

REVOLUTIONARY PAN-AFRICANISM

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Elenga M'buyinga (Translated by Michael Pallis), Pan-Africanism or Neo-Colonialism: The Bankruptcy of the O.A.U. London: Zed Press, 1982. Appendix, 236 pp., \$10.75 paperback.

Elenga M'buyinga's book highlights the failure of the original drive toward Pan-African unity in the context of the many dependent economies and neo-colonial regimes in present day Africa. Whereas the book is a critical contribution to the history of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), it is pari passu, a manifesto that endeavors to suggest how to achieve genuine continental unity - which the author contends can only be envisaged by considering the abolition of petty-bourgeois regimes and the creation of a socialist society organized by the proletariat and the peasantry.

This is the first publication in English, having already gone through two editions in French. The author, a radical Cameroonian political activist in exile, has skillfully combined a scholarly analysis with a precise political objective: his thesis is that there has been over the past two decades since independence, an ineluctable relationship between bourgeois rule, economic crisis and continental disunity.

This intellectually explosive polemic is arrived at through analyses of the dominant tendencies of international monopoly capitalism since 1960, and the consequences they have had for the evolution of the economies of African states. Having anatomized the failure to solve the discernible effect of poverty, the author recounts the parallel failures at the political level-what he terms 'Pan-African Demagogy.' In this undertaking, M'buyinga does not hesitate to criticize even the self-styled revolutionary regimes like the late Sekou Toure's in Guinea. Employing a wealth of concrete examples, the 'bankruptcy' of the OAU is exposed, and the political economy requirements for 'Revolutionary Pan-Africanism' prescribed.

The major merit of the book is its solid analysis of Pan-African unity via Marxist-Leninist paradigms of class and anti-imperialist struggles-an immensely positive departure from the traditional realms of rhetorical attachment and superficial historical accounts of events that have bedevilled many a literature on the subject. The study does not only

focus on certain aspects of the current neo-colonial status quo in the continent; it also deals with neo-colonialism in Africa as a whole, and argues that the fundamental roots of this imperialist policy are being implemented by the present ruling classes in the continent.

Contents

The study contains five chapters. In chapter one the author gives a brief summary of the various ways in which Pan-Africanism has been conceived and interpreted (from the time the concept first appeared in America in 1900 to the May 1963 conference that founded the OAU in Addis Ababa). The initial idea of Pan-Africanism, the author indicates, started as solidarity among people of African descent in the Americas - its champions being Marcus Garvey with his 'Back to Africa Movement,' and W.E.B. DuBois using the concept as anti-colonialism. Once the concept got entrenched in Africa itself (1945-1962), two currents of thought emerged: reactionaries like Houphouet Boigny who opposed independence and African unity, and revolutionaries like Kwame Nkrumah who wanted 'Independence Now,' and upheld the notion of 'Africa Must Unite.' Out of these two divergent ideological camps, a compromise was struck-giving birth to the OAU.

Chapter two deals with the evolution of the African economy and the imperialist nations' economies that came to determine that of African states. It is this economic base, the chapter contends, that can provide the keys for discovering the answer to the question of how to understand and explain the policies of the African ruling classes during the first twenty years of independence.

Chapter three attempts to develop the explanation of the above policies which the author terms the 'Strategy of Pan-African Demagogy.' This, he elaborates, is the strategy being implemented by the emerging African neo-colonial bourgeoisies who deceive the masses of the people of Africa and world opinion about economic development, social integration and political unity. This chapter ends by defining Pan-Africanism as the political theory that asserts that Africa is a single entity with a common set of problems and which must unite to ensure its liberation from domination, exploitation and enslavement [emphasis added]. The author elaborates:

"...there have always been two variants of this Pan Africanism, a revolutionary form and a reactionary form. Revolutionary Pan Africanism has, during each historical period, explicitly or implicitly represented the conscious and unconscious interests and aspirations of the exploited African working

people. Reactionary Pan Africanism expresses the interests of those social strata in whose interests it is for Africa to remain enslaved." p. 162.

Chapter four then turns to the crucial political question of what is to be done, given the neo-colonial situation in the continent. In this chapter, the author tries to define what it means to speak of 'Revolutionary Pan Africanism' today. He proposes a break with the world capitalist market system as 'essential requirement,' taking the lesson of 19th century France, the lesson of Argentina and the lesson of the U.S. As to how to achieve this break, the author proposes a large economic territory via 'revolutionary political unity' in which 'Pan African revolutionaries' are the 'only qualified' persons to lead this struggle. The author categorically states that the present African bourgeois class can not lead this struggle because it is too weak, and because it still has its umbilical cord tied to the womb of its imperialist mother at the center of metropolitan capitals.

