

# the class struggle in africa

by

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This article by Samir Amin was originally published in the Paris-based magazine Revolution in 1964 (Vol.1.No.9) under the anonymous signature of XXX. The Africa Research Group is reprinting it now because the text provides one of the best introductory essays on class relations in Africa. Amin surveys the development of classes from the earliest village economies to the current neo-colonial formations. He warns against the danger of mechanically transposing the lessons of European experience and categories of Marxist analysis onto the African scene. He reveals the erroneous conclusions of many who have claimed that classes do not exist in Africa. Amin's contribution is to show not only the existence of classes, but also the originality of their forms. By the same token, he shows the variety of class relations in different African countries and stresses the importance of seeing the specificity of each situation. Finally, his analysis includes a valuable summary of the perspectives for socialism in Africa. Although this text was written prior to the fall of early socialist leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Modiba Keita, the author's analytical approach provides an insight into why these regimes proved to be so precarious. Amin takes a strongly critical position on the question of a transition from communal relations to modern socialist society. He is sceptical of those who seek to give 'socialist form' to pre-capitalist relations. His comments on the necessity of freeing individuals from the chains of traditions in the country-side should be read in the context of his rejection of utopian ideas of socialist development.

Samir Amin is an Egyptian. He has written several books on Africa including: Trois experiences africaines de developpement; Le Mali, La Guinee, et Le Ghana; Le developpement du capitalisme en Cote d'Ivoire; and Les Hommes d'affaires senegalais.



# The Class Struggle in Africa

The importance of a scientific analysis of the problem of social classes throughout black Africa and specifically West Africa is obvious. Only a scientific analysis of the different social groups in this region of the world will allow revolutionary movements to appreciate correctly the evolving perspectives and to adopt a realistic strategy. Only this scientific analysis will finally allow us to get beyond the sphere of superficial judgments from day to day about this or that government. Without such an analysis, judgements would have to be founded on the promises of politicians, or the foreign policy of the government, or especially the attitude towards socialist countries. Too often because of a superficial analysis of the fundamental problem of social groups, the revolutionaries of these countries have been surprised by unforeseen changes in the policy of this or that government, on the domestic level or on that of foreign policy.

A century ago Marx formulated the theory of the evolution of societies, analysing the genesis of European capitalism and demonstrating

the possibilities of this society. What has retained its universal meaning in the lesson of Marxism is its method, the theory of the primacy of the forces of production, explaining how these forces determine in the last analysis the dynamics of production and beyond that the framework of the societies. Starting from there, it is a universal truth that when human societies reach a certain degree of development of their productive forces, they break up into antagonistic social classes.

The scientific Marxist answer to the question of whether or not the present societies of West Africa are class societies would be unhesitating: almost all through West Africa the level of development of the productive forces has evolved sufficiently for social classes to have already appeared.

However the present societies of West Africa are not essentially similar to the "classical" descriptions of class societies: based on slavery, the feudal system, or capitalism. That is certainly why a certain confusion reigns. The scientific analysis of African societies



is only possible if one is aware that the significance of the formula primitive communism-slavery-feudal system-capitalism which is exposed in the elementary books and manuals is only relative. This formula is nothing more than the application of the Marxist method to the history of one part of humanity, the Europeans. In other places other societies have evolved sometimes very similar but sometimes very different from those described in the manuals. As always history presents in this domain an incomparably more rich variety than that of the pedants. It should not be forgotten that Marx, who recognised this richness of historical variety, always took care not to transpose mechanically the lessons of European experience. He chose a new term for certain pre-capitalist class societies which he felt were not based on either slavery or the feudal system: "Asiatic Society." But since the appearance of black Africa on the scene of contemporary history, the problem has been posed of societies until now even less known.

Dogmatism in this domain consists in giving a particular historical formula a universal significance. Here as elsewhere dogmatism finally permits the "justification" of no matter what thesis, to pretend either that the present societies of West Africa are class societies, or that they are not. It allows the justification by these same individuals of opportunist or underhand tactics, according to local or international circumstances. Super-

ficial "self-criticism" permits the justification of these double-crossing tactics.

The dogmatic people try to find everywhere exactly the same historical categories analysed by Marx: slavery, feudal system, capitalism. At certain moments to justify a "leftist" policy, those bound by dogma will be satisfied with a few superficial formal statistics. If any slaves exist in a society, they decide that this society is based on slavery. If there are a few businessmen, they decide that the society is based on capitalism. At other times to justify a conciliatory attitude toward this or that political group in power, they will say on the contrary: "since neither slavery nor the serf system nor the wage system are the dominant modes of production, our society is fundamentally a classless society," or again, to weaken the point of this affirmation in view of the future, they will say: "Among us class differences are not very sharply defined," which does not really mean much<sup>1</sup>.

They do not try at any time to penetrate in reality the nature of the dominant mode of production and its mechanism. They forget the Marxist method. They try only to glue

<sup>1</sup> Affirmations of this type usually are derived from the relatively "equalitarian" aspect of certain African societies superficially observed. It is not a realistic way of judging things. According to this way of thinking, Scandinavian societies which also seem "equalitarian" would be classless societies!



labels prepared in advance on new things. Their attitude is completely unscientific.

Originally, in West Africa as in other parts of the world, the dominant productive system was the village community. Fundamentally the village community is a system of production without classes. This is true not only in West Africa but for all humanity. But what is special in West Africa and numerous other parts of Africa is that this village community is still not very far off. The village community is a classless society, this evidently does not signify that it ignores all forms of social differentiation. But as we will explain further on all the differences in the organization and division of work (age classes, hierarchy of occupations and caste problems, symbiosis of populations with different life-patterns, etc.) are not necessarily class differences, that is to say antagonistic differentiations<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Masters and slaves, feudal lords and peasants, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat constitute antagonistic classes. The contradictions which oppose them have found or will find their solution in revolutionary violence, that is to say that the destruction of the old system to make way for the new brings about *ipso facto* the liquidation of the dominating classes of the old system. Other social differences, such as those connected to sex or age, can not be suppressed by the violent destruction of one of the terms of the contradiction (young men or old men, etc.). They can only be surpassed by *latu sensu* education and the destruction of the traditional family structure.

But what one must above all keep in mind is that nowhere in Africa has the village community survived until the present time as it originally was. Everywhere it is already distorted and decomposing. Its decadence began long before colonisation, as early as the 10th Century with the appearance of the West African States. Islam, the slave trade, and then colonization evidently accentuated this process of degradation and decomposition.

The decadence of the village community in the historical conditions of black Africa did not lead either to a society based on slavery or to a feudal society<sup>3</sup> or even less to a capitalist society in the scientific sense of these terms<sup>4</sup>.

