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Continued from File Forman .1 ends Potekhin in M.T.

Forman's article in Marxism Today, April, 1959.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Lionel Forman

"South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white," the Freedom Charter declares. "Our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities."

Only when this has been achieved will it be possible for a South African nation to develop. And before it does, the likelihood is that a number of different nations will come into being in our country, and that they will flower and prosper before they merge into one.

A single African nation in South Africa is likely to develop before a single South African nation does. And similarly it seems likely that Zulu, Basotho and other nations will develop before they merge into a single African nation in South Africa. *

The Africans will constitute the main element in the future South African nation and we therefore begin with a study of the origins of African nationalism.

They are comparatively recent. The development of a single African political consciousness in South Africa only really begins in the 1880's. Until the nineteenth century the economic basis did not exist for the amalgamation of the numerous African tribes into states. They were cattle-grazers and small-scale farmers, and as they required large areas of pasture and lived at subsistence level the tendency was towards dispersal rather than concentration of population. Even when, with the accumulation of wealth, a ruling class and a state developed, it was capable of exercising its authority only over a limited area, and when conflicts of interest arose it was powerless to prevent dissident tribal groups within the tribe from moving off to pastures new.

As new techniques were acquired, making possible a greater division of labour and the development of a standing army, groups of African tribes would have developed towards a statehood and unification just as people did in Europe, and this is clearly demonstrated early in the nineteenth century by the Zulus from the time of Tshaka, and the Basotho from that of Moshoeshoe.

* There may, of course, be substantial changes to the present state boundaries, which were drawn arbitrarily by the imperialist powers. The "South Africa" of the future may be a smaller or a larger place. This does not affect the argument. The peoples who today live together in our country are likely one day to merge into a single nation.

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Unification in this form, however, was smashed in its infancy by British imperialism.

Nevertheless, it is not impossible that, taking the long view, British imperialism hastened the development of a single African nation rather than retarded it. The huge inflow of capital which came with the discovery of diamonds in 1870, and of gold sixteen years later, transformed South Africa from a collection of primitive pastoral and agricultural communities into a single economic unit, and smashed the tribal system and sped up the process of unification of the the Africans.

Long before the industrial revolution wrought by the discovery of diamonds and the imperialist intervention in South Africa, the voluntary amalgamation of all the black people to make a stand against the white advance had been a dream of the most farsighted African leaders and the nightmare of all the Europeans. But it had remained a dream.

Far from there being unity of the African tribes, a handful of Europeans were able to exploit inter-tribal conflicts so skilfully that in every decisive campaign by far the main burden of fighting, on the European side, was borne by Africans.

At the diamond fields men were transformed from Zulu, Xhosa or Basotho tribesmen into African workers. Members of a myriad of separate tribes came for the first time, to see themselves as a single brotherhood united by their common economic interest. Theirs was not a working-class consciousness, but an African working-class consciousness, for they were subject to political disabilities on the ground of race, which, by giving the lowliest white worker the status of boss over all black men, almost completely obscured any common interest between white and black workers.

Though handicapped by the absence of a common language - the lingua franca was Dutch - the black workers were not slow in evolving the weapon of workers' unity. There was an African strike at Kimberley in 1882, before there is any record of a strike by European workers in South Africa.

At the same time a tiny African petit bourgeoisie, composed of mission assistants, priests, teachers and clerks, was coming into existence in the Eastern Cape, and in the early 1880's the first bodies cutting across tribal barriers, the first African bodies, came into being. Most important of these were mutual benefit societies at Kimberley (embryo trade unions), the African Educational Association (composed of teachers and priests around the mission stations of the Eastern Cape) and the general political organisation, Imbumba Yama Afrika.

The Imbumba was the counterpart of the Afrikaner Bond (which incidentally coined the phrase "Africa for the Africans", meaning by that Afrikaners) and it may be described as the first non-European national organisation - the direct forerunner of the African National Congress. Like the Afrikaner Bond, it came into being as the result of the heightened national oppression which followed the decision of the

British government, in 1874, to establish complete control over Southern Africa.

From the formation of Imbumba onwards, the drive towards the unity of all Africans continued steadily. By the time of Union there were political organisations uniting men, not as members of tribes but as Africans (though the word "African" was not yet used) in each of the provinces, and with Union their merger into the South African Native National Congress was a natural development, the description "Congress" probably coming from the Indian Congress, via the Natal Indian Congress.