Chapter five suggests that the 'bankruptcy' of the OAU has become common knowledge. In this chapter, the author emphasizes the class nature of the pan-African body-why the contradictions within the OAU are now so intense. He argues that these contradictions are essentially a reflection of the class contradictions in African society-which contradictions developed and surfaced over two decades of neo-colonial capitalist penetration, and are now sharper than ever. In this regard, the author asserts that the 'bankruptcy' of the OAU is 'now complete,' that the OAU has completely failed, that actually the OAU is 'dead', and therefore it can not be revived or revamped. Instead, he proposes a new continental body, what he terms 'a Union of African Socialist Republics.'

The book as a whole is a very interesting reading. His analysis of the emergence and growth of Pan-Africanism along two opposing ideologies in Africa amidst the penetration of external forces is quite provocative. So is his account of the current problems of the OAU. Unfortunately, there are a number of problems with the author's style of writing. In some parts of the book, he is virtually carried away by emotion. Similarly, there are some unsubstantiated statements regarding especially his opponents. In challenging the neo-colonial bourgeoisies, the author's language becomes empty-making his argument amount to what may be regarded as personal attacks against his opponents. This is by no means a suggestion by this reviewer that the acts of the neo-colonial bourgeoisies should be vindicated; rather they should be denounced objectively.

The OAU Is Not Dead

The author's assertion that the OAU is dead is inaccurate. His suggestion of 'a Union of African Socialist Republics' in place of the present OAU is welcome, but let us first try to understand that the OAU is not dead. The continental body only comprises active elements of weakness-meaning that its principle aims and objectives as initially stipulated in its charter, have been rendered unachievable under the present conditions of neo-colonialism in Africa. Because of this fact, two crucial issues ought to be tackled immediately: one, because the present OAU is weak, it must be strengthened; Two, because the organization's charter is anachronistic, it must be revised. It is only after these two important issues have been addressed that one can reach definitive conclusions.

Below, this reviewer makes a few proposals in trying to strengthen the OAU, and in revising its charter. Indeed, as M'buyinga himself has correctly observed (p. 212), most of the OAU Secretaries-General have been weak and unqualified. He gives as examples, Eteki Mboumoua and Ekah Ngaky, his own compatriots. This therefore means that OAU policy must be to appoint a strong and qualified Secretary-General with added powers to work independently. The position of the Secretary-General and that of the OAU itself can further be strengthened by reconsidering the functional committees that were created by the founding fathers to handle different problems. For instance, since the liberation of the continent from colonialism is almost complete, it now means that the arbitration committee must be strengthened. This is because most current problems in the continent are between member-states themselves, neo-colonialism merely aggravating the nature of these problems.

To strengthen the OAU also calls for a shift of emphasis away from purely political crises to issues such as working for the economic independence of Africa. This urgently calls for the immediate implementation of the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action for the economic development of Africa by the year 2000.

The second issue that arises is the need to revise the OAU charter to reflect the reality of the present circumstances such as enlarged membership, diversity of ideology, mounting aspirations and needs of the African peoples. One way of redefining the aims and objectives of the OAU is to divide them into two categories: the first category could list immediate goals on the basis of which the second, comprising long-term aims, reposes and takes shape. Corresponding to each category, definite rules and regulations,

must be specified to guard against both imperialist interferences and narrow selfish national and/or regional interests of some member-states. Similarly, the obligations and responsibilities of member-states must be clearly stated in a manner that will eliminate potential local compradors of neo-colonialism.

A 'Union of African Socialist Republics' is quite an attractive proposal, which however, M'buyinga does not seem to clarify to the ordinary reader. Why should Africa go socialist? Briefly stated, part of the answer lies within the framework of analyzing the two major socio-economic systems in the present world-socialism and capitalism. Capitalism is the root-cause of Africa's afflictions, whereas socialism offers Africa a brighter future.

As the leader of world socialism, the Soviet Union has continued to grow and develop. In the sixties and seventies, the Soviet Union and the socialist world extended the material base of socialism. Past the last three decades, the growth rates of socialist countries have been consistently higher than those of key capitalist countries (including the U.S.). In corollary to this, has been a rise in the standard and quality of life of the people of the socialist countries. Social services, medical care, education and all sorts of benefits became increasingly available to the people-the exact opposite of what has been happening in the capitalist world. Above all, unemployment has been virtually non-existent throughout the socialist countries.

Moreso, ever since the Great October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union and the socialist countries have demonstrated themselves to be the most consistent allies in the struggle against imperialism, for national independence, peace and social progress in Africa. This should be the argument for Africa to turn socialist.

This reviewer and the author therefore do not differ in principle. The difference is in ways and means of seeking solutions to the OAU. I believe that there is still chance for a re-organization of the OAU. This is not to say that this exercise is devoid of problems. M'buyinga's prescription should follow after and if such a reorganization fails.