That the decadence of the village community did not lead generally in black Africa to a social system corresponding rigorously to one of the two studied by Marx could only surprise a blindfolded dogmatist. Evidently this does not signify that this

Thus these are not antagonistic contradictions.

<sup>3</sup> Except in certain regions of Ethiopia (among the Tigre and the Amhara) where a real feudal system existed. But this is a semi-oriental country whose civilisation goes back to thousands of years before Jesus Christ and where the development of productive forces (the generalised use of swing-plowing is a proof) is infinitely more advanced than in the rest of black Africa.

<sup>4</sup> Except in regions where many Europeans settled (Kenya, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa).



disintegration did not engender social antagonisms. One can not pretend that African humanity escapes from the general laws of human evolution, and that therefore one must give up trying to study and understand African societies through logic.

The only scientific way to state these problems is thus to try to give the elements of an answer to the following questions:

- 1) What remainders of the primitive village community still survive in West Africa? In other words, to what point have antagonistic contradictions infiltrated?
- 2) What are the mechanisms which started antagonistic social differences going in the village community before and after colonisation? And what are the original forms of the particular social differentiations among the present societies of West Africa?

### **I. The Remainders of the Village Community in Rural West African Society**

Those who pretend that West African societies are not fundamentally class societies or that, at least, class differences are only embryonic, are thinking of those vast regions of West Africa where the dominant mode of production has remained that of small independent producers associated in the village community. The base of agricultural production is still family production.

The low density of the rural popu-

lation (in the regions not yet infected by "land hunger"), the very slight degree of commercialization of agricultural production, the very low degree of productivity of agricultural work, have permitted the small family production for its own subsistence to perpetuate itself until modern times without much modification. The ownership of the land has remained collective, the use of the land distributed to each household being, on the other hand, familial. Thus each household receives each year as much land as it is capable of working, agriculture having remained itinerant.

These conditions are extremely exceptional, since the entire under-developed world and large regions of Africa suffer already from a shortage of land where it is possible for farmers to grow crops. This land shortage has favored and reinforced the monopoly of landlords, creating a class of peasants without land or obliged to work land which does not belong to them.

It is true that in West Africa that this diffused property of the earth whose use is shared equally among the producers is founded on a sort of supreme right of the real or supposed "first occupant" and his descendants: the "masters of the earth" (there are also "masters of the hunt" and "masters of the water").

In certain regions this supreme right has already become the embryo of a sort of land ownership. On the Ivory Coast and in Ghana the population of the forest (Baoulé, Agni,



Ashanti, etc.) have thus profited from their "rights." These new "landlords" exploit coffee and cacao plantations by bringing agricultural workers from the country of the plains (especially the Mossis of the Upper Volta). Here the class difference superimposes itself on a racial difference. The government of Houphouët-Boigny, founded on the ethnic domination of certain peoples of the forest, favors systematically this type of evolution.

In other regions where a "pseudo-feudality" has been formed, as in the Fouta, in the ring of the Niger and northern Nigeria, it is not the "masters of the earth" who have become the dominating elements. On the contrary, it is the conquerors, Peuls or other tribes<sup>5</sup>, these "newcomers" then, which have constituted the class of proprietors. Usually in these regions the symbolic right of the former "masters of the earth" has been maintained parallel to the much more important rights of the new masters.

In general the magical links which united the different "masters of the earth," of the hunt or of the water and the spirits which haunt the land they have cleared, the herds of animals in the brush and the fish in the river, have stayed alive in the tradition and the spirit of the people. The obligation for each farmer, hunter or

<sup>5</sup> See the example of the Armas, Negritized descendants of Moroccan conquerors of the region of Gao-Tombouctou, which constitute until the present time the powerful feudality of the ring of the Niger.

fisherman to give symbolically to the masters of the earth a fraction of the produce of his work in the hope of obtaining the benefits of friendship with the earth spirits is still in effect. But this supreme right of property does not go any further, it brings only slight advantages to its beneficiary. Without exception it has never become a substantial income. Completely different is the tribute exacted by certain warrior tribes like the Touaregs, the Moors, or certain Peul herdsmen, from the population of farmers for their "protection." This last aspect of class differences in West Africa is usually connected to the spread of Islam.

Thus if it is correct to say that over large areas collective ownership of the land has remained the base of the rural system, still it must be specified that a majority of the peasants of West Africa work the earth under conditions of either semi-slavery (Fouta, ring of the Niger, North Nigeria: more than 25 million inhabitants) or semi-wage system (forest and coast of the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey, and Southern Nigeria: about 15 million inhabitants).

But even where the ownership of the land has remained really collective, the ownership of livestock is already individualised and very unevenly shared. Whether it be among the populations of cattle-herders or among the farmers who leave their livestock to be raised by the cattle-herders who benefit from their growth, the ownership of livestock is



already very concentrated. The result is that among the cattle-herders class differences have already appeared. This differentiation evidently goes along with the concentration of prestige and power in the hands of a small aristocracy. This process of differentiation of the classes is very advanced among the Moors, the Touaregs, and certain Peuls. Among the cultivators, inequality in the distribution of livestock is less extreme. As for the most part the farming populations do not yet use livestock in agricultural work, as they have very little commercial activity, a class difference based on inequality in the distribution of livestock among the farmers has not developed that is of any significance. Among the farmers, the accumulation of livestock is still above all motivated by reasons of prestige, borrowed from neighbouring cattle-raising populations. It is not yet a source of economic equality because this livestock is to all practical purposes not exploited. Evidently the exploitation of the group livestock owners, cattleraisers above all and farmers only secondarily, by the new class of meat salesmen who, with the development of urban markets and regional exchanges between the plains and the coast, have formed a colonialist group, is a completely different story.

## II. Evolution of the Village Community and the Appearance of Antagonistic Classes

On the other hand, even where the village community has remained the dominant mode of production, that is outside the zones where systems of semi-slavery or semi-wages have developed, certain social antagonisms have for a very long time found a way to the very nucleus of village society. Certainly as we have said all social differences connected to the division of work in the village community are not antagonistic class differences. It is thus with age classes, castes, and symbiosis between different ethnic groups, although some of these differences can under certain conditions degenerate and evolve rapidly toward class differences.

Age classes are not social classes. Their organisation and their structure are of course related to the problems of the division of work, but it would be completely erroneous to assume that certain age classes are "exploited" by others. Certainly the authority that surrounds the group of the old men, justified historically by the necessity of transmitting the experience of the past generations which alone permits survival, can become in a certain sense an obstacle to progress. Today the human beings of Africa are benefiting from new knowledge, new methods which permit the escape from the cruel domination of nature. The transmission of and the complete respect for tradition have become an obstacle to renewal. The authority of the old men is no longer justified. In any case, the real contradictions which animate the relations between different age groups



in the actual situation as it really is (characterized by the introduction of new methods which will completely upset traditional agriculture), are not antagonistic contradictions. Let us understand by this that their solution does not imply necessarily the use of revolutionary violence, revolutionary liquidation of certain age classes to the profit of others.