With Congress came the conscious assertion of a single African nationhood. The tribes had long been described as nations. Now the word nation came into common use both as a description of the individual tribes and for the African people as a whole.

Strictly speaking, the use of the word "nation" is inaccurate in both cases. Socialists define a "nation" in clear terms. If a community does not share a common language, territory, economy and culture, it is not a nation.

The everyday use of the word, however, is at variance with the scientific usage. Progressives use definitions as tools, not as straitjackets, and it would be pedantic to make any issue about the everyday use of the word - specially when we are not always quite sure what the correct word is.

But when it comes to serious theoretical analysis the situation is quite different. As Potekhin says: "It is by no means an argument about words. To give a definition of a 'nation' is of vital importance for the peoples." A nation is not an imaginary or mystic concept - it is a very real phenomenon, and as such needs an exact definition, without which it is impossible to understand the national question which plays such an important part in the life of the peoples of the present time" (Potekhin, Formation of Nations in Africa - 'Marxism Today' - October 1958, p.308).

Are There Any Nations in South Africa ?

It has long been recognised that it is possible to have a nation which does not have its own state. South Africa is an example of a state which has no nation.

A glance at the definition is sufficient to show that there is not a South African nation. The South African people have a variety of languages and cultures. For the same reason the Africans are not a nation.

What of the Zulus, Xhosa, Basotho, Tswana, Swazi and Tsonga ? What of the Afrikaners, English, Coloureds and Indians? Are they nations in South Africa?

No South Africans can vie with Verwoerd's Nationalists in the fervour with which they express the conviction not only that the Afrikaners are a nation, but that they are the nation.

But are they ?

They have a common language and culture, certainly, but can it really be said that they have a common territory ?

They inhabit the same territory, South Africa, in common with all other South Africans, black white and brown, all inextricably mixed throughout the country. But there is no substantial territorial area where the Afrikaner is in the majority.

"Common territory" must mean a territory on one's own, because basic to the national question is that of self-determination and the right of secession. There is no part of South Africa which the Afrikaners could, by mere reason of their numbers, claim for the exercise of the right of secession. In this respect their position can be compared with that of the Jews in Russia, who, Stalin remarked in his argument showing that they do not constitute a nation, "are spread all over Russia and do not constitute a majority in a single Gubernia" (Stalin - Marxism and the National and Colonial Question).

A further essential to nationhood is a common economy, "in a word, a single national market" (Potekhin, op. cit. p. 309). Just as is the position with regard to territory, so it is with the common economy whose existence is dependent on that of the common territory. South Africa has a single national market - the Afrikaners have not. Nor (again like the Russian Jews) have they a normal class structure, which is a factor to be considered in determining nationhood.

The ruling class has created a completely distorted class structure among the Africans. The great majority of them are peasant-migrant labourers and proletarians with only a tiny petit-bourgeoisie and an infinitesimal bourgeoisie. The complementary effect has been the distortion of the class structure of the Europeans. The white workers are essentially supervisors of African labour; there is an exceptionally big stratum of professional men and salaried officials. The Afrikaners are employed throughout the Government service, manning the enormous repressive apparatus, and with a working class well bribed and entirely petit-bourgeois in outlook.

For analagous reasons to the Afrikaners, the English, the Coloureds and Indians fail to qualify as nations.

When freedom is won, the Afrikaners and other national groups, if they so desire, will, no doubt, obtain the opportunity to develop into nations, being given the essential territorial basis for such development, as has happened in the USSR and China.

The African "Pre-Nations"

The African communities are in a different position. Let us consider the Zulus.

There is no doubt that they have a common territory in Natal, in a substantial portion of which they are an overwhelming majority of the population. Similarly they have a common language and culture. In one respect only have they not yet attained nationhood, and that is with regard to the development of a single Zulu market. The government has strangled Zulu economic development because it is in the interests of the ruling class that the Zulus be kept at the level of unskilled labourers.

There is no doubt, however, that this stifling of the Zulu nation will not endure, and that the Zulus are on the threshold of true nationhood.

