance with what is known of primitive society; hence the gratuitous assumption of the evolutionists, that African society is primitive, has been proved false.



Once we have rid ourselves of this misconception the whole of the African problem appears in a new light. The barriers that appeared to divide the "primitive" Africans from the "civilised" Europeans can be seen to have no material existence. African states and civilisations cease to be a riddle the solution of which must be looked for outside the continent; it becomes clear that they are the creation of the African nations themselves, the result of their continuous history from ancient times.

Modern archaeological and historical research is tending more and more to this conclusion. Gervaise Mathew, not a man who would form such a view in eagerness or haste, has recently written:

"When I first began archaeological work on the East African coast eleven years ago, I assumed that the ruins and sites that I was investigating were the remains of Arab or Persian colonies along the coast...but gradually I have come to doubt it; now it seems to me that the history of the coast in the medieval period is more easily intelligible as the history of an African culture gradually Islamised than merely as the history of Islamic colonies from the Persian Gulf". (Africa South, Vol. 2, No. 2).

There could hardly be a surer indication that the idea of Africa as the home of primitive tribes is increasingly becoming untenable. The history of Africa before the European conquest is not a question of evolutionary theory but of Marx's revolutionary, materialist conception of history, just like that of any other continent.

#### Vernacular Tongues or National Languages ?

Besides the theoretical propositions which he regards as self-evident, Potekhin offers only one consideration in which he sees proof for his contention: the multiplicity of languages.

"It is true that the linguistic divisions are a fact, and one which no scholar can deny or ignore since it is an irrefutable proof that for most of Africa neither nations nor narodnosts have yet emerged. The linguistic divisions reflect the tribal divisions of the people"

Far from proving anything, this simply begs the question. A complex language distribution can come about in many different ways, and so long as we have not studied the detailed history of the speakers of these languages we are in no position to know what it reflects. In North America, e.g., there exist widely scattered communities for whom newspapers and entire literatures are published in an enormous number of languages; by comparison,



the linguistic pattern of Africa, a continent nearly one-and-a-half times as large, is almost simple.

In both cases wars, conquests, emigration, colonisation, the slave trade, and the search for land, minerals and opportunities for trade have contributed to the complexity of the picture. In Africa, these historical processes were subsequently intensified by the intervention of imperialism which included the wholesale transportation of people from lands confiscated by the foreign powers.

But none of this does away with the fact that the languages themselves, wherever they are spoken, are the national languages of the peoples who in their overwhelming majority still live in their ancient lands. This also is as true of Africa as of any other continent.

There are very few African languages which are not written as well as spoken, do not serve as a medium for long-distance communication; all but the relatively rare international meetings attended by members of the several nations inhabiting a given colonial territory are naturally conducted in the national languages, and nationalist newspapers have been published in them whenever imperialism did not prevent it. In fact, one of the most potent means of counteracting the political movements of the African nations has been for the colonial administrations to publish official newspapers in the national languages, not to mention the Bible. It is difficult to see how Potekhin could have got the contrary impression.

Potekhin is not trying to make out a case for African "exceptionalism", on the contrary, he is trying to get away from this conception. But he appears to be hamstringing his own arguments by a set of propositions which to many Marxists will not be as self-evident as they are to him; rather do they raise a number of fundamental questions of Marxist theory as well as lead to conclusions which are not entirely compatible with the evidence.

Among the evidence we must now reckon the historic second Accra conference, a most eloquent proof of the existence of the African nations. To leave us in no doubt, this conference has placed on the agenda of history the question of erasing the artificial colonial frontiers and the re-establishment of historical national boundaries. It decisively challenged the imperialist concept of Africa as *res nullius*.

In one of his prefaces to the Communist Manifesto Engels wrote:

"Without re-establishing the unity and independence of each nation,  
it is impossible to create the international unity of the proletariat, nor the peaceful and intelligent collaboration  
of these nations towards common aims."

Experience has time and again proved the truth of this statement, particularly so since the Bandung Conference. When the African nations have solved their question, and few would today say that



their movement is anything but irresistible, they will also have removed one of the last obstacles from the road to world socialism.

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## Note on The Formation of Nations

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by Sam Russell

In connection with the discussion on the question of nationality in Africa and the contributions of B.R. Mann and J.M. Warren, readers may be interested to hear of a new study which has been published by the Leningrad orientalist, Dr. Vyacheslav Misyugin.

In this study Dr. Misyugin asserts that an East African nation is in the process of formation on the basis of the Swahili language, now the native language of over 30 million people in the coastal strip of East Africa between the Ruwuma Estuary and the Lamu Archipeligo.

It is used not only by the Swahili people inhabiting the narrow coastal strip but also by the people of Zanzibar, Pemba, Mafia, Pate, Lamu and other islands and is also to be met beyond East Africa, in Rhodesia and the mining area of the Belgian Congo.

The Soviet scientist proves in his work that the class society and the ancient towns developed independently in the Swahili country, and not in consequence of the colonisation of the coast by Arab traders.

Dr. Misyugin says that a study of the Swahili language in the past and at present and the existence of an ancient written language and literature in the country are evidence of a rich and original culture.

The well known Soviet African specialist Professor Dmitry Olderogge said in his opinion Dr. Misyugin's work is an interesting, novel and well argued approach to the problem, throwing considerable light on the real history of East Africa.

This study is part of a much large monograph on the Swahili people on which Dr. Misyugin is now working.