These contradictions can and should be surmounted by education and the destruction of the traditional family structure.

The hierarchy of occupations also does not constitute a class difference *stricto sensu*. This hierarchy, which corresponded in the past to historical necessities, idealised in the spirit of the people, became petrified. It no longer answers the demands of progress, it has become an obstacle to renewal, an obstacle that only education and the destruction of the traditional family can surmount. The castes the most looked down upon (such as the blacksmiths and the sorcerers) are not economically exploited by the others. Nevertheless the "superior" castes have a tendency to transform themselves into pseudo-feudal exploiting classes.

Certain symbioses between different ethnic groups present the same characteristics of non-antagonistic contradictions. It is this way in certain regions where there is a symbiotic relationship between Peul herdsmen and farmers belonging to different ethnic groups. Certainly these relationships have been strained by economic ex-

ploitation and political predominance at certain moments of history. But in a general fashion in the field of economic relationships which is that of the differentiation of the classes, it is not correct to say that the farmers "exploit" the herdsmen or vice versa (this is not the case in certain other symbioses between farmers and herdsmen we will discuss a little further on). In any case these non-antagonistic symbioses are based on an agricultural tradition that is obsolete. African agriculture is progressing to the stage of liquidation of the farmer-herdsman duality by a fusion of their activities. This synthesis, the abolition of this duality, cannot be attained, like the liquidation of antagonistic classes, by revolutionary violence, by suppression of one or the other category of farmers or herdsmen. It should and can only be attained by education. This evidently does not signify that the task is any easier, that it can be accomplished with less effort than some revolutionary task.

Analysing the structure and evolution of traditional subsistence economies, a French sociologist<sup>6</sup> demonstrated accurately that the village community must not be confused with primitive communism. This last represents the most ancient phase of evolution. Later the structure of traditional elementary social cells be-

<sup>6</sup> Claude Meillassoux: "Essai d'interprétation du phénomène économique dans les sociétés traditionnelles d'auto-subsistance, Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, n° 4, December 1960.



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cause of the "hierarchisation of ancestry" and the "relationships with complementary economies" becomes complicated. The formation of castes and the reinforcement of the power of the "old men" which derived from this evolution, retraced ideally in this study, constitute the genesis of antagonistic social classes in Africa. Everywhere in Africa, doubtlessly even among the most primitive groups like the Pygmies or the Bushmen, the village community has attained or is attaining this stage of evolution<sup>7</sup>.

To find societies even closer to primitive communism, one would have to leave Africa for Australia or the Amazon.

Under these conditions, social differences which were originally non-antagonistic tend to become antagonistic class differences. And founded on this new antagonistic differentiation, the State was created and developed, which, let us not forget, came on the West African scene in the 10th century.

### III. Decadence of the Primitive Community, Appearance and Development of the State before Colonisation

Although small family production

<sup>7</sup> The most primitive West African populations are situated in a pocket around Mount Nimba (Liberia) (the forests of Guinea and western Ivory Coast). These populations are still too backward to play any political role. Nevertheless they are already reaching the stage of social classes.

in the framework of the village community has remained the dominant mode of production in large areas of West Africa up to the present time, it is nonetheless true that antagonistic social differences had already appeared before colonisation. The proof is that numerous African peoples had evolved beyond prehistory for centuries, and the State appeared in West Africa in the 10th Century with the Empire of Wagadou. Between the 10th and the 19th Centuries, all West Africa was covered with States: Mali, the kingdoms of Ouolof, Songhai, Bambara, Peul, Hausa, Mossi, Sarakollé, Ashanti, Yoruba, etc.

But the scientific theory of the evolution of societies teaches us that the State only appears where class antagonisms exist, for the State is only the instrument by which one class dominates another. The States of West Africa do not escape this universal law of human evolution.

It remains to reconcile some facts which appear contradictory: the co-existence of organised States and a dominant mode of production still close to primitive communism. These facts are indeed contradictory, but the contradiction occurred in life: coming from the fact that the State did not make a sudden entrance on the scene. The parallel processes of the constitution of social classes and the formation of the State are extremely slow: they can last several centuries. During this entire transition period, the State is present in an embryonic form. It is originally constituted by a few



When would Ann say today  
gave her common  
at the tribal  
mode  
production

rulers: the king and his court. This ruling class does not yet fit into the classical categories of slavery or feudality. Although slavery was not unknown in these embryonic States, it had not yet become the dominant mode of production<sup>8</sup>.

The slaves, usually prisoners of war, were domestic servants of the king and the court officials, the administrators and the soldiers. Their function in the society was non-productive, while the village communities continued to be the only source of agricultural and craft production. However a new type of production was sometimes put in the service of the court: workshops and farms worked for the king, his court and his army. But the production of these workshops and farms never represented at this stage more than an unimportant fraction of the social activity. The essential part of the individual and collective consumption of the new class of... privileged people and their agents (soldiers, bureaucrats, servants, priests, etc.) was furnished by tribute from the rural population whose organisation remained unchanged. It is for this last reason that one can not classify this new ruling class as feudal. The historical cate-

gory of feudality is a system of production and the peasant bound to the land each have a precise and definite function. The feudal system should not be confused with a simple juxtaposition of village collectives and a State supported by tribute from the villages which aside from that remain independent of the central power.

So long as the system remains like this, a juxtaposition of village collectives and a few officials grouped around the king, the State should be considered as embryonic.

Later in certain privileged zones, the relative importance of "villages of captives" in social production increases. A sort of feudalism<sup>9</sup> becomes the dominant mode of production in these zones. But in general even at the end of the 19th Century, at the moment of the European conquest, the area over which the States spread was much greater than those privileged zones where feudalism had become the dominant mode of production. In this sense over vast areas which had been recently conquered, the State remains in an embryonic form.

In this process of the formation of the State in black Africa, the slave trade and Islam played an important part.

<sup>8</sup> A sort of serf system later becomes the dominant mode of production. At this stage, close to that of "military democracy" as in the ancient Greece of Homer, the State is still embryonic, and the small production of village communities remains the dominant mode of production.

<sup>9</sup> Feudalism rather than slave system. The status of captives who owe a certain number of work days to their masters is closer to the serf system than slavery, where the slave becomes like one of the farm animals—a means of production.