The Russian term for this type of community is "narodnost" (Potekhin, op. cit. p. 30). The closest English translation is "nationality", and as that has a different connotation in ordinary speech I would suggest that we use the word "pre-nation".

Other "pre-nations" in a position similar to the Zulus are the Basutho, the Xhosas, the Swazis, the Tswana, etc.

Self-Determination

The position of the pre-nations is also different from that of the Afrikaners and the English - who have no territory of their own - when it comes to a consideration of the right to self-determination.

Progressives might, in certain circumstances, accord to a pre-nation the right to self-determination. In fact that is already our policy with regard to Basutoland where we recognise the democratic right of the Basutho to decide for themselves how best they can march towards nationhood.

Although in Europe the demand for self-determination in some form was a characteristic feature of the national struggle, this is not the case in South Africa.

What is the reason for this ?

In the first place the national oppression has quite a different basis from that of Europe before the First World War.

The national oppression here has not the primary purpose of keeping the bourgeoisie of the oppressed people out of the market place as it did in Europe. The oppressive laws here have the purpose, first and foremost, of driving the African workers to the factories and farms. The restrictions on the non-European bourgeoisie crushing as they are, are quite secondary to the legal enslavement of the African workers, through the Pass Laws, the Master and Servant Acts, the Industrial Colour Bar Acts, the complete ban on strikes and the Suppression of Communism Act.

Further the repression is not that of a dominant nation in one territory oppressing another in a different or adjacent territory. It is more that of a small minority, spread throughout a single country oppressing a big majority also spread out.

Whereas in Tsarist Russia, the Finns, Armenians, Georgians and the dozens of other peoples were separated, were oppressed in different ways and to different degrees, the Africans are in close contact and suffer identical oppression.

And thirdly the demand for self-determination is one which comes in the first place from the petit-bourgeoisie and in particular the traders, and this class is still infinitesimally small.

The demand of the people, therefore, is not for secession and self-determination in their own areas, but of full equality throughout the whole country. This is only a reflection of what we have already seen - that there are still no nations in South Africa.

The absence of a demand for self-determination does not mean that one should have no policy on the question.

At the same time it is necessary to clear up a common misconception - that because they fight for the right of nations to self-determination, socialists favour the exercise of that right.

A large state enjoys obvious advantages over the small one and the world tendency is towards merger rather than to splitting up. Normally, no progressive would support any splitting up. He would oppose it. But the essence of socialism is that it is truly democratic. A nation has the democratic right even to follow a wrong path though socialists point the correct one. By analogy most people will agree that Mr. and Mrs. Smith should be allowed to have a divorce if they want one. That does not mean that they think that Mr. and Mrs. Smith should be divorced.

We should not ignore the existence of "pre-nations" and the likelihood that there will develop, when democracy is won, a brotherhood of different South African nations before a single South African nation emerges.

On the contrary, we should consider whether we are succeeding adequately today in identifying ourselves with the specific progressive national aspirations and ideas of the "pre-nations", just as we have completely identified ourselves with the demand that all share in common for the ending of apartheid and the achievement of democracy.

The dearest possessions of the "pre-nations" are their language, their culture and traditions.

It is obvious that to really get to the hearts and minds of the people, particularly the rural masses, it is necessary to develop to the full a presentation of our message which has its roots deep in the popular culture.

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It is necessary to produce socialist literature in the language of the people - not merely in *translation* but in the original idiom. Because English is the most widely understood language it is natural that it should be so widely used for conferences and country-wide newspapers. But this is no excuse for neglecting the *majority* of the population who have not been fortunate enough to obtain sufficient education to read or to follow an argument in English. In this respect we could learn from Indian socialists who also use English as the international tongue, but at the same time produce extensive literature in the vernacular languages.

If there is any neglect of these people it is still a hang-over from the old days when there was a feeling that the intellectuals were the only important people in Congress, and when, in turning their backs on tribalism, the intellectuals tended to turn their backs also on their language and culture.

The need to remedy this situation is already widely recognised. The effect of the deeply moving and inspiring African political songs and music which has been created in recent years is evidence enough of the importance of this type of development. Now what are required are plays and poems and dances of liberation which will inspire and teach people who know no English, and which will give them that added consciousness of dignity which pride in a national culture instils.

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Article in *Liberation*, July, 1959.