Contradictions and Distortions of Some Aspects of Pan-Africanism

M'buyinga's scholarly effort at reiterating the concept of Pan-Africanism is blurred by inconsistencies, contradictions and distortions of the historical facts in some parts of the book. He for instance claims that Marcus Garvey's

anti-racist rally at the beginning of World War II was in itself 'manifestly racist' (p.29). This was an expression of struggle against racism-not a racist act. This view needs to be reconciled with the fact that Nkrumah who is still recognized by many as '...the greatest African advocate and theoretician of Pan-Africanism' (p.33), himself acknowledged Garvey's influence on him, in as far as his (Nkrumah's) ideological development goes. This is the point, even if we today know that Nkrumah later deviated from Garveyism.

The author also insinuates that Pan-Africanism as an ideology is subject to the 'freedom of racial alignment' (p. 34). This is contradicted by his later claim that 'one objective basis for the unity of the peoples of Africa' is due to 'a common, or kindred cultural background and a social organization that still presents many similarities from one area to another make Black Africa a single entity' (p. 167).

M'buyinga also turns the whole concept of Pan-Africanism up-side-down. Pan-African ideas involved the transformation of what can be termed DuBoism which was the opposite of Garveyism.¹ In other words, DuBoism which Nkrumah called 'bourgeois Negro reformism' (pp. 33-34), was transformed into Garveyism and not vice-versa. Garveyism was a 'Back to Africa Movement' which DuBoism rejected on the absurd claim that Africans of the Diaspora would not manage the so-called harsh climate of Africa. Paradoxically, it was not Garvey but DuBois who 'returned' to Africa (Ghana) where he lived, died and was buried.²

The author also distorts Nkrumah's approach to African unity. M'buyinga claims that Nkrumah accepted that 'Political unity could be achieved by heads of state trade union' (p. 210), via the OAU in spite of its numerous shortcomings (pp. 183, 202, 206). The author does not seem to appreciate the fact that Nkrumah was in the vanguard in the foundation of the All-Africa Trade Union Federation (AATUF) way back in 1961. Despite its problems, the AATUF organized Africa's workers for purposes of pursuing radicalization and political integration 'from below.' Contrary to the author's charge that Nkrumah had a 'love affair' with the pan-African body, Nkrumah in fact wrestled with it throughout, even after he had been deposed.

In his continued criticism of Nkrumah, the author, without any evidence, claims that 'Nkrumah was practically under house arrest during his stay in Guinea' (p. 43). This is amazing since it is a well-known fact that the late Sekou Toure offered to make Nkrumah co-President of Guinea. Whether he accepted this offer, was never publicized. As if to confirm his personal dislike for Nkrumah, M'buyinga charges that Nkrumah was not supported when he called for the political unification of Africa at the inaugural OAU Summit of May

25, 1963 at Addis Ababa (p. 211). This is totally false because if M'buyinga cared to scrutinize the documents pertaining to OAU genesis, he would have discovered that the then Prime Minister (later President) Milton Obote of Uganda strongly supported Nkrumah.

The author who is trying to invoke the spirit of revolutionary Pan-Africanism, uses the very terminologies that Pan-Africanism fought against. He applies racist and oppressive words like 'blackmail' and 'Negro' (pp. 35-43), a mere replica of the anachronistic linguistic verbiage of the imperialist slavers of Africa—a phenomenon still being perpetuated by reactionary scholars especially in western European and North American universities.

In his contradictory and inconsistent style, M'buyinga asserts that 'The Western countries are obviously not seeking to "destabilize" Africa' (p. 7), whereas in the same vein he states that 'in 1966, neo-colonialism won what was probably its greatest victory in Africa for 13 years: a coup d'etat in Ghana overthrew Nkrumah' (p. 58). He also stresses that in Africa there are no longer any revolutionary states (pp. 155-156); yet on the other hand, he maintains that certain reactionary regimes have ganged up in battle against 'the revolutionaries' (pp. 58, 143).

Conclusion

Every book has its own merits and demerits although the degree certainly varies. M'buyinga's is no exception. Despite its shortcomings, Pan-Africanism or Neo-Colonialism: The Bankruptcy of the OAU remains an important political economy publication that rekindles the imperatives of genuine and revolutionary continental unity. The book preponderates much of the existing literature on the OAU, an immense contribution that must be read and understood by all Africans concerned with the unity, prosperity and genuine independence of Africa. It therefore deserves to be translated in the major African languages like Kiswahili and others.

NOTES

¹For details see A.J. Garvey, Garvey and Garveyism (New York, 1963).

²See E. D. Cronon, Black Moses (Madison, 1955).

³Nkrumah denounced the OAU as the vehicle of imperialism and anti-Pan Africanism, and advocated for its liquidation, and in its place, the establishment of an All-Africa People's Revolutionary Party. For details, see K. Nkrumah, A Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare (London, 1968). M'buyinga's proposal for a more revolutionary pan-African body is therefore a reiteration of Nkrumah's call.