This trade and the civil wars that were its consequence destroyed the ancient African system, poisoned the ancient peace. Money-lust, artificially introduced into black Africa, pushed the population into perpetual war to procure slaves to sell to the Arab and European traders. On this basis embryonic military States were constituted around this or that famous leader. The immense movements of the population because of these wars, the flight of the farmers before the slave-raiders, brought about the development of new relationships, often unequal, between ethnic groups formerly good neighbors but ever since at odds with each other, as the linguistic map of Africa shows.

Unequal symbioses were superimposed on the ancient equalitarian symbioses: such a tribe in such a region becomes collectively the "captive" or "payer of tribute" to some other tribe. Here again let us not confuse these class societies of a very special type that only the original history of Africa can explain with the model of the slave system in Ancient Rome or European feudality.

The influence of Islam, whose history in Africa is linked to the genesis and development of class States<sup>10</sup> is ancient and profound in many regions of West Africa. In almost the entire area north of the plains a real feudality was constituted. There as in numerous regions of the Moslem

<sup>10</sup> In Arabia Islam also appears at the same time as the State and class differences.

world class domination often took the form of a deformation of the ancient symbiosis between farmers and herdsmen. The herdsmen were more powerful in war, better organised, galvanised by the religious appeal, and collectively imposed themselves as the exploiters, collecting tribute from the black farmers reduced to the state of vassals. At the same time class differences among the farmers become more accentuated: the traditional chiefs have seized the ownership of the herds of livestock which were formerly collective. Thus it was in the regions colonised by the Moors, the Touaregs, and the Peuls, especially the north of Nigeria, the Niger ring, and Fouta.

So little by little under the influence of all these internal and external elements, the institutions of a real class State develop: unequal relations between ethnic groups, formation of a caste of "nobility" which constitutes a group of privileged people imposing tribute on the farmers who have been reduced to the state of vassals, development of commercial exchanges and the appearance of a merchant class, transformation of religious agents (animist sorcerers and Moslem marabouts) into exploitative parasites (*maraboutage*) are the principal manifestations of this evolution.

How would this society have evolved if it had been left to itself? Towards what type of society would it have developed if colonisation had not brutally put an end to it? It is not possible to say: one can explain



history, but one can not remake it. It is possible to imagine an evolution finishing in some variant of a real slave or feudal system as was the case in certain regions north of the Plains. But that is not absolutely necessary.

Among others the history of ancient Egypt indicates other possibilities: the development of a strongly centralised theocratic bureaucracy exploiting the masses of peasants by the State it represents. In this system the primitive institutions of the village collectivity have been degraded by varying degrees. When the system is very old as in Egypt, each peasant is submitted to the exploitation of State theocracy, the only owner of the land. In the contrary case where the system is relatively recent as in black Africa, the village collectivity has remained a .lity which is still quite alive<sup>11</sup>.

Between the two extremes all the different degrees of evolution obviously exist.

As long as the decadence of the village communities is not sufficiently advanced, the State remains embryonic: over large areas it does no more than superimpose itself in some way on the communal administration of the village, it does not penetrate the social body profoundly. Parallel to the bureaucratic class State, the State still remains a sort of federation of villages. What is alive in this struc-

ture is the village administration: the central superstructures come and go according to the hazards of history without leaving profound traces. And the village administration is not a State in the Marxist sense of the word, but an equalitarian association of producers organised for their common external defense and not the instrument for domination of one class by another.

Because the embryonic State spreads over large areas which surpass its possibilities of exploitation it remains superficial, menaced with destruction: the society can easily survive without the State. In this sense a return to the ancient independence of the village communities is still possible, which is after all what happened in numerous regions where the colonising powers systematically destroyed the young African States which had been so difficult to conquer.

At the beginning of colonisation the young animist or Islamic African states like those of Diolof, El Hadj Omar, Ousman Dan Fodio, Samory, Ashanti, Benin, etc., had their hour of glory. They sometimes led the war of resistance against the colonialist conquerors. No matter what part these States played in ripening the anti-colonial national conscience, it still is true that they were class States.

With the destruction of some of these class States by European conquerors, African society suffered a collapse. Witness the rapid emaciation of the ancient capitals, reduced to the state of villages after the disappear-

<sup>11</sup> For a long time the superstructures of these classes are marked by these vestiges. Thus the "captives" are integrated into the family system and "adopted" into the mastering tribe, etc.



ance of the States. It is not until many years later that new towns created by the administration will take up where the ancient capitals left off, but in new forms and new ways.

This regression, however, did not lead anywhere to a pure and simple return to the ancient classless village community. Everywhere these States existed, past history has left profound traces. The primitive equality is no longer the rule between the new villages: the memory of the class differences in the period preceding colonisation effectively prevents the return to the ancient communities. The form of the system of the village collective with the periodic redistribution of the land remains intact. But the old noble families, marabouts, sorcerers, etc., make up an aristocracy in these villages. They are the ones who always get the best land while the others get what is left over, the castes held in lowest esteem being especially ill-treated. Sometimes even the old "nobles" of vanished States have the earth that they have had distributed to themselves through the collective workers by their former "captives," who from being servants, functionaries, and State soldiers have become farm-vassals or agricultural workers for the new aristocracy. The "poor" population of the village must often pay a tribute to the "traditional chiefs" and marabouts which although supposedly voluntary is nonetheless sometimes very important. All the more as colonisation tries from the start to gain the allegiance of

these ancient ruling groups by putting at their disposition all the equipment of the colonial State to make the peasants "stay in their place."

#### IV. Colonisation

Even before the complete conquest of West Africa by the imperialists (conquest which dates approximately from 1870 to 1900), the establishment of Europeans on the coast, first for the slave trade, then from 1820 to about 1850 for commercial activity, profoundly upset the traditional social structures. The impact of these establishments showed itself on the one hand by the reinforcement and enrichment of the black aristocracy who served as intermediaries between the countries of the interior, the slave traders and the European businessmen, on the other hand by the establishment of "colonies of advanced Negroes," former slaves who after liberation became the rulers of certain States.