SELF-DETERMINATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

A Contribution to Discussion

by Lionel Forman

In modern times the right of nations to self-determination has become a rallying call of oppressed peoples all over the world.

What does this demand mean? Essentially it means that a nation has the right to determine its own destiny, and this in turn means that, if it forms part of a multi-racial state or empire, it has the right to secede and lead an independent political existence.

That is self-determination. But what is a nation? People use this word in many ways. Everyone has for example heard talk of a South African nation, a Zulu nation, and an African nation. In each case something different must be meant, for the Zulus form part of the African people and the Africans part of the South African people. They cannot all be nations unless one gives the word nation a very amorphous meaning like community, or people. Social scientists have therefore analysed the specific characteristics which make a community tightly knit and integrated, and capable of leading a separate existence. The definition they have adopted is that a nation is a historically evolved, stable

community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up, manifested in a community of culture.

A community possessing all four of these essential features, and lacking none of them, is capable of leading an independent political existence in the world of today; and such a community is therefore entitled, as of right, to receive from all true democrats in the other nations of the multi-national state or empire of which it forms part, the fullest support for its demand for self-determination.

South Africa is not a single nation but a multi-national state. What is the position with regard to the Africans, who constitute the majority of the population of this State?

They too are not a nation. To a very large extent they have become, as the result of their common oppression, and the unifying efforts of the ANC, a single political community - but, like South Africa itself, it is a multi-national political community containing several languages and cultures.

An African Nation?

This duplicate much of above

Are the Africans developing into a single nation? The answer seems to be 'Yes', and a single African nation is likely to develop before a single South African nation does.

The beginnings of a single South African national consciousness can be traced back to the 1880's.

Until the 19th century the economic basis did not exist for the amalgamation of the numerous African tribes into states. They were cattle-grazers and small scale farmers, and as they required large areas of pasture and lived at subsistence level the tendency was towards dispersal rather than concentration of population. Even when, with the accumulation of wealth, a ruling class and a state developed, it was capable of exercising its authority only over a limited area, and when conflicts of interest arose it was powerless to prevent dissident groups within the tribe from moving off to pastures new.

As new techniques were acquired, making possible a greater division of labour and the development of a standing army, groups of African tribes would have developed towards a statehood and unification just as people did in Europe, and this is clearly demonstrated early in the 19th century by the Zulus from the time of Tshaka and the Basuto from that of Mosheshoe.

Unification in this form however was smashed in its infancy by British imperialism.

Nevertheless, it is not impossible that British imperialism hastened the development of a single African nation rather than retarded it. The huge inflow of capital which came with the discovery of diamonds in 1870 and of gold sixteen years later transformed South Africa from a collection of primitive pastoral and agricultural communities into a

single conomic unit and smashed the tribal system and sped up the process of unification of the Africans.

Long before the industrial revolution wrought by the discovery of diamonds and the imperialist intervention in South Africa the voluntary amalgamation of all the black people to make a stand against the white advance had been a dream of the most farsighted African leaders and the nightmare of all the Europeans. But it had remained a dream.

Far from there being unity of the African tribes, a handful of Europeans were able to exploit inter-tribal conflicts so skilfully that in every decisive campaign by far the main burden of fighting, on the European side, was borne by Africans.

At the same time a tiny African petit-bourgeoisie composed of mission assistants, priests, teachers and clerks was coming into existence in the Eastern Cape, and in the early 1880's the first bodies cutting across tribal barriers, the first African bodies came into being. Most important of these were Mutual Benefit societies at Kimberley, (embryo trade unions), the African Educational Association (composed of teachers and priests around the mission stations of the Eastern Cape), and the general political organisation, Imbumba Yama Afrika.

The last-named may be described as the first Non-European national organisation - the direct forerunner of the African National Congress. Like the Afrikaner Bond it came into being as the result of the heightened national oppression which followed the decision of the British, in 1874, to establish complete control over Southern Africa.

From the formation of Imbumba onwards, the drive towards the unity of all Africans continued steadily. By the time of Union there were political organisations uniting men not as members of tribes but as Africans (though the word 'African' was not yet used) in each of the provinces, and with union their merger into the South African Native National Congress was a natural development.