The societies of the coast that served as intermediaries between the slave traders and European businessmen in their dealings with the populations of the interior were completely upset by the infiltration of Europeans. The embryonic ruling classes which already existed at the time the Europeans arrived (black "aristocratic" and "royal" ancestry) became richer and more or less Europeanised. The descendants of these aristocracies have often given birth to millionaires in the modern style. For example the aristocracy of Ewe and Mina planta-



tion owners in southern Togo and Dahomey. Europeanised very early, these aristocracies have usually been the faithful agents of colonization and its penetration into the interior. Thus in Ghana, especially in south-eastern Nigeria, and also in Senegal there are families of intellectuals that go back three generations. The Portuguese and English names of these "great families," frequent on the coast between Accra and Lagos, the "light-skin" snobbery which is a symbol for cross-breeding, testifies to the antiquity of this Europeanisation. The German colonisation of Togo consistently used these families which then went into the service of France, taking over the plantations of the German colonial companies in 1919, and still form the ruling class of this country. Where the development of capitalism was more profound as on the Ghana coast and in Nigeria, almost the entire coastal population was deeply Europeanised. The traditional structures could not withstand this Europeanisation: "noble families," castes, and animism nearly disappeared. Allied to the proletariat of the coastal towns, numerous intellectuals coming from this environment played an important part in the national movement. Thus it is paradoxically the descendants of those who were the best agents of colonisation who took the leadership of the independence movement, often against the traditional chiefs of the interior of the country who after having resisted colonisation for a long time

became during the 20th Century its best new supporters (for example such is the case of the Ashanti monarchy in Ghana).

The colonies of freed slaves installed in Liberia and Sierra Leone for similar reasons have become the ruling class of these countries. Submitting brutally to their administration and exploitation the "savage of the interior," taking for themselves the best land and building modern plantations, this new ruling class is a faithful ally of imperialism with whose interests it is closely identified (Firestone in Liberia, etc.).

The complete colonization of West Africa accentuated the formation of class differences. The effects of this transformation did not of course have the same magnitude everywhere. In this respect certain coastal countries more efficiently exploited where the capitalist system was more extensively developed must be distinguished from the less "interesting" countries of the interior, less rich, less developed because further away, which served and still serve mainly as reserves of cheap migrant labour for the coastal regions. One should also distinguish the former British colonies, much richer and better run than the former French colonies. Colonial policies were not always the same. In the British colonies the national States were usually respected, the British contracting an alliance of hierarchised collaboration with the traditional ruling classes. The French always tried to impose a direct administration,



which led in most cases to the destruction of local state structures.

The complete colonisation of West Africa had two principal social effects: the acceleration of the decadence of the primitive community and the reinforcement of traditional class differences on the one hand, the introduction and the development of new class differences linked to the capitalist exploitation of the country on the other hand.

a) **The decadence of the village community and the reinforcement of traditional class differences**

British colonisation systematically practised a policy of reinforcing the traditional chiefs, in Ghana with the Ashanti kingdom, in Nigeria with the feudal Islamic chiefs of the Hausa-Peul. And the descendants of those who were the heroes of the resistance to the conquest, the Ashanti chiefs, the emirs and sultans of Bornu and Kanem, the Sardana of Sokoto, etc., are today the best agents of imperialism. These traditional rulers have in general become powerful pseudo-feudalities, reducing the peasants to a state of servitude.

The French colonisation, which began by breaking the old ruling families who had directed the resistance to the conquest the kingdoms of Djolof, Bambaras, Mossis, Samory, Behanzin, El Hadj Omar, etc.) hastened to recruit its agents among the families of the former chiefs to recreate from the pieces and then reinforce the tra-

ditional ruling classes. The French and English colonisers who boasted of their "progressive" spirit and "civilising mission" did not do much to free the "captives"<sup>12</sup>, or suppress the tribute. On the contrary, not only they reinforced the material power of the privileged class in the regions where vestiges of theocratic military States remained after conquest, but even more they tried to systematise feudal models in regions where class differences were not yet advanced. The artificial creation of "district chiefs" in the French colonies, and "headmen" in the English colonies derived from the desire to create an auxiliary class of privileged people to exploit the peasants. Following a certain economic development, it is these traditional chiefs, authentic or artificially put in place, who have been the principal beneficiaries, taking the best land which they exploit with local or migrant serf or paid labor according to the regions.

However the economic power of these new landlords brought about a more complete decadence of the antique village community. In only three countries, Guinea, Ghana and Mali, have governments officially proposed a reduction of the chiefs. But the results which are still very un-

<sup>12</sup> Rarely it happened that for political reasons the colonial power freed colonies of captives" in such a way as to weaken the power of particularly strong enemies. Such was the case in certain regions of Senegal in 1892.



equal according to the regions will depend in the long run on the amplitude of the peasant mass movement and the support given this movement by administrative authorities. Without this the abolition of the chief system will remain theoretical<sup>13</sup>.

**b) The antagonism of the new classes**

More serious and heavier with menace are the new forms of exploitation introduced by colonialism. More dangerous because liable to spread, because they conform to the objective laws of economic movement. The development of salaried exploitation is very unequally developed in black Africa. In general the almost complete lack of existence of industry limits the scope. In the agricultural sector, regions of "plantations" exist in Africa where salaried forms of exploitation have extensively developed and there are still regions situated outside of these new capitalist forms.

Certainly in West Africa there has been no European agricultural colonisation such as in Kenya, Rhodesia, or South Africa.

Firestone in Liberia is an exception in West Africa, where large modern European plantations do not exist. One does find immense forest regions covered with "little" African plantations. It is in these regions where coffee,

cacao, bananas and pineapples are grown that a real rural bourgeoisie has formed. It is this rural bourgeoisie exploiting migrant workers which constitutes the main support for the Houphouët-Boigny style of government.

The development of a non-rural proletariat is still completely embryonic in West Africa. This is not true for the rest of black Africa. In Central Africa (Congo and Rhodesia) and in South Africa, the exploitation of mineral wealth (gold, diamonds, copper) brought about the constitution of a numerous and concentrated proletariat. The particularly inhuman forms of exploitation of this proletariat are well known. Parked in small "reservations," the traditional peasantry tends to become more and more the economic appendix of this system of exploitation: it is in these "reservations" that imperialist big business gets the workers for its plantations, mines, and industries, it is the rural population of these reservations which continue to partially support the emigrated workers, reducing by that much the cost of labour to the monopolies and the planters. There is nothing like that in West Africa, although in a certain measure the overpopulated regions of the barren plains country (the Mossi for example) play the same part for the plantations of the rural bourgeoisie of the coast as the "reservations" of central and southern Africa. Nevertheless as industrialisation is lacking in West Africa, urban development brought

<sup>13</sup> That is why we do not share the enthusiasm of G. Chaliand and J. Minces (*"L'Afrique et la Guinée"*, *Partisans*, no 7, 1962) who seem to believe seriously in the abolition of the chief system in Guinea by legislative methods.



about the development of new class differences. In most of the great urban centres (Ibadan, Lagos, Kano, Accra, Dakar, Abidjan), sumptuous villas and slums testify to class differences. But because urbanisation has not been accompanied by industrialisation, these popular urban masses have not become a proletariat. The ordinary people of West African towns is composed of small officials, businessmen, workmen, and employees, plus the innumerable parasites whose existence is favoured by the traditional family system and of course a false proletariat of semi-permanent unemployed. Along with these popular masses in the towns of the former British colonies a real local bourgeoisie has existed for a long time. It is a commercial and financial bourgeoisie of the colonial type, especially at Lagos, whose fortune comes from the big import-export businesses, from the exploitation of the country (usury, etc.), real estate speculation etc. Most of the high officials come from this group which is strongly allied with the rural bourgeoisie. On the other hand, in the former French colonies the urban bourgeoisie still remain almost entirely composed of non-Africans. However the French imperialists have been trying for many years to systematically associate in their enterprises the upper classes of the new bureaucracy, which has thus become the embryo of a real national bourgeoisie of the "classical" type, which is most often linked to the traditional chieftains and the rural

bourgeoisie of planters.