With Congress came the conscious assertion of a single African nationhood. In fact, however, the Africans do not yet constitute a single nation in the sense in which we are using the word.

Does this mean that the ANC is incorrect to demand self-determination? Of course not, for (quite apart from the fact that there may be circumstances in which even a single "pre-nation" should be supported in the demand for self-determination) the Africans are a political community made up of several national groups on the verge of nationhood, and as we shall see their right to self-determination cannot be disputed.

Zulus, Afrikaners, Coloureds

This brings us a stage further. What is the position with regard to the different national communities which make up the African people? Let us consider the Zulus.

With their common language, territory and culture, the Zulus have the main requisites of nationhood.

We have only to settle the question of whether there can be said to be a common Zulu economy,, or, in the words of Potekhin in his recent *Liberation* article, "a single national market." The main prerequisites for the development of such a market are "the geographical division of labour and the existence of developed exchanges on a profit basis within a capitalist mode of production."

If we take this view, the only thing separating the Zulus from true nationhood is the stifling of their economy by the colour bar. Abolish the colour bar and the Zulus will become a nation almost overnight. They are a form of the community known in Russia as a "Narodnost", the closest English translation of which is "nationality", and as that has a different connotation in English, I would suggest that we use the word "pre-nation".

What has been said of the Zulus applies, subject to modification, also to the other African people in South Africa.

What of the Afrikaners? No South Africans can vie with Verwoerd's Nationalists in the fervour with which they express the conviction, not only that the Afrikaners are a nation, but that they are the nation.

Here again we are at odds about a definition. The pure lily-white Afrikaner folk about which the Verwoerd Nationalists declaim are not a nation but an hallucination. If there is an Afrikaner nation in South Africa it does not consist of the 1½ million Afrikaners who can claim white identity cards, but of about 2½ million people - for once you break through the racialist smokescreen it becomes clear that the one million Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds are a part of the same national community as the 1½ million Afrikaans-speaking whites, common territory, language, economy, culture and all. Except for the political and social discrimination there is nothing at all to distinguish the very substantial proportion of Afrikanerdom which, though technically Coloured, passes for white, from that proportion which is too dark, or too proud, to pass.

And what is so ironical is that the Coloureds are one of Afrikanerdom's greatest national assets. With them Afrikanerdom has a territory where it is in the majority, with a few good-sized towns; and it has a much better balanced class structure.

Although the present leaders of white Afrikanerdom would choke at the idea, it is very possible that under conditions of freedom the single white and Coloured Afrikaner nation will be one of the first to consolidate itself, and that its Afrikaner language and culture will blossom as never before.

At the same time it must be noted that the position is by no means static. The political discrimination against the Coloureds is creating something akin to a Coloured national consciousness, separated from that of the white Afrikaner, and comparable with that of the Negro in the

U.S. The South African Coloured People's Organisation is thought of as a national organisation like those of its African and Indian allies in the Congress alliance. But an optimistic estimate of the time required for winning freedom would preclude the development of a separate Coloured nation born of "race" oppression.

There appear, therefore, to be several communities in South Africa which will swiftly become nations when the national oppression which strangles their economic development is ended.

Self-Determination and Secession

This brings us to a discussion of the form which the demand for self-determination is likely to take.

When other oppressed nations, particularly those of Africa, have put forward the demand for self-determination, the form of self-determination contemplated has almost always been that of secession (although informal political links with the former oppressor nation may be maintained, as is the case with the independent nations of the Commonwealth).

In South Africa, however, as far as the Africans are concerned, self-determination has a different significance. For them it is not a question of calling upon an oppressing majority to permit them independence in their own territory; no one of calling upon a foreign power to withdraw.

For the Africans are the majority. In a democratic South Africa they can have no fear of being subjected to discriminatory laws by another South African nation, and therefore the demand for Africans to secede from anywhere would not make sense.

The form that the demand of the Africans for self-determination takes, therefore, is simply that for full equality. And as the African pre-nation draw their whole strength and hope from their inter-national African unity, the demands of the individual pre-nations, are identical with and inseparable from those of the Africans as a whole.

The mere winning of the full and free franchise would guarantee the Africans self-determination, constituting, as they would, the majority of the electorate; there would, in effect, come into being an independent African state, with (if the Freedom Charter is the basis) full protection for national minorities.