All these phenomena of class differences of the modern type have so far only touched the coast countries which are economically more dynamic.

On the other hand, the commercial exploitation of the mass of farmers and herdsmen by imperialism stimulated and reinforced everywhere the position of the African merchant class. Squeezing in between the imperialist big business which dominates the entire economic structure and the rural producers, these merchants have developed considerably in the last twenty years. Generally descended from the merchant castes of precolonial Africa (Sarakollé, Diulas, Hausa, etc.) these merchants have now gone beyond the boundaries of their traditional activity (commerce in the kola nut, dried and smoked fish, and livestock) spreading out into transporting truckloads of cloth or hardware. In the most favorable case they introduce themselves into the import-export business, real estate speculation, etc.

Finally colonisation begot a new class of national functionaries, reduced of course to inferior positions but having had nonetheless the privilege of acquiring a modern culture, which would in the long run play an important part in the national movement.

## V. The National Movement and the Rise of the New Bureaucracy

Colonisation created a class of



*The party  
bourgeoisie  
of (Colonial)  
businessmen  
(at various  
(about 1945)  
a  
member)*

minor functionaries confined for a long time to inferior positions, postmen, teachers, clerks, etc. Considering the state of backwardness of the peasant masses and the almost total absence of a proletariat, this group of minor functionaries was for a long time almost the only one to have an anticolonialist conscience. The rural traditional chiefs and the national bourgeoisie of businessmen and plantation owners only thought of using colonisation to enrich themselves at the people's expense.

It is useless to regret that the proletariat did not exist to play this part, the fact is that the social class begotten by colonialism which had the mission of liquidating its domination was not the proletariat but this class of functionaries. The fact is also that due to the special relatively favorable economic situation of the embryonic proletariat which existed in these countries, the political conscience of the workers was not—and could not be—more advanced than that of the minor officials. This is evidently not a general law. We would not dream of supporting Frantz Fanon's thesis that the proletariat in underdeveloped countries is always opportunist and that the real revolutionary force comes from the peasants.

When the revolutionary masses are furnished by the peasants, the socialist ideology can only come from the factory-workers. However in certain underdeveloped countries where the qualified factory-workers enjoy relatively privileged conditions because

of exceptional population pressure, the working class having shown itself incapable of fulfilling its revolutionary duty, no other class, not even the poor peasants, is capable of filling the gap, even when some of the intelligentsia try. But when a proletariat does not exist, as in West Africa, how can we reproach it for not having directed the national movement?

The part played by the bourgeoisie of minor functionaries, employees, small businessmen, and urban artisans in the national anti-imperialist alliance varies according to the countries in function of the class structure of these countries. In this respect it might be useful to distinguish the coast countries from the countries of the interior, which are economically less advanced.

In the more advanced coastal countries, the lower middle class which took the initiative in the national movement soon became the instrument of the local wealthy class, especially the plantation owners and bourgeois businessmen. Such was the significance of the United Gold Coast Convention, the Action Group (Western Nigeria), National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (Southern Nigeria), Northern Elements Progressive Union (Northern Nigeria), Sierra Leone People's Party, Democratic Party of the Ivory Coast, Committee of Unity for Togo, and other groups in Dahomey and Senegal. In certain cases after a time splits occurred between the right and left wings. The right wing then openly represents the local wealthy class favourable to com-



promises with imperialism, the left wing like the C.C.P. of Ghana, the Juvento of Togo, certain fractions of the West Nigerian Action Group, elements of the lower middle class, intellectuals, and the common people of the towns refuse to let themselves be fooled by the local bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, in the countries that are economically less advanced the national movement created by the urban lower middle class when not broken by suppression is usually the "purest", the amount of influence of wealthy classes of the modern type being negligible. This was the case in Guinea with the Democratic Party of Guinea and in Mali with the Sudanese Union. Since the local wealthy class is not able to obtain a monopoly on the key posts in the administration founded on the traditional chief system, imperialism brings forth parties that are simply part of the administration. Such was the case with the Northern People's Congress (Northern Nigeria), the Moslem organizations and Ashantis in Ghana, the associates of the French S.F.I.O. and Overseas Independents, in Mali with the Sudanese Progressive Party and in the other former French colonies, the Progress Party of Togo, etc. These parties have usually tried to exploit ethnic differences. This was the case with the African Bloc of Guinea and the Social Democrats of Guinea and the Union of the Chiefs and Peoples of Northern Togo, the Apithy and Maga parties in Dahomey, etc. When the power of the traditional chiefs

is great enough to prevent the urban lower middle class from contacting the rural masses and a wealthy class of the modern type is still embryonic, which is the case in the plains countries where Islam predominates, these feudal pro-imperialist parties have succeeded in obtaining a powerful position. This is especially true in Northern Nigeria.

But the national movement was only able to take on a real amplitude and an anti-imperialist attitude in regions where it has succeeded in reaching the peasant masses. The suffering endured by peasants submitted to "forced labour", especially in the French colonies, the relatively heavy taxes which have the object of obliging the peasants to grow crops commercially interesting to the imperialists, the proximity of the ordinary townspeople fresh from the villages, create an environment favourable to the development of a national movement.

When the imperialists decided to speed up the accession of West Africa to independence in a framework of neo-colonialist collaboration, the position of the new bureaucracy which came from the lower middle class was by the nature of things considerably reinforced. This was especially the case in the former French colonies where the degree of influence of the wealthy classes both "modern" (plantation owners and businessmen) and "traditional" (chiefs) being less important than in the English colonies. Operating through judicial councils



and cabinets of ministers in the eight former French West African colonies. French imperialism tried to create from one day to the next the substantial class ally which until then had been lacking. Since, and even more as the country is economically less developed, the rise of this new bureaucracy has become the essential aspect of the class differences in a conjuncture of economic stagnation. The complete financial dependency of these artificial and corrupted bureaucracies on their money-lenders reinforces the control of the imperialists.