This leads us to a question which is going to be raised more and more frequently as the realisation grows that the Freedom Charter is neither treason nor a dream. What does the Charter mean when it says "All national groups shall have equal rights." ? And what is meant by the term 'national group' ?

One answer we may give is that these are things which must be thrashed out at a national convention to plan the new state form, and that if people want to know the answers they must urge the holding of such a convention.

But such a reply, good as it is, is not altogether satisfactory. The new state may not come about as the result of a round-table conference! We should begin to think about answers now; not fixed and inflexible answers - for conditions change - but answers nevertheless.

A Federation

Does the answer lie in some form of multi-national federation comparable say with that of the Soviet Union, India, Switzerland or China?

I would suggest it does. The Freedom Charter guarantees the right of all national groups to develop their own languages and cultures. For the first time the national cultures will be able to blossom, stimulated by (among other things) free, equal and compulsory education, of the highest standard, available in the national languages.

The example of other countries has proved that only by the fullest development of the national cultures will it be possible to secure the maximum participation of the nationalities less exposed to industrial development, in the work of constructing a new South Africa.

It may seem strange that the best way to achieve the fusion of national cultures in the future into one common culture, is to favour the blossoming of many cultures first.

As Pandit Chandra put it: "Disunion for the sake of union. Just think! - It even smacks of the paradoxical. And yet this 'self-contradictory' formula reflects the living truth of dialectical reasoning."

The national cultures must be permitted to develop and expand and to reveal all their potential qualities in order to create the conditions for their fusion.

National cultures do not blossom in the air. They have to be rooted in firm soil. And national cultures, plus territory, plus the unshackled economy which freedom will bring, means nations. The perspective is opened of a South Africa which is an economically integrated brotherhood of equal and autonomous nations, united in a single state, in which racial discrimination will be a crime.

This development and expansion is not merely a matter of the happy future "when freedom comes".

It is obvious that to really get to the hearts and minds of the people, particularly the rural masses it is necessary to develop to the full a presentation of our message which has its roots deep in the popular culture - and to do this immediately.

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It is necessary to produce democratic literature in the language of the people - not merely in translation but in the original idiom. Because English is the most widely understood language it is natural that it should be so widely used for conferences and country-wide newspapers. But this is no excuse for neglecting the majority of the population who have not been fortunate enough to obtain sufficient education to read or to follow an argument in English. In this respect we could learn from Indian democrats who also use English as the international tongue, but at the same time produce extensive literature in the vernacular languages.

If there is any neglect of rural people it is still a hang-over from the old days when there was a feeling that the intellectuals were the only important people in Congress, and when, in turning their backs on tribalism, the intellectuals tended to turn their backs also on their language and culture.

The need to remedy this situation is already widely recognised. The effect of the deeply moving and inspiring African political songs and music which has been created in recent years is evidence enough of the importance of this type of development. Now what are required are plays and poems and dances of liberation which will inspire and teach people who know no English, and which will give them that added consciousness of dignity which pride in a national culture instils.

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Letter to Forman from James Klugmann, Assistant Editor of 'Marxism Today', dated 18th February, 1959.

Dear Comrade,

Thank you very much for your letter and the excellent contribution to the discussion on "The Formation of Nations in Africa."

Unfortunately it came in too late for the March number, but we hope to get it into the April number.

In the meantime I am sending you a proof of an article by B.R. Mann on the question of the African nations, which will appear in our March number. You will see that she questions Potekhin's presentation and, in general, challenges what has been regarded as the Marxist approach.

If you feel inclined to deal with this, even in passing, in your contribution, please send any addition by air mail as soon as possible. If it arrives in time I shall certainly put it into your contribution.

With best wishes to you all.

Yours fraternally, James Klugmann.

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Discussion contributions (in Marxism Today, March 1959):

ON AFRICAN NATIONS

BY B.R. Mann

In an article entitled "The Formation of Nations in Africa"* I. Potekhin has put forward a number of considerations which have led him to the conclusion that for most of Africa no nations have yet emerged. In his view most of the criteria of the nation as defined by Stalin have not yet matured: there is not yet a single literary language, only a diversity of vernacular tongues and the official language which is that of the metropolitan country: in spite of the rich cultural heritage of the African peoples there are as yet no truly national cultures; there is as yet no national market, or at most the beginnings of one. In general, he believes, African nations are only in the process of formation, which in view of the many difficulties must be a protracted one.

Much of his argument hinges on the conception of the African countries as outlined by the colonial boundaries. In a previous article ** it has been shown that in progressive British opinion this conception is giving way to one which regards as nations not the accidental collections of peoples enclosed within these arbitrary boundaries but the historically developed communities whose countries in many cases are intersected by these boundaries.

These communities have a history which goes back over many centuries. In the course of that history they have developed their own languages and cultures and their common economies within their own boundaries. They have built up their civilisation, their towns and cities based on handicrafts and trade, erected their own states or become subject to some larger empire, and, in short, had a history as varied and complex as that of any other continent. Not until quite recently were their economies ruined and their countries carved up among the colonial powers.

Nevertheless, Potekhin would still not grant these historical African communities the status of nations. His conclusion would still be that in general the question of the African nations is not one of the past or present but only of a somewhat indeterminate future. His conclusion rests on the following basic propositions:

1. The *ethnic community* of the peoples goes through several stages of

* *Marxism Today*, October, 1958.

** B.R. Mann: "The Right of the African Nations to Self-determination" *Marxism Today*, January 1959. In a contribution to the discussion on the question of nationality J.M. Warren has raised a number of critical points on that article to which neither time nor space permit me to reply specifically in the present contribution. All the same, I hope she will find here the further explanations she asks for at least to one or two of her more general points.

of development: *tribe*, *narodnost*, *nation*, corresponding broadly, but only broadly, to the development of the socio-economic systems.

2. Only where there is a developed capitalist market can one speak of an economic community; a nation can, therefore, only come into existence under the capitalist system.

3. At the turn of the century there was not nor could there be any nation in Africa because there was no capitalist society; colonisation found the African peoples at the stage of the primitive community with the characteristics of tribal organisation, and with few exceptions where feudalism and the *narodnost* have developed, they are in this stage today.

If these three propositions were quite self-evident and indisputable, so would the conclusions be. Is one justified, however, in assuming that there is general agreement on their validity, either among students of African affairs or among Marxists? Is there not, perhaps, a case for examining these propositions?

Ethnic Community or Nation?

Marxists have generally accepted the definition of the nation which was given by Stalin in *Marxism and the National Question* in 1913, when this question formed the subject of fundamental discussions in the Social Democratic parties of the time.

According to this definition a nation is a specific community of people which is neither racial nor tribal, i.e. it is not ethnically homogeneous but composed of a number of ethnic elements which in the course of history have come to form a single nation linked into an economic community. Through living together in a connected territory from generation to generation, they have in the course of time acquired a common national language, culture and character.

Nations are stable, preserve their identity over long periods of history and in spite of all kinds of adversities. The definition distinguishes them sharply from casual, ephemeral conglomerations held together by the power of a state alien to the majority of the nations, which fall apart as soon as that state power disappears.

From this definition Potekhin selects common territory, language, culture and economy as the characteristic features of a nation, omitting that they should be stable, historically constituted communities. He then qualifies the expression "economic community" in such a way that only a *capitalist* economy is covered by it. From this point onwards he operates with a new conception: the *ethnic community* which goes through the series of metamorphoses described in the paragraph numbered (1) above.

It is this latter conception which I think is bound to be questioned. For the things which change in response to changes in the economic base make up the superstructure. Few people would agree to equate the

nation, the community of people which is fundamental to everything else, with a mere stage in the changing superstructure.

There is a point indistinguishing between ethnically homogeneous communities, such as can exist only in more or less complete historical isolation, from communities of complex ethnical composition which arise in the process of historical intercourse between peoples. The Marxist definition of the nation includes only the latter. But beyond that it makes no distinctions of quality such as would require the introduction of new terms, whether *ethnic community* or *narodnost*.

Migrations, conquests and the development of trade and communications began to break down the primitive isolation of the human communities in a very remote antiquity. Nations as distinct from ethnically homogeneous communities have therefore existed from the dawn of history; but not all the nations existing today were formed thus early. Some nations have grown at the expense of others and in some cases, e.g. in the Americas, new nations have been formed out of the fragments of almost all the nations of the world which came together on the new continent as conquerors, slaves or emigrants in comparatively recent times.