In this way the local bourgeoisie dominated progressively the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Togo; the pro-imperialist bureaucrats allied to the traditional chiefs and the small bourgeois class when it exists in Senegal, Dahomey, and the Niger; the Islamic feudality in Nigeria whose political power is being contested to a certain point by the bourgeoisie and bureaucracy of the South.

In Ghana the political conjuncture and the strong personality of Nkrumah have permitted the advanced elements of the urban people in alliance with the peasant masses against the chiefs to beat the local bourgeoisie on the political level.

The national movement in Mali and Guinea had only a few weak class enemies (except in the Fouta and the Niger ring) opposing the alliance between the peasants and the small bourgeoisie. This explains the tone and orientation of the government of these countries which comes from the

minor urban functionaries, whose power is not contested by powerful wealthy rural classes.

In countries where the domination of imperialism through the instrument of local bourgeois or feudal wealthy classes is at present uncontested, certain levels of the urban lower middle class are beginning to agitate. The examples of Mali and Guinea inspire the new rising bureaucracy, whose development has been speeded up by independence, and which is trying to monopolise the exploitation of power. Secondary contradictions between the traditional and the modern wealthy class of the "classical" type (chiefs and bourgeoisie) on the one hand and, on the other, the new potential wealthy class (State bureaucracy) also tend to develop.

These contradictions seem to explain in a large measure the recent fall from power of Sylvanus Olympio, the "plot" against Houphouët-Boigny, the trial of Awolowo and the Nigerian Action Group, the progress of the opposition in Niger and Senegal. The most radical members of the opposition in this movement rejoin the positions of the Marxists.

## **VII. The Perspectives of Socialism in West Africa**

The question of the possibility of constructing socialism in Africa without passing through a stage of capitalist development has sometimes been posed in abstract and dogmatic terms. Evidently history furnishes examples



where certain stages of development have been "jumped", but to content oneself with this statement does not lead very far, for the question is to know whether forces working in the same direction as socialism exist or not in the present socio-political system of West Africa and what their chances.

## Socialism

### a) The Sense of Spontaneous Development and the Objective of Evolution

Although in certain regions of West Africa important remainders of the village community have stayed alive up to the present time, one should not assume that socialism can develop or even that the presence of these factors favors spontaneously or quasi-spontaneously the socialist way. On the contrary these societies left to themselves would rapidly evolve toward class societies: the contradictions, even though embryonic, could only become sharper and deeper. Spontaneous natural development leads only to the decadence of the collective ownership of the land and consequently with the increasing commercialization of agricultural products to the development of inequality in the sharing of this property, to the formation of two antagonistic classes of landlords and landless peasants reduced to the state of vassals or farm workers.

The installation of settlers in pre-

pared areas gives a good idea of the way in which the degradation of the primitive community is inevitably accentuated. The beneficiaries of these arrangements, even when the State remains the real owner of the land, often install vassals on the land. These vassals are recruited among the "servants", "captives", and "strangers", these last being frequent when the nearby villages are not heavily enough populated to work all the irrigated land. There are even cases where the oldest and most powerful families, the "noble" class, simply claim the ownership of the irrigated land. One can not say either that socialism is easier when class differences are less sharply marked. It is an illusion to think that the primitive collective traditions facilitate the setting up of modern socialist structures. The Narodniks in 19th century Russia suffered from this illusion. And some of the present African leaders also suffer from this illusion.<sup>14</sup>

In reality nothing is further from socialism than primitive communism. So long as the traditional family structures have not been broken, modern socialist structures (co-operatives, etc.) can only remain empty of content and serve to reinforce the traditional powers: they are ineffective and can only lead to more profound class differences, even when these remain masked.

The origin of this illusion is to be

<sup>14</sup> Senghor and Sekou Touré believe or pretend to believe in this illusion.



found in the confusion of a certain philosophy fashionable among paternalistic technicians during the last years of colonisation, especially in the French colonies. It was concerned with finding the means of leading by the hand the "good savages" whose collective traditions were idealised directly from primitive forms to modern socialism, of course a "good socialism" friendly to the West and only rural. The compulsory cooperative including the entire rural population with its castes, its nobles, its serfs, its family structures and its chiefs, doubled with officials of the rural administration and agricultural vulgarisation, such was the sensational discovery of the new "friends of the Africans". The new African officials inherited this doctrine immediately after independence. They have not changed it in the least, contenting themselves with changing only the names of the former cooperatives, which had the now shocking name of "Native Assurance Societies".

What must be done to permit agricultural progress to really start is not to "educate the peasants" in the traditional family framework, but to break the family and its traditions. It is not to create illusory formal cooperatives but to develop individualism, to free the individual from the chains of tradition.

The West African countries at the present stage do not need an agrarian revolution in the sense of sharing the land. The problem of this peasantry is not to obtain the land which it al-

ready has the use of to a certain extent. It is to pass from the migrant worker with a hoe to the intensive use of livestock for plowing, to liquidate the traditional juxtaposition of farmers and herdsmen. This decisive progress, a condition essential to economic development, demands the destruction of family structures. It can only be done by the reinforcement of small merchant production at the expense of collective forms, the plow, an individual instrument, should not constitute the material base for a premature collectivisation.

Under these conditions the task of a progressive government would not be to maintain the relationships of precapitalist production (content to give them a modern "socialist" form) which would be even more reactionary than openly favouring the development of salaried exploitation because it could only lead to stagnation and failure. Its task is to favorize development in the framework of small merchant production and prepare the way for a future socialism, being careful that the breakdown of traditional structures does not bring about serious class differences. In this framework the cooperative can serve as a means of controlling the evolution. But then it is a question of: first, a cooperative founded on the voluntary membership of dynamic small producers freed from the traditional family and social chains; second, a cooperative of "internal" form (cooperative of commercialization and credit for essentials with possibility of



mutual help for heavy work), not a real cooperative of production. One can not avoid, one should not avoid, the development of a sense of individual ownership of the land. It is only at this price that the transition from the present extensive agriculture to intensive agriculture and mixed-farming is possible. An attempt to avoid the development of this sense of individual ownership by maintaining the traditional habits of dividing the land between large families in a co-operative framework or not short-circuits economic progress, condemns agriculture to stagnation and the co-operative experience to failure.<sup>15</sup>

The task of a progressive government is also to prepare by industrialization the conditions for the passage from individual plowing to collective work with machines. For if at an early stage the passage from hoe to plow constitutes a decisive agricultural progress, one must think of the next step which is the mechanization of West African agriculture according to forms and means adapted to the natural conditions of the country (that

is to say being careful not to transpose mechanically methods employed elsewhere) even if only to remedy the shortage of laborers. The only long-run solution in an under-populated region is mechanization.

But this transition can only occur when machinery can be locally produced and no longer imported from industrialised countries where wages are high. In the meantime the most important task in West Africa is to break the family structures.

#### b) Socialism and Bureaucracy

In most of the West African countries after independence the power went to the local wealthy classes and the bureaucrats who serve their interests. In these countries the way to socialism is blocked to start with. To what point can the capitalist system develop these countries, fulfill the historical role of primitive accumulation which it fulfilled elsewhere, and this in the specific national and international conditions of Africa? What will be the evolution of the relationship between the local wealthy classes and imperialism? To what point, when and

and direct descendants of the Assurance Societies, are a failure. The stagnation and the drop in agricultural production are eloquent evidence. In Ghana which has been more realistic they are still looking for new forms ("the New Farmers") which allow the family structure to be broken up and individualism to be liberated without however permitting extreme differences. Guinea has not yet found these new forms any more than Senegal.

<sup>15</sup> This is why we do not share the opinion of G. Chaliand and J. Minces (*"L'Afrique et la Guinée"*, *Partisans*, no 7, Nov.-Dec. 1962) who think that a "radical modification of rural productive relationships, education and mobilization of the peasants, modernization of work methods and means of production, organization of cooperatives at the level of each village" has taken place in Guinea. Nothing like this has happened. The cooperatives of Guinea, twin sisters of the cooperatives of Senegal



how will the class differences which are becoming more extreme in these countries open the way to revolutionary perspectives? These are fundamental problems in the outlook for socialism in these countries.

There are countries like Ghana or Mali where a bureaucracy which did not represent the local wealthy class at the moment of independence exercises alone the political power in a society without modern or traditional powerful wealthy classes. The case of Ghana is different, for most of the bureaucracy allied with the bourgeoisie and traditional chiefs is hostile to Nkrumah who depends directly on the popular masses which are only slightly organized for his support, waiting for the renewal of the Party. In other countries it can be imagined that certain bureaucratic groups succeed in taking away political power from the local wealthy class.

Bureaucracy always puts on the "socialist" label because by the nature of things it puts a high value on the development of the State sector. But the development of the public sector is not necessarily either "socialism" or even a "system preparing the way for socialism". Bureaucracy can become the wealthy class and behind the mask of public property exploit the masses. The historic conditions of its arrival in power in Africa, the international conditions which permit it to obtain important external aid, favorize to a certain point latent tendencies of the bureaucracy to become a privileged caste. Bureaucracies de-

riving from Parties which had to fight seriously against powerful class enemies are more to be counted on than those that have been or will be put in place without a struggle, for the control of the masses and ideological seriousness are more likely to be present.

Bureaucracy will not justify itself historically as a progressive force in West Africa or anywhere else except to the extent it succeeds in completely transforming the economic bases of the society to realize primitive accumulation. To do this it must mobilise the masses actively and effectively. In this case one could say that to a certain point the revolution which was started from above was relayed by a mass movement. If this is not the case it is condemned to decadence, parasitism, and inefficiency. The example of the inefficiency of rural services when they are not conceived of as mass movements but as administrative jobs is one of the proofs of the reality of this danger. Unfortunately there are African countries (Egypt for example)<sup>16</sup> where reactionary bureaucracies have been formed, isolated from the masses, living from day to day by bargaining for aid from other countries. It is not even necessary for this decadence to lead to the constitution of a bourgeoisie of the "classical" type as is the case in some countries where the new high officials are

<sup>16</sup> See Y. Durelles, *Structure et développement de l'économie égyptienne*, *Economie et Politique*, no 72, July-August 1960.



in a hurry to take over the plantations for themselves, to invest capital in commerce and new industry. Almost as dangerous is the formation of a bureaucracy isolated from the masses which it exploits through the instrument of the State in the name of "public property". It is not necessary either for this bureaucracy to fall into wholesale corruption. It is enough for it to isolate itself from the masses, to close in upon itself, becoming a privileged class, going to sleep in "sweet mediocrity", showing itself incapable of mobilizing the masses, contenting itself to live from day to day by external aid, for the way to socialism to be obstructed and the phrase empty of sense.

The degenerate bureaucracy incapable of developing the economy on solid foundations, will finish sooner or later by falling under the control of its neo-colonialist money-lenders. Then it will make little difference if it tries to save face, refusing to officially turn over the ownership of enterprises to imperialism, remaining firmly "for State property and against private property", etc.

Little difference its declarations of more or less "nationalist" foreign policy, its verbal ideological options even in favor of "scientific socialism". Bureaucracy, like all other social forces, should not be judged by its declarations but by its acts and the results of its acts.

The test of an authentic socialist option is the bureaucratic attitude towards the popular masses and tradi-

tion. Either the bureaucracy will choose traditionalism and will rapidly become a parasitic class of privileged and inefficient reactionaries, or else it will choose modernism and will justify its progressive role and prepare the way for true socialism. The capacity of the new rising bureaucracy to contact the masses, to mobilise them, to really start African economic development going will be in the end the only worthwhile demonstration of the authenticity of its socialist options.

### c) Socialism and African Unity

The construction of a socialist society in West Africa implies an immense effort of accumulation. For there is no socialism in misery. But the question is whether an African State at the level of development of the present West African States can objectively organise such an effort. It is in these terms that the problem of the historical necessity of African unity must be posed. African unity is not a sentimental need, it is an objective economic necessity.

The question is not whether this or that African people is capable of making the necessary effort. All peoples are.

The question is to know whether in a given natural geographic framework this effort can be successfully organized. It is quite evident that it stands a better chance of succeeding if carried out on the rich land of a country well supplied in potential mineral and energy resources than in a zone which nature had rendered particular-



ly unfavorable. There is no doubt that in West Africa taken as a whole all the natural conditions needed to assure rapid economic development are present. One can not avoid realizing that the private interests of the bureaucrats who were put in place by the imperialists just before independence have drowned out the public interests and have led to a breaking up of West Africa: regions which had natural complementary resources, like the plains and the forest, have been cut off from each other, several immense and useless frontiers surround tiny states like Togo and Dahomey, the overpopulated States like the Upper Volta are next to underpopulated States like Mali. This breaking up can not even be justified on the ethnic level as almost all the ethnic groups of West Africa are shared be-

tween several States. No doubt the political unity of West Africa would facilitate the rational exploitation of its wealth, the best use of the present infrastructure and administration, permitting a considerable speeding up of the economic and social development of the entire region.

Among all the artificial States of West Africa, some are lucky enough to have been given by nature not only abundant agricultural and hydro-electrical possibilities but also mineral wealth. The construction of socialism is therefore not impossible. However this construction would need a minimum of good will from the neighboring States. If it should be necessary to build socialism "in a besieged fortress" as was the case in other countries, the task would be infinitely more difficult.