All this is quite in accord with the usage of the word "nation" in the works of Marx and Engels. They freely wrote of the nations of antiquity, and Engels, e.g., examined the genesis of the German nations after the breakdown of the Roman empire. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels describe what the bourgeoisie has done to "even the most barbarian nations" and to "nations of peasants". Lenin and Stalin repeatedly referred to "nations which had passed through feudalism and developed capitalism". (My emphasis - B.R.M.)

What, then, gave rise to the idea that nations were *only* formed in the capitalist period?

Capitalism, the Nation and the State

There is one difference between the use of the word "nation" today and in the nineteenth century: it included both the nation and the state, and the nations referred to by Marx and Engels, e.g. were in the main nations with states the frontiers of which broadly coincided with the boundaries of the national territory. Where a nation was included in the state of another nation, it was referred to as a "nationality" and the question of the nations without a state of their own became known as the question of the "nationalities" (*Nationalitätenfrage*). It was first raised by the growing bourgeoisie of the western European countries, by the bourgeois-democratic movements against feudal autocracy and national oppression.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the working class movement had begun to take on the character of an international movement, the national question, too, was raised in a broader sense. In 1896 the International Socialist Workers and the Trades Union Congress

in London upheld "the full right of self-determination of all nations". This formulation obviously includes in the term nation both "nations and "nationalities", nations both with and without their own state.

Further clarification of the meaning of the word "nation" came in the course of the broad international discussions of the early twentieth century in which Lenin and his party took the lead in formulating the consistent Marxist standpoint on the national question.

These discussions in essence covered the entire period of the advance to socialism and representatives of the working class of many nations, including eastern European and Asian nations, took part in them. They received renewed impetus after the October revolution had opened wide the floodgates to the national liberation movements of all the world.

Originally based on the experience of the European nations, the discussion became constantly enriched as more and more of the oppressed nations staked their claims to independent state existence. In this sense it continues to this day.

Only in the course of this discussion did the concept "state" become definitely and finally separated from the concept of the nation. The special word "nationality" signifying an oppressed nation deprived of the possibility of forming its own state thereby became obsolete. Its use nevertheless lingered on in some languages. In the Russian language it became transformed into its opposite as applied to the House of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Only this separation of the concept of the state, a part of the superstructure, from the concept of the nation, the community of people itself, the fundamental source of all history, enables us to express the role of capitalism in the history of the nations in terms which apply to the experience of all nations, be they large or small, old or new, in whatever continent they are situated. For then we can see clearly that not the nation itself is the product of the capitalist period but the national state, a state the frontiers of which coincide with the boundaries of the national territory.

The states of the feudal period conformed to this condition only exceptionally. In general, they were either small states, covering only part of a nation, or large empires dominating a number of different nations. Hence the nations were oppressed, but they did not cease to be nations. On the contrary, the greater the oppression the greater is also the striving for self-determination. These features the modern colonial empires have in common with the feudal empires. The aim of the struggle against these conditions is the political unification of each nation into a single state.

(B.R. Mann article continued on next file No. .003 on ^{Same} side ~~2~~ of this disc no. 2)

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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, *resnullius*.

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

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.

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Letter from Vella Pillay in London to Lionel Forman, 1st May, 1959.

Dear Lionel,

I am enclosing a letter which Potekhin has written under a covering letter to me dated 27th April, 1959.

Many thanks for the two dozen pamphlets you sent me on your brief study of the S.A. working class movement. I am distributing these and hope to send you a remittance in the early future.

I was pleased to see your article in Marxism Today, it has been a basis for discussions we have had among mutually interested friends here. We found it extremely useful and in certain respects path-breaking. There are one or two problems arising from your article which I have asked one or two chapsto put down in writing and send you in the near future. It would appear that your concept of "pre-nations" is extremely interesting and certainly new, but that in so far as it could be applied to South Africa the impact of industrialisation and the rapid rate of African urbanisation is not given its due place to the possible fashioning out of a South African in the immediate future without other or small nation groups emerging first. But on this we hope to write to you more lengthily in the future.

Some of the confusions in the M.T. controversy on Potekhin's article appear to arise from the impression that is given that national